**MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

**Introduction**

My name is Mary Kajumwa, I am 20 years old, born on November 28th, 2003, in Jocham Hospital in Mombasa, Kenya, as the last born to a lovely family of two children. My elder sibling is Ayub Mjomba who is 27 years old. I couldn't say I was born into a struggling family, but instead, a humble one that lived well within its means. My mother and father work in microfinance and agribusiness, respectively. We’ve always had just enough; no more, no less. We have lived in several areas around Mombasa ever since I was born, including Tudor, Shanzu, and we currently reside in Mombasa-Bamburi.

As a young woman navigating the complexities of university life, even as I study at Dedan Kimathi University currently, I have encountered moments of triumph, adversity, and self-discovery throughout my life. Through this autobiography, I hope to share my experiences, challenges, and aspirations, offering insight into the transformative power of education and the pursuit of one's dreams.

**Early Life and Education**

My childhood was a time of innocence and wonder, marked by the simple joys of family, friends, and exploration. Growing up in Coast, I was surrounded by a diverse array of cultures, languages, and traditions, each offering its own unique perspective on the world. From the bustling streets of the city to the tranquil beauty of the countryside, I reveled in the beauty and diversity of my surroundings, finding inspiration in the sights, sounds, and experiences that shaped my early years.

As the youngest sibling, I was blessed with the love and guidance of my parents and elder sibling, who instilled in me a deep appreciation for education from an early age. From the moment I first set foot in a classroom, I was filled with a sense of curiosity and wonder, eager to learn and explore the world around me. My comprehension in the early stages of my life was impeccable and I picked up reading and listening faster than the rest of my classmates, giving me an edge even as I began my early stages of academics. And so, with the support of my family and the encouragement of my teachers, I embarked on a journey of discovery that would shape the course of my life in ways I could never have imagined.

Most of my early years were a blur but as I got to the age of six, I gained comprehension. My parents like to joke that I was their most conscious daughter at that age compared to the rest of my siblings. The critical thinking and consideration I harbored surpassed their expectations. Even my speech in those years was absolutely fascinating.

I attended a local primary school: Little Stars Primary school while we were still living in Mombasa where I discovered my passion for learning, excelling in both academics and extracurricular activities. I enjoyed competing with my fellow students and it gave me a thrill to see myself in the lead just from purely putting effort into my studies. Some would say I got cocky with they way I excelled, and I would agree, for shouldn’t one have the right to be proud when the surpass their own expectations?

Apart from excelling in my studies I engaged in extracurricular activities such as football. But that was only in primary school. The field helped me clear my mind and finally exert the energy I would store up during school days. It was exhilarating. As a young girl, I loved fictional books too; loved the way my mind would light up as I imagined the scenarios I read about come to life. Characters dancing and conspiring, making sarcastic jokes and all. After primary school I sort of struggled to find time to read as many books as I did in primary school although I’d pick up a piece of literature here and then.

Outside school, I never truly found more satisfaction than when I was with my siblings. My brother Ayub was ingenious, he loved coming up with inventions and plans and would always drag my cousin and I into it, and we loved it. My cousin, Gathoni, who was more than my sister and grew up together, was very imaginative and frank in whatever opinion she gave. Looking back, I think it was spending so much time with them that shaped my attitude to other people and taught me how to relate with others. They were a duo that challenged each other intellectually and physically and to date still gather inspiration from each other.

When I finished primary school after scoring a whooping 410 in my KCPE (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education) I got called by the government to Bura Girls High School situated in Taita Taveta County where I continued in the exact same spirit I had as a little girl. I did the best I could to be among the top scorers in my school. I became a leader in my high school: a dorm captain then soon after: head of academics.

In high school I got introduced to many students from many different cultures and with different backgrounds, it challenged my interpersonal skills to interact with them. I met all sorts of characters, some a bit odd and others more composed. From all the socializing I gained many long-lasting relationships; some of my best friends that I have kept to date that I trust with anything and everything including helping me in making crucial decisions in my life.

Academically I gained an interest in literature - stemming from my earlier interest in reading- and an interest in the three sciences. Highschool was a whirl wind of many activities and responsibilities but int the end I was able to work in enough work to get a B when I did my final KCSE (Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education) exams Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education) exams.

