

# **JOURNEY OF PURPOSE**

*The Autobiography of Sarah Wairimu Thuo*

*A story of resilience, determination, and technological innovation*

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## Introduction

My name is Sarah Wairimu Thuo, and at twenty years old, I stand at the intersection of tradition and innovation, rural roots and technological aspirations. Born and raised in Nyathuna Village, Kabete Constituency, Kiambu County, my life has been a testament to the transformative power of education, the strength of family bonds, and the unwavering determination to break barriers in a rapidly evolving world.

As I write this autobiography, I am a third-year student pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Business Information Technology at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology (DeKUT) in Nyeri. My journey from the dusty paths of Nyathuna to the computer labs of one of Kenya's premier technological universities has been anything but linear. It is a story marked by sacrifice, perseverance, and the quiet heroism of a mother who refused to let circumstance define our destiny.

This narrative is not just my story; it is the story of countless young Kenyan women who dare to dream beyond the boundaries drawn by poverty and societal expectations. It is a tribute to the villages that raise us, the schools that shape us, and the technologies that empower us to reimagine what is possible.

# **Chapter One: Roots in Nyathuna**

## **The Village That Shaped Me**

Nyathuna Village sits in the heart of Kabete Constituency, a place where red earth meets green vegetation, and where community is not just a concept but a way of life. The village roads, unpaved and winding, tell stories of farmers heading to their shambas at dawn, children walking to school in their neatly pressed uniforms, and neighbors greeting each other with genuine warmth—'Wĩ mweka?' 'Ndĩ mweka!'

My earliest memories are woven into the fabric of this village. I remember waking up to the sound of roosters crowing at the break of dawn, the smell of firewood smoke as breakfast was being prepared, and the sight of morning dew glistening on banana leaves. These sensory memories remain vivid, anchoring me to a place that, despite its material limitations, was rich in community spirit and cultural heritage.

As a child, I would help fetch water from the communal tap, balancing the plastic jerrycan carefully as I navigated the uneven terrain back home. Those trips were never solitary; they were social occasions where village gossip was exchanged, friendships were forged, and lessons about life were imparted by older women who saw in every young girl a reflection of their own youth.

## **A Family Built on Resilience**

I was born into a nuclear family, the youngest of three siblings. My mother, the pillar of our household, is what many would call a peasant farmer and hustler—though these words hardly capture the depth of her strength and ingenuity. Widowed when I was still young, she shouldered the responsibility of raising three children alone, turning our small plot of land into a source of sustenance and income.

My two older siblings paved the path before me. Growing up, I watched them navigate their own educational journeys, each triumph and setback teaching me valuable lessons about persistence. My older brother, disciplined and methodical, showed me the value of consistency. My sister, creative and resourceful, demonstrated that there are always multiple solutions to every problem.

Together, they created a protective canopy under which I could grow, even as they faced their own challenges.

Our home was modest—a simple structure with corrugated iron sheets for a roof and walls that had been plastered with care. But within those walls, my mother created an environment where education was revered. Despite her limited formal schooling, she understood with remarkable clarity that education was the key to breaking the cycle of poverty. 'Mwalimu akikwira ũndũ, ũigie wega,' she would say—when the teacher tells you something, listen carefully.

## **The Kikuyu Heritage**

As a Kikuyu, my cultural identity has been both a foundation and a lens through which I view the world. The Kikuyu people, known for their entrepreneurial spirit and emphasis on education, have a rich cultural heritage that permeates every aspect of community life. Our language, Gĩkũyũ, was my first language—the language of lullabies, reprimands, prayers, and storytelling.

I grew up listening to my grandmother's stories about Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi, the ancestors of our people, and the sacred Mũgumo tree. These narratives, passed down through generations, instilled in me a sense of belonging to something greater than myself. They taught me about the values that define our community: hard work (wĩra), respect (gũtĩĩa), unity (ũrumwe), and the importance of family (nyũmba).

Traditional Kikuyu culture places significant emphasis on communal responsibility and the role of women as keepers of cultural knowledge. I witnessed this in the way elderly women in our village would gather young girls to teach them songs, traditional dances, and life skills. These informal education sessions, conducted under the shade of a large mugumo tree or in someone's compound, were as important as formal schooling in shaping our identities.

