

THROUGH THE WILDERNESS OF LIFE

THE DUKE OF EMALI

REVISED
EDITION

.....and
I went to
Alliance....



RICHARD KIOKO KIUNDI



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ISBN 9789 9667 3446 4

Paperback ISBN 9798377925514

Hardcover ISBN 9798378267422

Library of Congress Catalogue

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Blessed are those who expect nothing for they
shall not be disappointed.

~Alexander Pope (English Poet 1688-1744)



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ACKNOWLEDGMENT



To my brothers and sisters who have at one time or another held out a steadying hand – especially Esther Ndunge Mulli and her husband Robert Zakayo Mulli – they welcomed me into their home during my crucial formative years. To my wife Margaret and children Ndunge, Kyavi, Noni and Mumo who have cheered me on as I doggedly put this story to paper. A special posthumous dedication to my late son David Mbevi who was an uncomplaining companion during those dark days of chemo and radio therapy in India. He shored up my resolve during the many times I felt like giving up, and opened up to me a new outlook on this thing called life. May his gentle soul continue to rest in peace.

To Armstrong Nzamba Kioli, a special friend and his lovely wife Purity who consistently kept me focused on this story, I shall forever be grateful. To my primary school headmaster James Mang'oka Mbululu and teachers Paul Kalei Kinyenze and Nicholas Musau Muteti who saw the potential in me and convinced me to choose to go to Alliance high school, making me the first pupil from Nduundune Primary School to do so.

I appreciate many of my Alliance high school class of 1978 year mates, especially Stanley *Snyidho* Otieno, Ken *Obish* Obimbo, David *Sudden* Kihurani and Edwin *Kinyash* Kinyanjui. They contributed invaluable suggestions and input on

life in Alliance high school between 1973 and 1978, as well as other Old Boys who have in one way or another contributed to the realization of this book. Senior Counsel Wilfred Ngunjiri Nderitu of Alliance high school class of 1983 has been on my case for the last three years encouraging me to put my story in a book.

A special mention of the Alliance high school Chief Principal William Mwangi who allowed me a peek into the official school files of the seventies. The contents in my personal file acted as a reality check on the rosy memories I have of my high school student days. Special acknowledgment to my publisher Francis Kondia Wachira and his Afritell Publishers team without whose patient guidance this book would be but a jumble of words.

**Richard Kioko Kiundi,
Garden Estate, Nairobi, Kenya.
November, 2021**

FOREWORD I



I first met Richard Kiundi aka the Duke of Emali when my family and I started our house construction at Garden Estate Nairobi in the year 2005, as he was the first neighbor who came to welcome us to the neighborhood even as we did the construction work. He introduced us to the neighborhood and made sure that we joined the neighborhood association where we became active members.

That is Richard Kiundi for you! Extremely social and welcoming, yet simple and down to earth. His story is a must read for all! It is a privilege to be associated with this humble soul who has been a miracle that has continued to walk among us. What an honor to be the one writing this foreword to this great book that he has created over the years.

As you read this great book you get to indulge in the life of the author, the famous ‘Duke of Emali’ – with all his close friends. The book reveals to us that we live in a world where the road to life has many forks that will take us where we choose depending on the fork we take. Imagine for a moment that you met a man who has diabetes, hypertension and the related complications, a man who has conquered cancer, amongst other serious diseases. Would that man be walking with his head high or would he be feeling that nature has dealt him bad cards? Well, the Duke has gone through these and more, yet he is always bubbly

and excited about this life.

We all have our perspective of life which shapes our thinking, hence the actions we take when faced with various situations in life. This obviously forms our story, and to a large extent, who we become. In this book, Richard opens his heart to tell his life story and gives us his perspective of life. He lays bare his life to tell his story, and for that I say kudos to him for allowing himself to be 'naked' so that we and future generations can learn lessons from an authentic life.

My observation is that we have all succumbed to the temptation of ignoring our history, hence failed to recognize the historical perspective that allows us to study how we have evolved as a people over the centuries including our basic values. Our historical perspective is always blurred and obfuscated by the colonizers' perspective where we 'learnt' ... that the first man to see Mount Kilimanjaro was a German missionary, while I believe the Duke's great grandfather must have enjoyed the sight of Kilimanjaro every morning for many years.

In this book Kiundi allows us to have a glimpse of the history that the colonialists (and the neo-colonialists who have ruled Kenya since 1963) refused to admit existed. He gives us his genealogy to the fifth generation, a feat that only a few of us can be able to do. This gives us a glimpse of the details that Kiundi has unraveled to be able to bring out his story for our consumption. He sets us off by transporting us back over 400 years.

My earliest recorded forefather was called Wangesu who lived in Mbooni in the late 1600s to mid 1700s. His son Mutyeti then moved to Ndolo in Kilungu in 1770 where his son Nduvu was born and also lived. Nduvu's son Mutyaia migrated to Utaati in 1810 and his son Nzau lived in the same place. Nzau's son Mukai moved to Makuli in 1850 and settled there. Mukai's son Yambu migrated to Ukonze in Ukia. Yambu's son Kiundi was born in Ukia before Yambu moved his family to settle in Mbitini in the early 1900's. Most of Yambu's descendants are domiciled in Mbitini to date.

In this volume, Kiundi has ably covered the highlight of his life from his birth, education in various schools – (one cannot miss to see that he was a genius, hahahaha, his career as an accountant, and finally as an entrepreneur. At every stage, one cannot miss to see the DNA of honesty and integrity weaved in his story and which forms the basic building blocks of a fruitful life. When you read about his fight with cancer and other chronic diseases, you will experience the

life of a brave and determined man who has walked amongst ordinary people with positivity and fully lived life.