**Choosing a university**

As I approached the final years of high school, the time came to make one of the most important decisions of my young life – choosing a university. Guided by my aspirations and fueled by a desire for academic excellence, I embarked on a journey of exploration and introspection, seeking to uncover the path that would lead me to my true calling.

For many students, the prospect of choosing a university and a course to study can be a daunting one, filled with uncertainty and anxiety. I really had to do some internal digging to discover what I wanted to do for the rest of my life or rather what I wanted to give me the momentum that would impact the rest of my life. Guided by my aspirations and fueled by a desire for academic excellence, I embarked on a journey of exploration and introspection. I read books and consulted my parents about it, seeking inspiration. Honestly none of that really helped. It was only after a visit from my mentor, a young woman named Michelle Strong who was two years ahead of me in studies and had been my mentor ever since primary that I truly decided.

She’d stopped over to say goodbye before her departure, you see Mitchelle was going abroad to study IT, a course her parents didn’t want her to do at first, in fact they were so adamant in their decision that they had refused to pay for her tuition. They wanted her to study medicine; her grades after high school would allow her to qualify for both courses but she chose to stay true to herself. She did her research and found herself a scholarship that would enable her to study what she wanted to study. Her passion, not their aspirations. Her visit reminded me of her entire backstory, and I was catapulted into analyzing myself yet again. More soul searching had me discover that I truly appreciated literature, I discovered I would love to be an author one day but, in the economy, we live in at the moment a career in writing with no initial capital would yield little or no fruit. Other than literature my other interests were in technology.

Yet, as I navigated the maze of options and possibilities, I found myself drawn to the esteemed University of Nairobi, a beacon of learning and innovation in the heart of the city. With its rich history, diverse academic offerings, and vibrant campus life, it seemed like the perfect fit for my aspirations and ambitions.

However, as fate would have it, circumstances led me to choose Dedan Kimathi University as my alma mater. While it may not have been my initial choice, I soon discovered that Dedan Kimathi University offered its own unique opportunities and advantages, from its close-knit community to its specialized programs in my field of interest. And so, with an open mind and a spirit of optimism, I embraced this new chapter in my academic journey, eager to see where it would take me.

**Adjusting to University Life**

Stepping onto the hallowed grounds of the university campus for the first time, I was filled with a sense of excitement, anticipation and apprehension for the journey that lay ahead. Yet, amidst the hustle and bustle of orientation week, I found myself grappling with the challenges of adjusting to a new environment, forging new friendships, and balancing academic demands with newfound independence.

As I navigated the labyrinth of lecture halls, libraries, and dormitories, I found solace in the knowledge that I was not alone on this journey. From the friendly faces of my fellow students to the supportive guidance of my professors, I quickly discovered that the university was more than just a place of learning – it was a community, a home away from home, where I could grow, thrive, and pursue my dreams.

I grew to love the environment and get comfortable in it for it would be the grounds that would truly ready me for the adult life I was about to begin. I sort of looked at it as a platform where I was going to train myself to manage the situations I would meet later and that excited me.

**Academic Challenges and Achievements**

University presented a new set of challenges, testing my intellect, resilience, and resolve. From demanding coursework to rigorous exams, there were moments when self-doubt threatened to overshadow my aspirations. Yet, with unwavering determination and the support of mentors and peers, I persevered. I pushed myself beyond perceived limitations, embracing the pursuit of knowledge with a fervent passion. As the years unfolded, I celebrated academic achievements that surpassed my wildest dreams, from earning top grades to receiving prestigious scholarships and awards.

Juggling between all the coursework being given and the independence that was suddenly in abundance, I grappled with giving my priorities their proper audience at first. Suddenly, I was the one in charge of monitoring my habits and ensuring that as a young woman I enjoyed the slice of life I had been granted while at the same time ensuring I performed exceptionally well in my academic assignments, CATS, and exams. So much to put under the shoulders of a girl who had just left high school and the watchful eyes of parents and teachers. In the end I was able to distinguish what was important and what would ruin the future that I had worked so hard to root its foundation.

It certainly wasn’t easy to align my actions and habits to the goals I had created for myself especially because aside the tranquil environment that the university provided, the students within its walls were rowdy and had misplaced objectives; some solely there to use up their parents' money as they enjoyed freedom and the lack of impending obligations.