However, my cultural heritage also came with expectations and limitations. As a young woman, I was expected to be modest, obedient, and domestic-oriented. Technology and engineering were considered male domains. Yet, the same culture that prescribed these roles also celebrated the legendary Wangu wa Makeri, a woman chief who defied conventions, and emphasized the

Kikuyu proverb: 'Mũndũ ũrĩa ũtarĩ na mũrango ndacokaga'—a person without determination never succeeds. This duality would come to define my own journey.

## **Chapter Two: The Foundation Years**

### **Nyathuna Primary School: Where Dreams Began**

My formal education began at Nyathuna Primary School, a government institution that served our village and the surrounding areas. The school buildings, though weathered by time and elements, stood as beacons of hope for families like mine. Every morning, I would wake up at 5:30 AM, quickly wash, eat a cup of porridge, and set off on the thirty-minute walk to school, my books carefully wrapped in a plastic bag to protect them from the unpredictable weather.

Nyathuna Primary was where I first fell in love with learning. In Standard One, I was fascinated by the magic of letters forming words, words forming sentences, and sentences conveying meaning. My teacher, Mrs. Wambui, noticed my eagerness and often kept me after class to challenge me with additional exercises. She was the first person outside my family to tell me I was capable of great things.

The school had limited resources—textbooks were shared among three or four students, science equipment was almost non-existent, and the library consisted of a single shelf of aging books. But what we lacked in materials, we compensated for with determination. Our teachers, most of whom lived in the community and understood our struggles intimately, went beyond their job descriptions to ensure we learned.

I remember one particular incident in Standard Five that would prove formative. Our school had received a donation of three old desktop computers—bulky machines that seemed like artifacts from another world. Our headteacher, Mr. Kariuki, set them up in a small room and began offering basic computer classes to upper primary students. I was mesmerized. The moment I placed my fingers on that keyboard and watched letters appear on the screen, something clicked. Here was a tool that could amplify human capability, a window into worlds beyond Nyathuna. I spent every free moment I could in that computer room, teaching myself to type, exploring the simple paint program, and pestering Mr. Kariuki with endless questions about how computers worked.

My academic performance was strong across subjects, but I particularly excelled in mathematics and science. I loved the logical precision of mathematics—the way problems had definite solutions if you followed the right steps. Science opened my eyes to the mechanics of the natural world. When we studied photosynthesis, I would look at the maize in our shamba with new understanding. When we learned about electricity, I began questioning why our village still relied on kerosene lamps when other parts of Kenya had power.

The Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination loomed large in Standard Eight. This single examination would determine which secondary school I could attend and, by extension, shape the trajectory of my future. My mother, understanding the stakes, made sacrifices to ensure I could attend extra tuition sessions on Saturdays. She would wake up even earlier to prepare food she could sell at the local market, using the meager profits to pay for my revision materials and tuition fees.

The examination week was grueling. I remember the anxiety that gripped our entire class as we sat for paper after paper, the future hanging in the balance of those few days. When the results were finally released, I had scored 341 marks out of 500—not extraordinary by national standards, but strong enough to earn me a place in a national school. My mother cried when she heard the news, tears of relief and pride streaming down her cheeks as she embraced me. It was a validation of years of sacrifice and a promise of new possibilities.

### **The Mary Leakey Girls' School: Transformation and Challenge**

Joining The Mary Leakey Girls' School marked a turning point in my life. Named after the renowned paleoanthropologist who made significant discoveries in Kenya, the school carried an ethos of scientific inquiry and female empowerment. Located in a different county, attending meant leaving home for the first time and living in a boarding school environment—a prospect that was both exciting and terrifying.

The transition was jarring. Suddenly, I was surrounded by girls from diverse backgrounds—some from Nairobi's affluent suburbs, others from different rural communities like mine. The socioeconomic disparities were glaring. While I arrived with two pairs of uniforms stitched by the local tailor and a small box of essential supplies, some of my classmates had entire trunks full



of clothes, snacks, and modern gadgets. It was my first real encounter with inequality beyond the abstract, and it stung.

But The Mary Leakey Girls' School also offered opportunities I had never imagined. The school had a well-stocked library, a functional computer lab with modern machines, science laboratories with actual equipment, and teachers who held advanced degrees. For the first time, I had access to consistent electricity, internet connectivity, and resources that made learning come alive.