I invite you to a great enjoyable read and hope that this will challenge many of us to sit down and prepare a record from our lives, so that those that come after us can learn from our lives how to deal with the challenges of their own lives.

Alex Muthiora Mwathi

Garden Estate, Nairobi, Kenya

November, 2021

Author, Life coach and motivational speaker

FOREWORD II



In June 2021 or thereabouts, I was honored to be asked by Richard Kioko Kiundi ‘the Duke’ to write the Foreword to his autobiography. At the time, I had no idea what the title of the final version of his book would be. By the end of the first one-third of July, Richard had sent me an image of the cover page of his draft on WhatsApp, entitled *The Wilderness of Life*, with a half-length photo of himself showing a reflection on his prescription glasses. Within minutes, I responded with the words, “Interesting... am I allowed to critique yet, beyond the green reflection on your specs?” He quickly replied to me, pointing out that the picture on the draft’s cover page would not be the final picture.

As for whether I could critique the more serious aspects of the cover page, his answer was a characteristic ‘Yes, *upende usipende*.’ (Yes, whether you like it or not.) I therefore immediately criticized the title that he had chosen for the autobiography, as I felt that the word ‘wilderness’ gave a rather gloomy overall picture of the totality of the author’s experiences. Indeed, those who know ‘the Duke’ know well that he is a ‘man of letters’ in as many senses literal or other – that the phrase can carry. He demonstrates traits of being scholarly and manifests a love for literature, language and good humor. In my many years of interaction with him since we first met in 1978, he even gives away a profound hint of the ability to write! I was therefore pleasantly surprised to recently learn that the final

version of his autobiography would go by the title *The Duke Writes*, for indeed, ‘the Duke’ writes. As at 22nd October 2021, Richard’s book had 55,623 words in 319 pages which included 29 black and white and 134 color photos, up from the 15,191 words contained in 61 pages as at 11 July 2021 as reported by him in a message to me.

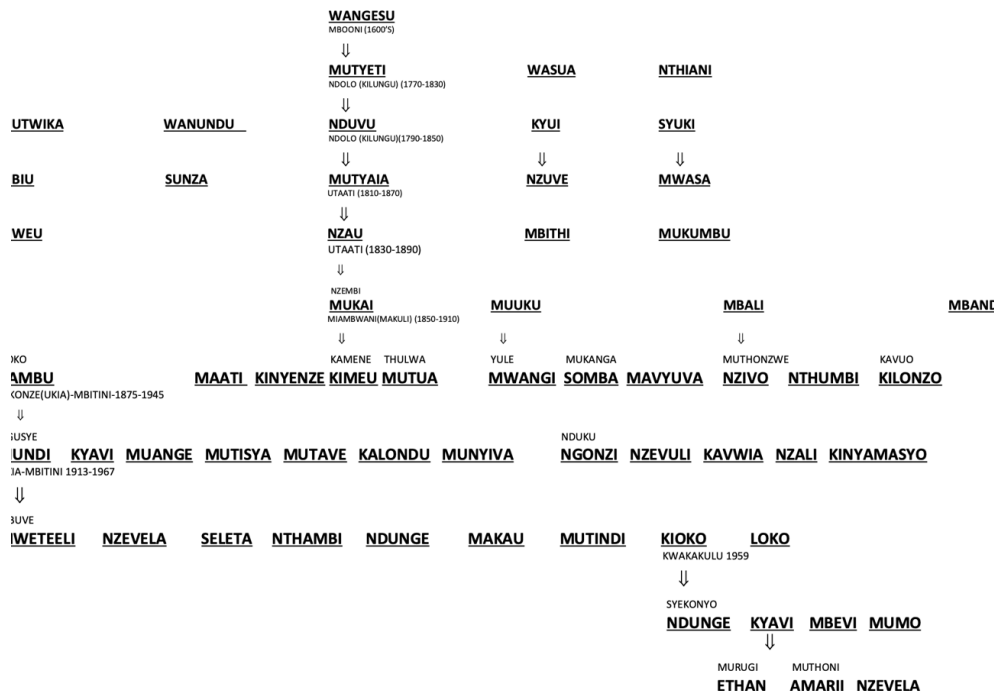
The addition of 40,000 words to the book in a little over three months is no mean feat for a man who is all but retired from active life. Little wonder then, that Richard’s message of July had ended with the words ‘...and still going strong!’ I hope that Richard’s autobiography will give its reader a clearer understanding of who the enigmatic personality that is popularly known as ‘the Duke’ really is: a ‘Duke’ who was raised in the village, and not into nobility. An indefatigable sexagenarian. A man who I suspect has few or no acquaintances because he makes a close friend of whomsoever he meets. A man who has had his fair share of successes in life and encountered, in equal measure, challenges – including life-threatening ones – all of which he has taken in his stride. A young-at-heart straight-talker who shoots straight from the hip and tells it like it is. For those, like me, who have known ‘the Duke’ long enough to have heard varying versions of his legendary exploits at school and in his early working life (including ‘the wildness of life’ pun intended), it is their turn to finally separate fact from fiction.