The transition from high school to university was not without its challenges. The academic rigor of university-level coursework pushed me to my limits, demanding a level of critical thinking and analytical skills that I had not yet fully developed. Yet, with each obstacle that I encountered, I found new reserves of strength and determination within myself, pushing through the challenges with a sense of purpose and resolve.

**Extracurricular Activities**

Beyond the confines of the classroom, I sought enrichment and fulfillment through a myriad of extracurricular activities. From joining student clubs and organizations to volunteering in community outreach programs, each endeavor offered a unique opportunity for personal growth and exploration. Whether participating in debates, organizing cultural events, or championing social causes, I found purpose and belonging in activities that extended beyond academic pursuits. These experiences not only enriched my university experience but also fostered lifelong friendships and memories.

I especially loved engaging myself in so many activities because it gave me a chance to meet new characters, some who were in the same line of study as I was thus had similar ideas and interests and others who had entirely different perspectives. It thrilled me to have the opportunity to learn from so many people from different walks of life at once.

In my second year out of the spirit of spontaneity, I ran for a leadership position in the student government within the university. Navigating the murky waters of politics was not for the weak. While running for chair of finance I saw how men use others to get into power and how money truly controls the greed of others and causes them to make decisions that definitely would not benefit them. I saw that the respect and goodwill earned from the public would get you nothing compared to what backhanded deals would get you. Even on campus where one would have thought they were safe from corruption! Absolutely heart shattering. I lost an arm and a leg financing my campaign and yet I still lost all because my pockets were not deep enough.

Throughout the rest of my university journey, I found myself drawn to a diverse array of extracurricular activities, each offering its own unique opportunities for growth and exploration. From joining the university debate team to volunteering with local community organizations, I embraced every opportunity to expand my horizons and make a positive impact on the world around me. While in school I especially loved being part of the debate team which felt like a continuation of the experience of the debate teams we had in high school just with more topics that were harder to swallow and really made one think. I even volunteered in our church, Parkland’s Baptist, in my first and second year during the holidays seeking to gain insight and receive wisdom from those who have been in the game for a while even as I contribute my part to society.

In my first year, I worked in the children's Sunday school department. I would go there during the week to help with planning, designing and printing the material that the kids would use on Sunday. I picked up a few skills from that; learnt how to use Canva and blender to design posters, learning material and what not for the kids. This skill would come in handy later considering the course I chose to study in university.

In second year, I volunteered to help in the mission department. We’d do quite a lot of travelling, going to check on orphanages and homeless shelters to lend a hand wherever we could or take stock of what needs to be done in the areas that we visited, making goals to source out the funds that would help implement the actions that needed to be taken. Some days, however, we didn’t travel but instead, we would split up all the donated items that well-wishers had given to the church in faith that it would benefit needy individuals and families.

I learnt to appreciate what I had in life and the much my parents had done for my siblings and I withing those many hours I spent volunteering and I ended up gaining quite a few connections from all that volunteer work, some who I now treat as mentors and others that I gathered knowledge from when I worked there. They proved very valuable later when I wanted to start doing internships and attachments.

Moreover, there is one activity I immersed myself in during the long holidays of my first semester that I try not to mention to often because of social sterotypes and in the name of avoiding too many questions, but I am immensely proud of myself for engaging in: I worked in a garage part time for the holidays. I enjoyed every single second of it. For the longest time I admired cars, and was fascinated by their builds, their inner workings and engineering, not to mention their designs. I wanted to learn about them; to beat the stereotype that girls were always clueless when it came to machines. Moreso, later in life when I finally bought a car of my own I really wanted to modify it myself and have that pride of being the owner of a car that I knew inside and out. On the grounds of all that, I decided to volunteer at a local garage around where we lived at the time. I would o over there after the t volunteers in church would be released. It was a very dangerous thing for me too do at that age considering that garages were full of men, but I believe it was my prayers that kept me safe.

I will never forget the day they towed in a Jeep Wrangler Rubicon. It was yellow; not a color that was really appealing but nonetheless didn’t dim the beauty of the car. Jeeps were my favorite cars to be honest and one day I would hope to buy a Jeep Wrangler Sahara for myself. The men in the garage by that time had taken quite a liking to me and a few of them were enthusiastic to show me all the nooks and crannies that the Jeep Wrangler had to offer. To say I was overjoyed would be an understatement. When I decided I had learnt just enough about the engines and the systems cars run on I stopped going to the garage, but it was overall a lovely experience.