Form One was a year of adjustment. I struggled initially with the academic pace and the medium of instruction—while English had been used in primary school, the level of English proficiency expected here was higher. I spent nights reading and re-reading textbooks, building my vocabulary, training my ear to understand different accents and speaking styles. My Kikuyu accent, once a source of pride, became something I was self-conscious about when some classmates would giggle at my pronunciation.

A defining moment came in Form Two during a computer science class. Our teacher, Ms. Njeri, introduced us to basic programming using QBASIC. While most students found the abstract logic frustrating, I was enthralled. Programming was like mathematics made practical—you could write instructions, and the computer would execute them. I stayed back after class regularly, writing small programs, debugging errors, and experiencing the unique satisfaction of solving a coding problem after hours of trial and error.

Ms. Njeri became my mentor. She recognized my aptitude and began nurturing it, lending me programming books, challenging me with extra problems, and most importantly, telling me that technology needed more women. 'The future is being coded right now,' she would say, 'and if women aren't part of writing that code, we'll be excluded from shaping that future.' Her words planted a seed that would later blossom into my career choice.

Form Three brought new challenges. The curriculum intensified, and I had to choose between sciences and humanities. Despite pressure from some quarters to pursue arts subjects—deemed more 'appropriate' for girls—I chose pure sciences: Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Mathematics, with Computer Studies as an additional subject. This decision was met with raised

eyebrows from some relatives who believed I was making things unnecessarily difficult for myself.

The sciences were demanding, but they were also exhilarating. In Physics, I learned about circuits, forces, and energy—concepts that explained the world around me in precise mathematical terms. Chemistry revealed the invisible reactions happening everywhere, from the matooke cooking on the school kitchen fires to the batteries powering our calculators. Biology showed me the intricate systems that keep living organisms functioning. Each subject offered a different lens for understanding reality, and I wanted to see through all of them.

Beyond academics, secondary school was where I discovered volleyball. The school had a strong sports program, and in Form Two, I reluctantly joined the volleyball team after a friend's persistent coaxing. Initially, I was terrible—my timing was off, my serves barely made it over the net, and I struggled with the quick reflexes required. But there was something about the sport that resonated with me. It required both individual skill and team coordination, strategic thinking and split-second decisions.

I practiced obsessively. During lunch breaks, I would be on the court, serving against the wall. In the evenings, I watched more experienced players, studying their movements, asking questions, seeking advice. Gradually, I improved. By Form Three, I had earned a position as a middle blocker on the school team. By Form Four, I was the team captain. Volleyball taught me lessons that extended far beyond the court: the importance of persistence, the value of teamwork, the art of staying focused under pressure, and the sweet reward of improvement through dedication.

The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination in Form Four was even more consequential than KCPE. For months leading up to it, the school operated in examination mode—intensive revision sessions, past papers, mock exams, and constant assessment. The pressure was immense. I knew that my performance would determine whether I could pursue a university education and, if so, in what field.

I remember the night before the first examination, lying in bed in the dormitory, listening to the quiet breathing of sleeping classmates, and thinking about how far I had come. From Nyathuna Primary with its three shared computers to The Mary Leakey Girls' School with its computer lab

and internet. From a girl who had never left her village to a young woman who had represented her school in volleyball tournaments across the region. From being intimidated by English to writing essays that my teachers praised. The journey had transformed me, and I was ready for the next chapter.

When the KCSE results were released, I had achieved a B- (minus) grade, with an A- in Mathematics. It was enough to secure admission to university in a STEM field. My mother's reaction when I called to tell her remains etched in my memory. She didn't say much, just 'Ngai niaturathimite'—God has blessed us—repeated over and over as emotion overwhelmed her words.

## **Chapter Three: University and Self-Discovery**

### **Choosing Business Information Technology**

The decision to pursue Business Information Technology at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology was both pragmatic and aspirational. I had always been drawn to technology, but I also understood that technical skills alone weren't enough in today's world. Business acumen—understanding markets, organizations, strategy, and management—was equally crucial. Business Information Technology offered the perfect blend: the technical depth of IT with the strategic perspective of business.

DeKUT, located in Nyeri County, was renowned for its engineering and technology programs. The university's motto—'Better Life Through Technology'—resonated with my own belief that technology could be a force for positive change. When I received my admission letter, it felt like a vindication of every sacrifice my mother had made, every hour I had spent studying, every doubt I had overcome.