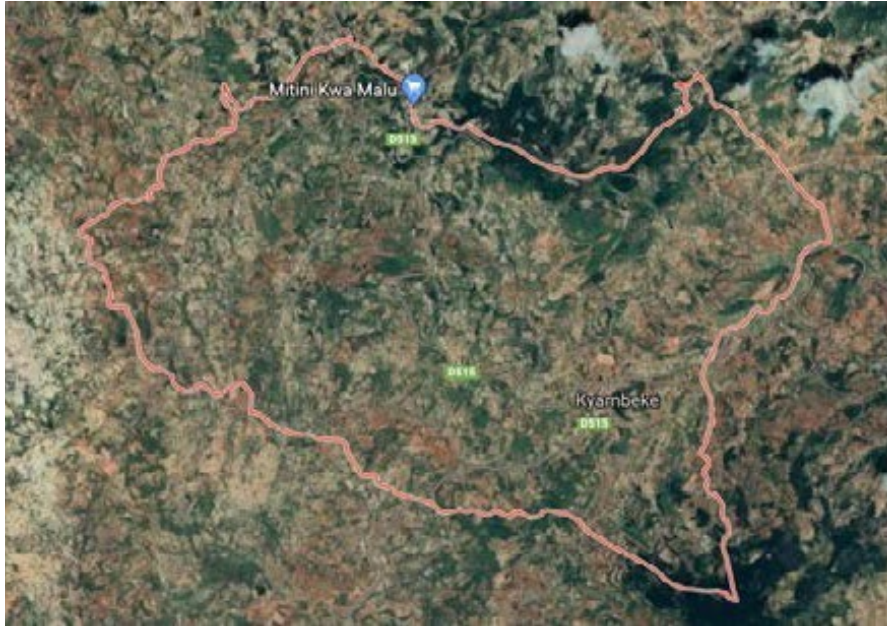
Wilfred Ngunjiri Nderitu
Senior Counsel, Nairobi
November, 2021

PREFACE

While growing up as a small child in *Kwakakulu*, I would be mesmerized as older people swore by their ancestors. Some could name their forefathers to the sixth or seventh generation, and I yearned to be able to do the same. I am from *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* clan, Ukambani's most populous clan. Nzau's descendants, *Mbaa Nzau* have been a closely knit family over the years with an elected council of elders. My favorite uncle Mutisya, fondly referred to as 'Kambela' on account of his having been a gun-bearer in the second world war, and my elder brother Mweteeli were members of the council for many years and agreed to my request in the mid 1980's to help in the recording of a family tree. We were able to put together an accurate record, but only as far back as the 17th century.

RICHARD KIOKO KIUNDI FAMILY TREE





Ndolo, Kilungu, Makueni County, Kenya. Some of my early ancestors lived in this area after moving from Mbooni.



Utaati encompasses Ukia, Ukonze and Makuli the areas my forefathers settled in before they moved to Mbitini and other places. They migrated in a constant general South Easterly direction.

I have always been a story teller milking out any mundane story for whatever it is worth. Writing this book gives me an opportunity to write my own history while at the same time challenging my contemporaries to do likewise. I have tried to give some personal background including my historical roots from childhood right through to the present to enable the reader get a good idea of the kind of person that I am. While I have lived a fairly ordinary life, I have had some critical junctures that have greatly influenced my life's trajectory. Having been born the eighth child in a family of achievers, I had little choice but to try and emulate the high standards set.

Throughout nursery and primary school, I topped my class almost effortlessly. Joining Alliance high school opened me to real competition that encompassed every facet of life from academic to sports and social interactions. Interaction with the female gender as well as members of other Kenyan and non-Kenyan communities, both fellow students as well as teachers widened my world view considerably. Competition for female company during social events such as debates and dances taught me persuasive decorum. The ability to hold my own with some of the best brains gave me the confidence to travel into uncharted territory and follow the bend in the road with confidence. During my first year at the University of Nairobi, I learnt to manage my time without supervision especially and most painfully when I barely scraped through the end year exams.

When I arrived in the world of employment, I learnt that the good guy does not always finish first. People I trusted as truth seekers would bear false witness against me and send my world into an unanticipated spin. The dishonesty in society reared its ugly head in my businesses where I lost vast sums of money due to my misplaced belief in the inherent honesty of people. The hardest lesson I learnt was never to take good health for granted. The transition from a consummate energetic businessman recovering from financial loss with the mantra, *I get knocked down, but I will get up again. You are never gonna keep me down-* from a song by the group Chumbawamba, and *I never needed nobody, to come and hold me hand, I never needed nobody, to take me through the land, never needed nobody, to tell me make a stand, I'm experienced man, I can understand, I know how to get along* – from the song Wajahka Man by Jimmy Cliff, to almost a vegetable in less than one month after a major surgical operation was truly devastating.

The many years of recovery from the after effects of those traumatic events made me come out more circumspect and ready to face the world once again but

with caution. I have written this book both as a way of reminiscing and with the hope that the reader will walk with me and realize that deep inside, there is an unbeatable iron man in all of us. All it takes is belief in one self and a commitment to take charge and say *I shall do it*. At the same time the book is intended to give the younger generation a peek into the world my agemates and I lived in. Having a loving family and sincere friends is a great blessing, but betrayal is an ever present possibility peeking just beyond the horizon. Happy and informative reading.

PROLOGUE



Leadership is defined as the capacity to get others to work in unity for and with you. Is it true a thorn tree comes out of the ground with its thorns? This debate has raged on in various forms from the beginning of time. There is now (almost) a consensus that whatever one becomes in life is partly inborn and partly made. A simplified way of explaining this is to say that some people are not born leaders and would flee for dear life if invited to lead, while some have the leadership bug and seek leadership positions right from childhood.