All in all, every extra cocurricular activity I engaged in went a long way in building my character and instilling in me crucial morals and values, molding me to who I am today.

**Making Friends and Building Relationships**

One of the most rewarding aspects of university life was the opportunity to forge deep and meaningful connections with peers from diverse backgrounds. Through shared experiences and mutual support, I discovered the power of friendship and camaraderie. From late-night study sessions to spontaneous adventures on the weekends, my friends who were a mix of people I had gotten to know while in university, others that I had carried on from high school and others I had picked up from all my extra cocurricular activities, became my pillars of strength, offering laughter, encouragement, and unwavering support through life's ups and downs. Together, we navigated the complexities of university life, forming bonds that would endure long after graduation.

I do believe however that within social constructs the average human being has three circles of friendships; the largest one being acquaintances- people you just vaguely got to know-, the second one being friends- people that you truly shared a mutual understanding of each other with and that you loved to have around- and finally the small circle of close friends- people you loved and could trust with daresay even your very own life.

As a person who, aside from interacting during the hours I engaged in co-curricular activities, would rarely interact with others, I cherished the people that brought it upon themselves to care about me and love me for me. Especially the friends I had who didn't got to the same university as me...at first, they were all I had before I could fully get comfortable enough to socialize on campus. They would call me out on the weekends, and we would go on spontaneous adventures or go to eat at aesthetic restaurants that shouldn't have been able to afford as students. They lifted my spirits, gave me a break from all the coursework and quite frankly kept me sane.

Later on as I gained confidence I picked up quite a few friendships in campus people I truly adore and have similar mindsets as myself.

The friendships that I forged during my time at university were more than just casual acquaintances – they were lifelines, anchors in a sea of uncertainty and change. From my roommate who became like a sister to me, to the classmates who became my study partners and confidants, each friendship added richness and depth to my university experience, shaping the person that I am today.

A funny coincidence that occurred was I actually knew my roommate from my past when we’d being living in Malindi we had been neighbors, this was a girl I had made mudpies with and had shared dolls with. She was a year older than me but that didn’t affect the bond we had and even when I met her again in university it was like we were just picking up where we left off. Of course, now she was a tad bit different but still herself, nonetheless. It was an adventure in itself rediscovering each other and learning about each other. To this day she is still one of my absolute closest friends.

**Exploring Kenya's Culture and History**

As a student of history and culture, I seized every opportunity to immerse myself in Kenya's rich heritage and traditions. From visiting historical sites and museums to attending cultural festivals and events, each experience deepened my appreciation for the vibrant tapestry of my country's identity.

Among some of the adventures I went on a lot of them were with my elder siblings who were already working and always up for adventure, while others were with my friends.

Just to give a brief history: I went to Suswa, Nairobi, did mountain climbing, went to paradise lost, took several road trips to Naivasha and not to mention went to see the waterfalls in several locations in Kenya.

I however would love the excursions that I would go on with my siblings because as their youngest sibling I would be fully accommodated for. I loved it when I didn’t have to remove anything from my own pocket. But in general, my sibling even as grown-ups, both with his fiancé, had never really changed up their quirks they were still very bright and imaginative, and Ayub still harbored that wonderful lustrous glint in his eye when he came up with an idea or when something absolutely fantasized him. They were aging in body and mind but at heart they were still the children they were all those years behind, and I absolutely adored them for it.

My sibling made sure to spoil me proper and if I think about it he sort of laid down the standard for the men that may want to pursue me later in life, for I was taken to the most lavish restaurants when he was around, or while we were on out adventures and bought me the finest presents when they could. Woe to the man that tried to pursue me with less!

My friends and I would go on the random gallivanting spree, to see art galleries and the museums Nairobi had to offer. We especially loved art galleries, but so did so many people our age too at the time, everybody seeking to seem more sophisticated and cultured to fit the standards that society had set. For myself, however, I think the art resonated with the artistic side of myself, the same side that fell in love with literature and poetry.

Whether exploring the bustling streets of Nairobi or embarking on rural excursions, I reveled in the beauty and diversity of Kenya's landscape, discovering new facets of its culture and history with each adventure.