Moving to Nyeri for university was both exciting and bittersweet. Nyeri is beautiful—cool climate, green landscapes, and a rich history as the heartland of the Mau Mau resistance. But it also meant being away from home again, this time with even more independence and responsibility. Unlike secondary school where everything was structured and supervised, university required self-discipline, time management, and personal initiative.

### **First Year: Foundations and Frustrations**

First year at DeKUT was overwhelming. The campus, with its modern buildings, computer labs equipped with the latest software, and students from across Kenya and beyond, was a world unto itself. Orientation week introduced us to campus life, academic expectations, and the various clubs and societies we could join. I immediately signed up for the Women in Technology Society and the Volleyball Club, seeking both community and continuity with interests I had developed in secondary school.

The academic program was rigorous from the start. Our first semester covered foundational courses: Introduction to Programming (Python), Mathematics for Computing, Principles of Management, Financial Accounting, and Communication Skills. The programming course, in particular, was a baptism by fire. While I had basic exposure to programming in secondary school, university-level programming demanded a deeper understanding of logic, algorithms, and problem-solving.

I struggled initially. The pace was fast, expectations were high, and the grading was unforgiving. My first programming assignment—a simple program to calculate student grades—took me three days and countless debugging sessions to complete. I remember sitting in the computer lab past midnight, frustrated to tears, trying to figure out why my code wasn't working. A classmate, Mark, noticed my struggle and offered help. He showed me how to trace through code systematically, how to use print statements for debugging, and most importantly, that struggling was normal and part of the learning process.

That experience taught me an important lesson: asking for help isn't weakness; it's wisdom. I began forming study groups, attending lecturer office hours, and utilizing online resources. Gradually, programming started making sense. The frustration transformed into fascination as I began to appreciate the elegance of well-written code and the satisfaction of solving complex problems through logical thinking.

Financial constraints were a constant concern. My mother was paying for my education through a combination of savings, loans, and income from her small farming and business activities. I was acutely aware that every semester's fees represented months of her labor. This awareness drove me to make every moment count. I couldn't afford to fail a unit or waste time. I applied for bursaries, sought part-time opportunities, and lived as frugally as possible, but the financial pressure was always there, hovering in the background of every decision.

## **Second Year: Growth and Challenge**

Second year brought increased academic complexity and deeper specialization. We delved into Database Management Systems, Object-Oriented Programming (Java), Data Structures and

Algorithms, Business Information Systems, and Operations Management. Each course built on the foundation laid in first year, adding layers of complexity and sophistication.

The Database Management Systems course was particularly transformative. Learning how to design efficient databases, write SQL queries, and understand data normalization opened my eyes to how information is organized and accessed in modern systems. I began to see databases everywhere—in the university's student management system, in the library catalog, in mobile banking applications. The world was built on data, and knowing how to manage it was a powerful skill.

It was during this year that I undertook my first significant technical project: a Library Management System. The project, part of our Database Management Systems coursework, required us to design and implement a backend system for managing library operations—book inventory, member registration, borrowing transactions, and fine calculations. I was assigned to work in a team of three students, and we decided to use Python with MySQL for the backend.

The project was challenging in ways that went beyond technical complexity. Coordinating with teammates, dividing responsibilities, managing version control, and integrating different components of the system required soft skills that no textbook taught. We had disagreements about design choices, missed deadlines, and moments of frustration when code written by one person broke functionality implemented by another.

But we persevered. I took charge of designing the database schema, creating tables for Books, Members, Transactions, and Fines with appropriate relationships and constraints. I also implemented the core borrowing and return logic, ensuring that the system correctly tracked book availability, calculated due dates, and automatically computed fines for overdue books. The moment when all the components came together and the system actually worked—when you could register a member, check out a book, return it, and see the fine calculation update correctly—was euphoric.

During the project presentation, our lecturer asked probing questions about our design choices, error handling, and scalability considerations. Defending our technical decisions, explaining trade-offs, and demonstrating the system's functionality under questioning was nerve-wracking

but ultimately rewarding. We received a high grade, but more importantly, I had concrete proof that I could build something functional, something that solved a real problem. That project remains one of my proudest achievements.

Outside the classroom, I continued playing volleyball for the university team. We trained three times a week and competed in inter-university tournaments across the region. Being part of the team provided a crucial counterbalance to the mental intensity of academic work. On the court, the world simplified to the movement of the ball, the coordination of teammates, the split-second decisions that made the difference between winning and losing a point. Volleyball kept me physically active, socially connected, and mentally resilient.