It is now accepted that most people are born with the potential to lead. Whether they become leaders, good or bad depends on what, where, how and when they learn and who they socialize with. We can thus confidently say that even born leaders have to learn from their environment, nature, other people, history and so on, to add to those unique skills that predispose them to leadership. We can also say confidently that many people not seen as born leaders can learn and become leaders. Some skills that are useful for would-be leaders include empathy, social intelligence, energy, diplomacy, charm, language, oratory, good sense of humor, mirth and a few others. Richard Kioko Kiundi, also known as ‘The Duke of Emali’, belongs to the class of leaders who were born with leadership genes and were brought up in circumstances that nurtured those leadership skills, both through example and learning.

He came to the world into a family whose patriarch Danson Kiundi Yambu was looked upon for leadership by people in those days, in all manner of endeavors. He never shied away from taking responsibility, and it is one such incident that put him and his family in trouble with the colonial administration in the early 1950S. This leadership bug rubbed off on Duke's older siblings who were opinion leaders in their diverse chosen fields. It is no wonder that Duke would become the leader of the gang whose opinion would be avidly sought, right from primary to high school, and on to university and society in general.

Being a people person Duke has been able to interact and inspire confidence across a wide range of persons, irrespective of age, race, tribe, creed or social status. My own encounter with the Duke was when we as precocious but mischievous form ones met at Alliance high school. That is why I feature in his book, for we are part of each other's story. Despite the shenanigans he has narrated, we turned out okay, and have proceeded to become productive adults, including siring upright heirs.

Engineer Stanley Snyidho Otieno
Alliance High School Classmate 1973-1978
Shanzu, Mombasa, Kenya.
November, 2021

THROUGH THE WILDERNESS OF LIFE

THE DUKE OF EMALI

.....and
I went to
Alliance....



CHAPTER 1



MY HUMBLE BEGINNINGS



I was at one time at my outset a single cell. I have no memory of this stage of my life, but I know it to be true because everyone and reproductive science say so. There was of course a sort of half-life before that, literally half, when the two half-endowed haploid gametes each carrying half my chromosomes were off on their own looking to bump into each other and did so by random chance, sheer luck, for better or worse, richer or poorer, et cetera, and I got under way. I do not remember this but I know that I began dividing. I have probably never worked so hard, and never again with such dexterity and certainty. At a certain stage, very young, a matter of hours of youth, I sorted myself out and became a system of cells, each labeled for what it was to become—brain cells, limbs, liver, the lot—all of them signaling to each other, calculating their territories, laying me out. At one stage I possessed an excellent kidney good enough for any higher fish, then I thought better and destroyed it all at once, installing in its place a neater pair for living on land.

I didn't plan on this when it was going on but my cells with a better memory did. Thinking back, I count myself lucky that I was not in charge at the time. If it had been left to me to do the mapping of my cells, I would have got it wrong, chopped something, forgotten where to assemble my neural crest, and confused it. Or I might have been stopped in my tracks, panicked by the massive deaths, billions of my embryonic cells being killed off systematically to make room for their more senior successors, death on a scale so vast that I can't think of it without wincing. By the time I was born, more of me had died than survived. It is no wonder I can't remember; during that time I went through brain after brain for nine months, finally contriving the one model that could be human, equipped for language.

On a Friday, maybe the day accounts for my sunny disposition the 20th March 1959, I was born in the village of *Kwakakulu* in the then Iteta sub-location of Mbitini location of Masaku colonial district, now Makeni County. I am the fifth son and eighth child of four girls and five boys of the late Danson Kiundi Yambu and the late Serah Mbuve Kiundi. I was called Kioko because I arrived into sinful earth amid loud protests early in the morning or so I am told. I am also told that there was a proposal to call me Mutua, because my mother went into prolonged labor, as I debated with myself whether to step out into this cruel world or not. My parents were business people who operated a retail shop at the local shopping center of Emali, where they had moved to from their first shop in Mwanjani. I grew up a typical rural child, making friends with other children in the immediate neighborhood, many being relatives. Some of these have remained great friends to date.

It was a tradition in the Akamba community for older siblings especially girls to be made responsible for the younger siblings and when I was born, the responsibility to make sure I was fed, bathed and generally looked after largely fell on my elder sister Esther Ndunge. This relationship continues to this day though I was also able to create a close relationship with all of my other siblings and their families. My very first travel overseas was in December 1990 to visit my sister Ruth Kyatha and her family in Nova Scotia Canada with my wife Margaret. We had deliberately chosen to visit in winter to experience snow. We boarded a KLM Jumbo jet at Nairobi's JKIA a little past midnight and landed at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport some seven hours later. We were the only non-whites on the

flight and I found it curious that we were the only ones asked to show our passports as we passed through the gate into the airport. We had a long wait for the connecting flight and so we took time to travel into Amsterdam by train and do some sightseeing. When it was time to head back to the airport, we could not find our way back to the train station although there were sign posts all over but written in Dutch. Our efforts to get directions from a policeman did not work either as he did not speak English. We ended up at a taxi rank where we decided to take a limousine and travelled back to the airport in the longest car, a Volvo any of us had ever ridden in. Many hours later we landed at Ottawa and cleared immigration before boarding onto a local flight to Halifax where we were met by our hosts. We then drove through the night the three hundred or so kilometers to Arcadia, our home for the next couple of weeks. It is on this trip that I encountered snow for the first time. My sister Ruth had asked me to apply for an International Driving license before our travel which I did from the Automobile Association. The Kyathas had a Buick Station Wagon and since both were new drivers, they were not allowed to drive with passengers and I became the official driver for the two weeks we were their guests.