**Internship and Professional Development**

During my three university years, I embarked on internships that provided invaluable hands-on experience in my chosen field of study and skills I had previously learned after I finished my high school. From corporate placements to grassroots organizations, each internship offered a unique opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges.

Following the fact that my mother worked in microfinance and knew several people in the corporate world I did internships working in the tech sector of several companies after third year.

I had a privilege of being attached at the Government Chemists Department in Mombasa for my external attachment when the connections I made during my volunteering in church finally paid off. The second one was a well-paid internship to work in the tech sector. I did my very best during the time I worked there and cherished the wisdom my superiors would impart. As an intern of course a lot of the tedious assignments would be given to me and a few other interns in the company, but I would never slack on the job. I did every single task I was given as if it would be the determining factor if I lived or died. I felt that everything we were being told to do would be applicable in future. I picked up so much while working at these two companies and I am so grateful for the opportunities that still continue to open even after I left.

I learnt how to apply my chemistry and data analytics skills and things like backend development in the workplace and took note of skills I would need to pick up if I wanted to excel in the field I had chosen to study.

It was a bit cumbersome and exhausting travelling to and from work every day and I often got discouraged from all the travelling I did early every morning in the name of getting to work on time. I would get home late in the evening and would leave even before the sun properly rose from the horizon simply due to the sheer distance from Kiembeni, our place of residence, to the areas of work. Despite it all I managed to excel in my performance at the designated companies even as a mere intern.

These experiences not only honed my skills and expertise but also broadened my perspective on the possibilities and responsibilities of my chosen career path. Through mentorship and guidance, I navigated the complexities of the professional world, laying the foundation for future success and fulfillment.

**Personal Growth and Self-Discovery**

University is a transformative journey of personal growth and self-discovery, challenging me to confront my fears, embrace my vulnerabilities, and pursue my passions with unwavering determination.

Every triumph I’ve had has come from a place of near defeat. As a woman in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) the job market and circumstances I face in life are already rigged against me before I ever got into the game. The career opportunities I hope to get are automatically not going to be the same as my male competitors, the grades I get would always have to be extraordinary to really catch the eyes of recruiters to land me a job or even an internship.

Despite all the extra risk and the constraints that come with being a young woman in society however I am able to overcome it all and surpass all the expectations that I had set for myself.

From moments of triumph to periods of uncertainty, I learned to navigate life's uncertainties with grace and resilience. Through introspection and reflection, I unearthed hidden strengths and confronted lingering insecurities, emerging stronger, wiser, and more self-assured with each passing day. As I embarked on a journey of self-discovery, I found solace in the pursuit of knowledge, the pursuit of purpose, and the pursuit of meaning.

**Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges**

No journey is without its obstacles, and mine was no exception. From academic setbacks to personal struggles, I encountered numerous challenges along the road to graduation. Yet, with each setback came an opportunity for growth and resilience. Through perseverance and determination, I confronted adversity head-on, refusing to be defined by circumstances beyond my control. Whether navigating financial hardships, overcoming academic hurdles, or facing personal setbacks, I emerged stronger and more resilient, guided by an unwavering belief in my ability to overcome life's challenges with grace and fortitude.

**Graduation and Future Plans**

As I stand on the brink of graduation, I am filled with a profound sense of accomplishment and anticipation for the future that lies ahead. The culmination of years of hard work, dedication, and sacrifice, this milestone represents not an end, but a new beginning. Armed with knowledge, experience, and a boundless sense of possibility, I eagerly embrace the opportunities and challenges that await me beyond the university gates. Whether pursuing further studies, embarking on a career, or exploring new avenues of personal and professional growth, I am confident in my ability to navigate life's uncertainties with courage, resilience, and determination.

**Conclusion**

My university journey has been a testament to the transformative power of education, resilience, and the pursuit of one's dreams. From the halls of academia to the corridors of self-discovery, I have embarked on a deeply personal odyssey marked by triumphs, challenges, and moments of profound growth. As I reflect on the chapters that have unfolded, I am filled with gratitude for the experiences, friendships, and lessons learned along the way. Though my university days may soon come to an end, the lessons learned, and memories cherished will endure, guiding me forward on the path to a future filled with promise, purpose, and possibility.