### **Third Year and Fourth Year: Deepening Expertise**

As I progressed into third & fourth year, the curriculum became more specialized and demanding. Courses in Systems Analysis and Design, Web Development, Mobile Application Development, Strategic Management, and Entrepreneurship pushed me to integrate technical knowledge with business thinking. The line between theory and practice blurred as projects became more complex and expectations more sophisticated.

These years also brought introspection about my future. As graduation approached on the horizon, questions about career direction became urgent. Should I pursue software development? Business analysis? Project management? Entrepreneurship? Each path offered different opportunities and challenges. I began attending career talks, networking with alumni, and researching companies and roles that aligned with my skills and interests.

The Women in Technology Society became increasingly important to me during this period. Through the society, I connected with other female students navigating similar challenges—the occasional skepticism from male classmates, the pressure to prove ourselves in technical spaces, the balancing act between academic demands and societal expectations. We organized workshops on resume writing, technical interview preparation, and career development. We invited successful women in technology to speak to us, providing role models and practical advice.

One particular event stands out: a panel discussion with three Kenyan women working in senior technology roles—a software engineering manager at Safaricom, a data scientist at a Nairobi-based startup, and a cybersecurity consultant. Hearing their stories—the obstacles they overcame, the opportunities they created, the impact they were making—was inspiring and empowering. They spoke candidly about challenges: being the only woman in technical meetings, having their expertise questioned, juggling family expectations with career ambitions. But they also spoke about the rewards: the satisfaction of building solutions that impacted millions of people, the mentorship relationships they had formed, the doors that technology had opened. Their message was clear: the path wouldn't be easy, but it would be worthwhile.



## **Chapter Four: Challenges and Resilience**

### **Financial Struggles**

Throughout my university journey, financial constraints have been a persistent challenge. Unlike many of my peers whose parents work in formal employment with steady incomes, my mother's income as a peasant farmer and hustler is seasonal and unpredictable. Good harvests bring relief; poor ones bring anxiety. School fees payment deadlines have often been sources of stress, with my mother scrambling to raise money through loans from savings groups or by selling produce at lower prices than she would have liked.

I remember one particularly difficult semester in second year when fees payment was delayed, and I was barred from sitting for examinations until the arrears were cleared. The humiliation of being turned away from the exam room while my classmates proceeded inside was crushing. I called my mother, trying to keep the desperation out of my voice, and she promised to find a solution. Three days later, she had borrowed from relatives, taken a loan from her women's group, and somehow cobbled together the minimum amount required. I was able to sit for the exams, but the experience left a mark.

These challenges taught me resourcefulness. I applied for every bursary opportunity, wrote compelling applications highlighting my circumstances and potential. Some applications were successful, providing welcome relief. Others were rejected, teaching me resilience in the face of disappointment. I also sought part-time opportunities—tutoring younger students in mathematics and computer studies, helping local businesses set up basic websites, doing data entry work during holidays. Every shilling earned was a small contribution toward easing my mother's burden.

### **Gender Dynamics in Technology**

Being a woman in a technology program has presented its own unique challenges. While DeKUT's Business Information Technology program has better gender balance than pure Computer Science or Engineering, male students still outnumber female students. In some technical courses, I've been one of only three or four women in a class of forty students.

There have been moments of casual sexism—assumptions that I chose Business IT because it's 'easier' than Computer Science, surprise when I perform well in programming courses, or comments suggesting that women are naturally better at the 'soft skills' aspects of Business IT while men excel at the technical components. These micro-aggressions, individually minor but cumulatively corrosive, required conscious effort to not internalize.

Group work sometimes revealed gender biases. In one project, a male teammate automatically assumed he would handle the 'technical' programming while suggesting I focus on documentation and presentation. I had to assert my technical competence and insist on a fair division of work that allowed me to demonstrate my programming skills. In another instance, during a class discussion, my technical suggestion was ignored until a male student made the same point minutes later and was praised for it.

But these challenges also strengthened my resolve. I made it a point to speak up in class, to volunteer for technical tasks in group projects, to help other students (male and female) with programming challenges, and to let my work speak for itself. I refused to be defined by stereotypes or limited by others' limited expectations. My success in the Library Management System project, my strong grades in technical courses, and my active participation in coding competitions gradually established my credibility.