One evening, my brother in law Henry and I decided to have a drink with some Arcadia University students from Kenya at a pub named Anvil, the local university student hangout. It closed promptly at 10pm before I had fully quenched my thirst and no pleading would convince the barman to serve any more. We adjourned to a restaurant nearby where drinks were only served to diners. We ordered a plate of fries and drinks and my boisterous self must have rubbed the waitress the wrong way. After having our fill and as we left, the waitress asked how we were going home as we were quite drunk, to which I must have arrogantly retorted "by car, it knows home." She replied "you touch that car; I will call the cops." We were eventually dropped home by the Palestinian owner of the restaurant on a night that snowed heavily. The following morning we went for the car and could not tell which of the various mounds of snow was ours and we had to scrape off snow from the general area of the registration number plates of a number of the mounds before we dug out the correct car. Before the Kyathas left the country, I had been a frequent visitor at both their Nairobi and Mbooni homes. In fact Ruth was greatly instrumental in my success at kicking out my cigarette smoking habit as stated elsewhere in this book.

Before we left for Canada, we had dropped our children at my sister Esther Mulli's home in Mtwapa on the northern outskirts of Mombasa. We landed back in the morning of December 31st and decided to drive to Mombasa the same day to see the children before the new year. My wife did not know how to drive at the time and so I drove all the way. The first wave of jet lag hit at around 10am as we passed Kiboko and we parked the car under some trees opposite Hunter's lodge and slept. I woke up at around 4pm and we continued the journey. The second wave hit at around 6pm near Voi and we took another snooze before drinking a few cups of concentrated black coffee at the Caltex petrol station restaurant. We eventually arrived at my sister's home at around 9pm and found the children already asleep and all our efforts to wake them up did not bear fruit. We felt quite disappointed after taking so much risk on the road. Many years later I mentioned this to the ever witty Ndunge who quipped "you had not told us you were coming! We would not have been able to sleep with all the excitement of looking forward to seeing you"

In earlier years, there had been a failed but hilarious attempt at match making by my brother William and his late wife Beatrice with a young lass from their neighborhood when I visited their home at Utithi near Machinery Township. Apparently, the young lass had seen my photograph and fallen head over heels in love with me, as my brother William told me. My frequent visits to my brother Joseph's home continued even after he relocated from Mombasa to the Rift Valley. One Christmas day, after an overnight binge at Emali, Joseph decided to treat his wife Zipporah, brother John and myself to breakfast at Hunter's Lodge Kiboko some 40 kilometers away. How he allowed me in the driver's seat of his VW Golf, registration number K LW 405, I still do not remember but I flew along Mombasa road overtaking all vehicles as we headed back to Emali.

To me, family was and remains very important. My immediate family and I have hosted uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces from both near and far. Uncles Mutisya Yambu and Matutu Nzivo were frequent and much loved visitors. My mother lived with us for many years and the almost fluent Kikamba spoken by my children is as a result of her prolonged residence in our home. Most of my school holidays, beginning from 1975 were spent in Mombasa at my sister Esther and husband Robert Mulli's home and I grew close to their children. During the children's high school days around Nairobi, we acted as parents for

the four of them, picking them from the bus station, dropping them at school, visiting, picking them during mid-term and closing days. We would chauffeur the parents when they visited from Mombasa and so on. In actual fact, most if not all of the nephews and nieces who schooled in or around Nairobi would find a home away from home at our home.

It is possibly this camaraderie and what must have looked like my ability to meet any challenges head-on that left me holding the short end of the stick in many Kiundi family emergency situations. One Sunday, on my way from my Kambu Four farm in Kambu, I found a very sickly elder brother Joel Mweteeli at Emali and I arranged with younger sister Loko to bring him to hospital in Nairobi the following day. I got him admitted at Nairobi West Hospital under care of an army physician friend, who gave a dire diagnosis that his liver was completely dead from long term untreated yellow fever. He passed on a couple of days later and we transferred the body to Chiromo mortuary, where I recall taking my sister Esther to view the body. It was a vast room with covered cadavers on tables everywhere and Joel's body had been placed right at the far end of the room. Esther had to almost physically muster sufficient courage to walk through the room. Eventually the burden of arranging for the funeral largely fell on me, but thanks to my numerous friends, it went ahead without a hitch.

I was again to be left holding the baby when my younger sister Loko passed on in the year 2000 after running a hefty bill at the Nairobi hospital intensive care unit. I had been rushing her to Kenyatta hospital from her doctor's clinic at Yaya center when her condition worsened as we passed Nairobi hospital, and I decided to seek some first aid to stabilize her before continuing to Kenyatta hospital, where her doctor was to meet her. It was never to be and she passed on a few days later in the ICU at Nairobi hospital. I had to give two car log books as security so as to be allowed to bury her. After a poorly attended *harambee* at KICC, I struggled to clear the bill alone and my efforts to sell one of the cars became very dicey, as no one would pay without the log book even directly to the hospital, and the hospital would not release the log book without payment. My erstwhile clearing agent and fixer George Ngei Mutinda, a distant cousin came up with the bright idea of reporting the log book of the car I had a buyer for as lost, then he would help me get a duplicate. We set the ball rolling and a few weeks later on a Friday of a long weekend, some three heavily armed flying

squad officers raided our Roma Agency Limited office on the 4th floor of Bruce house and took me to Kilimani police station, where I was booked for forgery in connection with the duplicate logbook application. Ngei had for some inexplicable reason set the police on me, and when I asked him a while later, he told me “You ain’t seen nothing yet”. Fortunately, I did not see anything else, at least not from him. I was able to get my lawyer Alice Kingoo Wanjau on phone and she came and got me released on a cash bail. Later that evening as I relished my freedom, a friend Preston Mathenge Kilungya called me on my cellphone, he wanted to know where I was. When I replied that I was at home, he told me that Ngei was boasting in Buru Buru bars that I was spending the long weekend in police custody. I gave him my home landline phone number, 8560021 to confirm I was home. When I narrated this incidence to my sister Esther, she stepped in and before the end of the week, we had cleared the debt and the hospital withdrew the complaint.