## **Balancing Tradition and Ambition**

As a young Kikuyu woman pursuing a career in technology, I often navigate tensions between traditional expectations and modern aspirations. Some relatives question why I'm pursuing such a 'difficult' field when I could choose something more 'suitable' for a woman. There are subtle pressures about marriage—questions about when I'll settle down, concerns that too much education might make me 'unmarriageable,' suggestions that I should focus on finding a husband rather than building a career.

These expectations are rarely expressed maliciously; they come from people who genuinely care about me but whose worldview was shaped by different times and different possibilities. My mother, despite her limited formal education, has been my strongest defender. When relatives express these concerns, she firmly states that education is never wasted, that times have changed,

and that women must be able to stand on their own feet. Her support has been a shield against discouragement.

I don't reject my cultural heritage—I'm proud to be Kikuyu, proud of the values of hard work and community that were instilled in me. But I also believe that culture must evolve, that traditions should empower rather than limit, and that my generation of African women has both the right and responsibility to chart new paths while honoring what is valuable from the past.

## **Chapter Five: Vision and Aspirations**

### **Professional Goals**

As I approach the final year of my undergraduate studies, my professional aspirations have crystallized around several key goals. In the immediate term, I aim to graduate with first-class honors, solidifying the foundation I've built over the past three years. This goal is not merely about grades—it represents mastery of my field and readiness to tackle real-world challenges.

Upon graduation, I intend to gain practical experience in the technology sector, ideally in a role that bridges business and technology—perhaps as a business analyst, systems analyst, or associate product manager. I'm particularly interested in organizations that are using technology to solve African problems: fintech companies making financial services accessible to rural communities, health-tech startups improving healthcare delivery, agri-tech solutions empowering farmers with data and market access, or e-government initiatives making public services more efficient and transparent.

Medium-term, I envision pursuing a master's degree in a specialized area—possibly Data Science, Business Analytics, or Information Systems Management. Advanced education will deepen my expertise, expand my network, and position me for leadership roles. I'm particularly interested in how machine learning and artificial intelligence can be applied to uniquely African contexts, creating solutions that work with our infrastructure realities rather than assuming Western conditions.

Long-term, my ambition is to establish a technology consulting firm that helps small and medium enterprises in Kenya leverage technology for growth. I've witnessed how many businesses—including those in Nyathuna and similar communities—are held back by manual processes, lack of data-driven decision-making, and limited online presence. With the right technological interventions, these businesses could dramatically improve their efficiency, reach new markets, and scale sustainably. I want to be part of making that happen.

### **Social Impact Aspirations**

Beyond professional success, I'm driven by a desire to create meaningful social impact. My journey from Nyathuna to DeKUT was made possible by the sacrifices of my mother, the dedication of teachers who believed in me, and the opportunities—however limited—that were available. I feel a responsibility to create more such opportunities for others, particularly young women from rural communities who dream of careers in technology.

I envision establishing a mentorship program that connects university students studying technology with girls in rural secondary schools. Through this program, mentors would provide academic guidance, career advice, and encouragement—the kind of support that makes such a difference when you're navigating unfamiliar terrain. The program would also facilitate exposure visits where secondary school students visit university campuses and technology companies, expanding their sense of what's possible.

I'm also passionate about digital literacy in rural communities. I've seen firsthand how lack of basic computer skills limits opportunities—job applications are now online, government services are digitizing, banking is moving to mobile platforms. Those without digital skills are being left behind. I want to establish community computer centers in underserved areas, providing free basic computer training, internet access, and support for online services. These centers would serve as bridges to the digital economy for communities that currently stand on the wrong side of the digital divide.

## **Personal Development Goals**

On a personal level, I'm committed to continuous learning and growth. The technology field evolves rapidly—programming languages rise and fall in popularity, new frameworks emerge, business models that seemed unassailable become obsolete. Staying relevant requires a commitment to lifelong learning. I plan to continuously update my skills through online courses, professional certifications, and hands-on projects.

I also want to develop my leadership capabilities. Technical expertise alone isn't sufficient for the impact I want to create; I need to be able to inspire teams, manage resources, navigate organizational politics, communicate vision, and drive change. This requires deliberate

development of skills like emotional intelligence, strategic thinking, conflict resolution, and persuasive communication.