My mother started ailing in the late 1990s and was diagnosed as diabetic and hypertensive, resulting in frequent admissions in hospital requiring expensive and difficult to administer medication. Much of the time I would foot the bills but occasional help would be received from some of my other siblings. It was during one such admission around year 2001 that the doctor suggested that I take a diabetes test myself, as diabetes was suspected to be hereditary. Indeed it turned out I was pre-diabetic, and I was put on a diet and exercise regime that would ensure I would not slide into full blown diabetes. Sadly, I followed these instructions half-heartedly and within two years I was officially declared diabetic and hypertensive. A story is told how my mother swore never to eat fish, because one of my aunties would show off with some sent by her husband who was then working in Mombasa in the late 1940’s. It took nearly sixty years for her to taste fish again at the prompting of my wife, Margaret. This resolve came to the fore once again and she vowed to avoid all foods that would spike her blood sugar. Within a few months she was completely off medication and for more than ten years she lived a healthy life on a strict diet.

After I had recovered from the vagaries of cancer treatment, I convinced my two sisters Esther and Ruth to have monthly lunches hosted by each of us in turn, and this became a regular occurrence. Once every while one of the other siblings would join us. Ruth would host us in Machakos, while Esther and I would host

her in Nairobi. We would share photos from these frequent meetings in our family WhatsApp group. As Chinua Achebe once wrote, *A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it from his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so.* I hosted the larger Kiundi clan at my Garden Estate home in 2015 for a very well attended and successful thanksgiving celebration after I had been declared cancer free, after a lengthy sojourn in, followed by annual follow up visits to India. This appeared to set in motion a desire for us to come together, and because it is good to do so, it became a tradition every August to gather in one of the homes to eat and make merry together. In the next three years we made it to Machinery, Mbooni, and Nakuru and were heading to Kangundo in August 2020 when Covid 19 checked in and destabilized the world.



Kwakakulu, the place of a small gourd is named after the *Kakulu* hill. The hill got its name when cattle raids between the Akamba and Maasai tribes were frequent. Whenever the war alarm, the *nguli* was sounded announcing a successful raid by Maasai Morans, the Akamba warriors, *Athusi* would congregate on the hill to strategize on retaliation strategies. The leader accompanied by a few of the warriors would then consult a famous medicine man who was also my maternal uncle called Mukeka. Mukeka's tool of trade was a small gourd, *Kakulu* that he kept under his bed, *vuui* in Kikamba language and he would consult it for directions on when and where to retaliate, which route to take, formations of attack and so on. The directions would be very precise and when followed to the letter would yield great bounty for the Akamba raiders that would include cattle, women and material valuables. The *Kakulu* would communicate its divination at its own time and pace which could be executed immediately or after some days. The *Athusi* would just have to wait patiently for direction. The hill where the *Athusi* would wait for the *Kakulu's* divination acquired the name *Kiima kya Kakulu*, hill of the small gourd or in short, *Kwakakulu* and eventually it became the name of the whole village.

Kwakakulu is your typical rural village with homesteads scattered all over but

with access to the main thoroughfares that criss cross the village. The homesteads would be grouped in order of extended families. From my home to the West is the *Kwakakulu* hill that has a sacred shrine, *Ithembo* where elders who would include my grandfathers Mavyuva *Mbombwe* Muuku, Kilonzo *Mwasya Mbola* Mbali and Kimongo Ngovi among others would congregate to make animal sacrifices for any of the various communal requirements. This could be sacrifice for delayed rains or widespread sickness, whether of humans or domestic animals with consistent positive results. To the South, across Muooni river is the savanna along which runs both the Nairobi-Mombasa highway and railway line. At night we could see the lighted wagons of the passenger trains. There were two going both ways every night, the first Nairobi to Mombasa train passing Emali at 9pm and would stop at every station along the way to drop and pick passengers. The second one, an express train, would pass Emali at 11pm and would only stop at Mtito Andei and Voi before getting to Mombasa, its final destination. The Mombasa to Nairobi trains would operate in much the same way passing Emali at 4am and 5am respectively. It is on these savannah grasslands called *kinyoo* where we would herd the family cattle. On clear mornings, we could see snow-clad Kibo and Mawenzi, the two peaks of Mt Kilimanjaro further south. In a south westerly direction lies Emali town, the main shopping center about five or so kilometers away shielded from view by *Kwa Kamba* hill. To the East past *Mbaa* Mulungye hill is *Kwakakulu* Primary School, which at the time only admitted children from Catholic families beyond which Ithumba hill is visible while Maatha hill comes into view to the north east, with Mumanzi and *Kwa Nthuku* hills further to the south east. To the north, past Mwetha hill is *Kwa Mbaa* Mumbe and Muuni, Masue and other ranges of hills visible in the distance.

The gently sloping flatlands between the hills would be family *shambas*. My family had a *shamba* at Muooni river that had banana, sugarcane, mango, guava and other fruit trees. Crops such as maize, beans, pigeon peas, sweet potatoes and cassava were grown as well. The main family *shamba* was the one at *Kwakakulu* and a third one at the homestead with more or less similar use. Weekends and school holidays would be spent planting weeding and harvesting from these *shambas* depending on the season when not herding the family cattle. During the post-harvest dry season, we would herd cattle in the *shambas* and the cows would feed on the dry stalks of the harvested maize and other cereals such as

sorghum and millet. During this season roasted sweet potatoes made in *ndumbia* in the *shambas* which were much like the traditional earthen ovens for charcoal burning were a delicacy with the sweet potatoes more often than not acquired without the *shamba* owner's knowledge.

Two of my many uncles were very good friends, James Kavwia Yambu and Alexander Mwangatu Kilonzo and for some reason both really liked me and would buy me *mandazi* and a cup of tea often when we met at Emali. One time my mother had sent me to buy meat at uncle Mwangatu's butchery next to Kilungu hotel when I found them sitting at the hotel, this was 1969 or thereabouts and they invited me for a *mandazi* and a cup of tea. Then one of them told the other one *nîenda kwîwa sûa* meaning 'I want to feel the sun's heat' and after paying for the tea, they both disappeared into the maize and Pidgeon peas *shamba* next to the railway line. As there was a lot of sun just outside the hotel, I wondered why they had to go that far and it puzzled me for many years until when I came of age and had a salary from teaching at Emali secondary school in 1977. I offered uncle Kavwia a beer or two, uncle Mwangatu never took alcohol, at least not to my knowledge. I then asked him what he meant when he told his cousin uncle Mwangatu *nîenda kwîwa sûa*? The answer had me rolling on the bar floor in laughter. Apparently the two of them enjoyed a puff of *marijuana* once in a while and this was their cue to go catch some. As stated elsewhere in this book, a number of agemates and I were already into the herb and I got a vivid mental picture of me sharing a roll with the two uncles.



Emali is your typical rural town that was originally called *Katese*, or small station because it grew up around the Nairobi-Mombasa railway line station. The name Emali may have come from the word *emaar* which means *I will not kill you* in the Maa dialect. The two tribes fought each other in other localities frequently for livestock and other valuables and this could imply *emaar* was a place for peaceful commercial activities. It may also have come from the Arabic word *mali* for property or the Indian words for place of value, *el mali*. Whatever the case, Emali is without doubt currently the leading commercial center in Makueni county. It has now grown to be quite a spread but in the earlier years, it was made up of a few retail shops and hotels with a few entertainment spots. Friday was and

still is a market day at Emali where the Akamba and Maasai communities meet to trade in foodstuff and livestock. The Maasai traders would travel to and from Emali by *Jishinde Ushinde* bus that plied the Nairobi to Loitoktok route via Emali. One of the drivers of the buses was a hilarious and toothless story teller called Kinyinyia, who had taken *Kick You* as his *nom de guerre*. Sadly he passed on in a road accident at Lukenya along the Nairobi- Mombasa road one Christmas eve when the bus he was driving got involved in a head on collision with a fuel tanker.

At the time my brother Mweteeli had employed uncle Dismus Kisavi as a mechanic in his bicycle repair garage. Kisavi, as mentioned elsewhere in this book was a renowned guitarist as well. These two very good friends then hatched a wicked plot to acquire money through fraudulent means. They would load Maasai men and women into a stationary broken down *Jishinde Ushinde* bus parked under a tree near Kilungu hotel, after telling them they were headed to Loitoktok. Mweteeli played the part of the driver, and Kisavi the conductor. After the 'conductor' had collected fare from all of them, he left pretending to have gone to get water for the bus from the nearby Kilungu hotel. After a while the 'driver' would leave the bus ostensibly to fetch the 'conductor', both of them never to be seen again. The poor Maasai men and women kept wondering when the bus would set off until they would realize that the bus had no wheels. According to available information, they pulled this fraudulent prank many times.

Emali town had some very interesting characters that I would interact with as I grew up. There was a man from Kiliku village nicknamed *Kalelete* who was a thief extraordinaire. His specialty was to board the passenger train and survey the contents of the luggage racks and as the train gathered speed, he would grab one or two suitcases and jump out. The railway police laid a trap for him, as his modus operandi became well known, and eventually caught up with him and he spent some time in jail. He was involved in many thefts around Emali and its environs when not in prison, one time I witnessed a severe beating meted out to him by a mob that had caught him alienating other peoples' property. He was surprisingly generous and would buy my friends and I tea and *mandazi* once in a while. I do not remember seeing him take alcohol but he was constantly chewing *mira*.

In those early days, the best entertainment establishment at Emali was Blue Chonjo bar and restaurant. It was the brain child of Mbooni-born David Mbevi

Katambo, who also operated a medical clinic in Emali and wife Joyce Nduku around 1964. They then put up a building adjacent for the more upmarket patrons and named it Banana Lodge, but this was short lived and they eventually turned it into their family residence. Long before I traveled to Mombasa and saw electric lights, Blue Chonjo bar and restaurant had a generator that lit the place up, and I would marvel as the jukebox automatically played the chosen song when a patron deposited a coin in the appropriate slot. One Friday, some upper primary school pupils from Nduundune who were found dancing to music from this jukebox were thoroughly caned by the headmaster James Mang'oka Mbululu the following week. This frightened poor me who had formed the habit of listening to music from the jukebox, but from the hotel side of the establishment. My favorite songs in the jukebox were *Nilikupenda Sana* and *Roho Yangu Moja* both by Western Jazz Band. As was the situation elsewhere, this small railway town called Emali had its social strata with the Kiundi family part of the small middle class. The tiny aristocracy was made up of the Katambos, the Ndolos and the Ismael Bhanjis. A few other families like the Kilungyas and Muthengis occupied the upper middle class. The aristocrats took their children to boarding schools, while the rest of us attended the local primary schools and grew up together. However, there was a certain measure of mixing during the school holidays and as we transitioned to high school.