Physical and mental wellness are priorities too. The demands of technology careers—long hours, constant learning, problem-solving pressure—can lead to burnout if not balanced with self-care. I intend to maintain my athletic involvement, possibly transitioning from competitive volleyball to recreational play and coaching. I also want to cultivate mindfulness practices, maintain strong social connections, and create boundaries between work and personal life.

Financial stability and independence are important goals. I want to reach a point where my mother no longer has to struggle financially, where I can support my siblings when needed, where I can invest in opportunities without constant anxiety about money. This isn't about wealth for its own sake—it's about security, dignity, and the freedom to make choices based on what's right rather than what's affordable.

## Chapter Six: Reflections and Philosophy

### Lessons Learned

Looking back on my journey so far, several key lessons stand out. First, circumstances don't determine destiny—they influence it, sometimes heavily, but they don't dictate it. I was born into poverty in a rural village with limited resources, but through education, determination, and support, I've been able to access opportunities that seemed impossible a decade ago. This doesn't mean the system is fair or that everyone has equal opportunities—structural inequalities are real and need addressing. But it does mean that within constraints, agency exists.

Second, success is rarely solitary. My achievements are built on the foundation of countless other people's contributions—my mother's sacrifices, teachers who stayed late to help struggling students, classmates who shared knowledge, mentors who provided guidance, and even strangers who funded bursaries that I benefited from. Recognizing this interdependence creates both gratitude and responsibility: gratitude for the support received, and responsibility to pay it forward.

Third, failure and struggle are essential parts of growth. Every time I struggled with a difficult concept, failed an exam, had code that wouldn't work, or faced rejection, I had a choice: give up or persist. The struggles weren't pleasant, but they built resilience, problem-solving skills, and confidence that comes from overcoming challenges. The smooth path, had it existed, wouldn't have prepared me as well for the real world's complexities.

Fourth, representation matters profoundly. Seeing women succeed in technology—whether Ms. Njeri in secondary school, the panelists who visited our university, or successful alumni—made technology careers seem possible for me. Conversely, the absence of representation can make paths seem closed even when they're technically open. This is why I'm committed to being visible in my field, to being a role model for younger women who need to see that people like them can succeed in technology.

Fifth, technical skills and soft skills are equally important. Knowing how to code, design databases, or analyze systems is crucial in my field, but so is knowing how to communicate

complex ideas clearly, work effectively in teams, manage time, accept feedback, and navigate interpersonal dynamics. The most successful professionals I've encountered excel at both dimensions.

## **Philosophy of Technology and Development**

My experiences have shaped specific beliefs about technology and development in the African context. I believe that technology is neither inherently good nor bad—its value lies in how it's applied and who it serves. Too often, technology solutions are designed in Silicon Valley or other Western contexts and then imported to Africa without sufficient adaptation to local realities. What works in an environment with reliable electricity, high-speed internet, and digital literacy doesn't necessarily work in contexts where these conditions don't exist.

Effective technology for African contexts must be designed with African realities in mind: intermittent power supply, varying internet connectivity, mobile-first usage patterns, diverse linguistic contexts, and different cultural norms around privacy and data sharing. This requires African technologists—people who understand these contexts intimately because we live them—to be creators, not just consumers, of technology.

I'm also convinced that technology should be an enabler, not a replacement, for human capability. In discussions about automation and AI, there's often anxiety about job displacement. This concern is valid, but I believe the solution isn't to resist technological advancement—that's futile—but to ensure that technology augments human capability rather than simply replacing it, and that the gains from technological productivity are shared equitably.

Furthermore, I believe in the principle of digital inclusion: technology's benefits should be accessible to everyone, not just the urban elite. This requires deliberate effort to bridge digital divides through infrastructure investment, digital literacy programs, affordable devices and connectivity, and user interfaces that work for people with varying levels of education and technical sophistication.

## **Identity and Belonging**



My identity is multifaceted, and different aspects come to the fore in different contexts. I'm a Kikuyu woman, proud of my cultural heritage and the values it instilled. I'm a Kenyan, optimistic about our country's potential despite its challenges. I'm a technology professional in training, excited about innovation and problem-solving. I'm a daughter who carries the hopes of a mother who sacrificed everything. I'm a student still learning and growing. I'm a volleyball player who understands teamwork and discipline. I'm a rural girl navigating urban spaces. I'm a feminist committed to gender equity. I'm young but experienced beyond my years.

These identities sometimes align and sometimes create tensions. But I've learned that I don't have to choose one identity at the expense of others. I can honor my cultural roots while embracing technological modernity. I can be ambitious professionally while maintaining strong family ties. I can advocate for women in technology while working collaboratively with male colleagues. Integration, not compartmentalization, is the goal.

I find belonging in multiple communities: my family and village community that shaped my early years, my academic community at DeKUT where I'm challenged and supported, my volleyball team where I'm part of something larger than myself, the Women in Technology Society where I find solidarity with other women in STEM, and the broader technology community where I'm building professional identity. Each community offers different forms of support, connection, and meaning.

## **Conclusion: The Journey Continues**

At twenty years old, I'm aware that this autobiography captures only the beginning of my story. The most significant chapters—the career I'll build, the impact I'll create, the family I may raise, the challenges I'll overcome, the failures I'll experience and learn from—are still unwritten. But the foundation has been laid, and the direction is clear.

From Nyathuna Village to Dedan Kimathi University, my journey has been one of continuous transformation. Each stage—primary school, secondary school, now university—has expanded my horizons, challenged my assumptions, and equipped me with new capabilities. The girl who walked thirty minutes to a rural primary school with limited resources has become a young woman coding backend systems and studying business information technology at a national university. The transformation is profound, yet I remain connected to my roots.

My mother's resilience, working the land and hustling to ensure her children could access education, exemplifies the power of parental sacrifice. Her belief in education as a pathway to a better life, despite her own limited schooling, demonstrates wisdom that transcends formal credentials. She may not understand the technical details of what I study, but she understands its significance. When I explain my projects to her in simple terms—'I'm building a system that helps libraries track books and borrowers'—her face lights up with pride. That pride is my greatest motivation.

The challenges I've faced—financial constraints, gender bias, balancing tradition with ambition, navigating unfamiliar spaces—have been difficult but formative. They've taught me resilience, resourcefulness, and the importance of support systems. They've also instilled empathy for others facing similar struggles and a commitment to making the path easier for those who follow.

My passions—technology and volleyball—might seem unrelated, but both have taught me valuable lessons. Technology has shown me the power of logical thinking, the satisfaction of building solutions, and the potential for innovation to improve lives. Volleyball has taught me teamwork, discipline, the importance of practice, and how to stay focused under pressure. Together, they've shaped a well-rounded perspective that balances technical expertise with interpersonal skills, individual achievement with collective success.

Looking forward, I'm both excited and realistic. The technology field offers immense opportunities, but competition is fierce and the pace of change is relentless. Success will require continuous learning, adaptability, perseverance, and probably some luck. Gender barriers persist, though they're evolving. Financial security isn't guaranteed. The path ahead has uncertainties.

But I'm ready. The journey from Nyathuna has prepared me for challenges. The support of my mother, siblings, teachers, mentors, and peers has shown me that I don't face these challenges alone. The skills I've acquired—technical, analytical, interpersonal—give me tools to navigate complexities. The values instilled by my culture—hard work, perseverance, community responsibility—provide ethical grounding. The vision I've developed—using technology for social impact, empowering others, bridging digital divides—gives me purpose beyond personal success.

To young women in rural villages across Kenya and Africa who might read this: your circumstances don't determine your destiny. Education is transformative. Technology offers pathways to impact and opportunity. The journey won't be easy—there will be financial struggles, moments of self-doubt, people who underestimate you, and barriers that seem insurmountable. But with determination, support, and effort, these barriers can be overcome.

Don't let anyone tell you that technology isn't for you because of your gender, your rural background, or your economic circumstances. The world needs diverse perspectives in technology—people who understand different contexts, who can design solutions for varied realities, who bring different experiences to problem-solving. Your perspective is valuable. Your potential is limitless.

As I approach graduation and the transition from student to professional, I carry with me the lessons of Nyathuna—the value of community, the dignity of hard work, the importance of helping others. I carry the education from Nyathuna Primary School, The Mary Leakey Girls' School, and Dedan Kimathi University—the knowledge, skills, and confidence that formal education provides. I carry the wisdom of my mother—her resilience, her sacrifices, her unwavering belief in education's power. And I carry my own dreams—of professional success, social impact, and a life lived with purpose and meaning.

The journey from Nyathuna continues. The destination is still being defined. But the direction is clear: forward, upward, and always with the intention of lifting others as I climb. This is not just my story—it's a story of possibility, of transformation, of hope. And the best chapters are yet to be written.

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