Preston Mathenge Kilungya and I used to hang around their sugar distribution store at Emali, and I would try my hand at driving their Peugeot 404 pick up. I however learnt how to drive properly and shoot a shotgun at the Ndolo's expansive farm at Sultan Hamud while visiting Steve and his step brother George. When the business Africanization process reached Emali, Ismael Bhanji the Indian Emali wholesaler relocated to Nairobi and his former premises were acquired by retired Major General Ndolo. It became a Kenya Breweries beer depot from which in my middle to late high school years holidays, I would cadge a bottle or two of Guinness stout beer. I do not remember mixing with the Katambo children, three boys and two girls until much later in life and I eventually got related to them by marriage. The Kitaa Kilili family patriarch, another of the middle class families possessed a shotgun too, and on some evenings, I would join him and his son Charles Katili who was my classmate at Nduundune primary school in hunting for small game that included dik diks and guinea fowl. Charles' elder brother

Phillip Kimuya was our teacher. He performed hilarious stunts when he got tipsy and would call himself James Bond. I would be given a sizable chunk of meat from the bounty to take home. One time as we chomped on the takings of the previous night, I nearly broke a tooth on an iron pellet embedded in the meat. A shotgun fires pellets as opposed to bullets from a rifle. The pellets usually spread out before hitting the target and lodge in various parts of the animal's body.

As I grew up there were role models of all ages and professions. Raphael Nzuvu Kagia from Mulala stood out both with his Morris Minor car, one of the very first of his age group to own one and for having a European wife. Jackson Kyengo Mulwa my *Eombe Nthoka Katemi*, ENK clansman who had changed his name to *Kasanga* Mulwa captured the Makueni parliamentary seat in 1969, as well as capturing the imagination of the youth on leadership opportunities. Then there was another of my fellow *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* clansmen Philip Kalii whose father, a staunch A.I.C church elder was greatly troubled when Phillip was appointed the Chief Brewer at East Africa Breweries Limited. In 1978, when my Alliance high school Upper Six Economics class visited EABL, he was one of our hosts and I proudly introduced him to my classmates. He managed to help a few of us boys swallow a bottle or two of Guinness stout beer on the pretext that Guinness was a foreign extra stout, and we were allowed to taste it as part of education on the technology and economics of the alcohol beverage industry. There were many other role models but I would interact with them when I was all grown up and experienced a bit of the world myself.

In the early 1970s, I had grown quite close to Wilson Mbingi Lati for a number of reasons. His elder brother Chris Matata – very generous with the purchase of sweets and other goodies as well as donation of a coin or two – got married to my elder sister Rabecca. Wilson, then working with the ministry of Tourism and Wildlife had captivating stories of his work and experiences at the Wildlife Training school in Mweka Tanzania. He had an impressive collection of Mbaraka Mwinshehe and other Tanzanian musicians' vinyl records which he let his half-brother and my agemate William Makite and I enjoy on his record player when he was on leave. Later on in 1978, he had been transferred to the ministry headquarters by the time, he would make a mighty push for me to get a scholarship to study Tourism Economics in West Germany, but one of his bosses pulled the carpet from under our feet and it was awarded to someone else.

In 1963, my immediate elder sister Mutindi joined standard one at Nduundune Primary School and I demanded that I be taken to school too. I ended up in what was really a playgroup in a nearby homestead in 1964, *Kwa Kala* where the teacher was Mbenyi wife of Malii Mulungye who I was to learn later was my cousin in the larger *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* clan. Later that year I was transferred to a nursery school constructed on land donated by *Mbaa Nthongo* across Mukameni river from Nduundune primary school. The teacher was a daughter of the Kala in whose homestead I had joined a play group earlier.

My first encounter with death was in 1965 when my grandmother Susana Ngusye died. I was in a crowd that watched as she struggled for breath, and she eventually gave up the ghost. I vividly recall one of my aunts in the crowd finding mirth in my grandmother's struggle for breath. My elder brother Mweteeli had earlier on rushed to Emali shopping center and brought some tablets labelled *Mama Mzee*, but they did not stop grandmother Ngusye's date with destiny.

A highlight of this early life, was *to be called for duty at the shop* at Emali over a weekend or during school holidays. Children were not allowed to drink tea as it was believed to be highly addictive and therefore not good for them and they would live on porridge. It was during one of those shop duty sessions that I had a chance to taste tea in 1965. On this day there was a meeting of sorts of some of the leading business people of Emali, and in attendance were Paul Kilungya, Malika Mukoma who was also my mother's younger brother, Nzuki Kawino, Isaiah, Maweu Muoka, and Samson Mwongela Kimei among others on the family shop veranda. My mother then served them tea in special cups that were only used for important occasions. How I ended up drinking the tea and eating a *mandazi* was probably because one of the *wazees* saw my expectant face and proposed that I be allowed this forbidden beverage that once. As any young person would attest, during the innocence phase before life starts happening and knowledge of the difference between the sexes with attendant secrecy and guilt, time spent with the parents was the best time ever.

There was only one wholesale shop at Emali, operated by a huge-bellied Indian called Ismael Bhanji whose name had been corrupted to *Sumani* by the locals, and who was a good friend of my father. He had a son who was approximately my age and some evenings I would be allowed to visit them. I would marvel at a small box that had pictures that moved and spoke, and that's how I was introduced

to the world of television. I would also taste Indian food with mixed reactions from my palate and stomach. Outside our shop was the bus-stop for the Overseas Transport Company, OTC bus and the ticketing agent Simon Mutwii also acted as the Post Office agent, and would receive and dispatch the day's mail with his tools of trade stored at our family shop. Of special interest to me were the different dressing styles and appearances of travelers in the OTC bus as it wended its daily way between Nairobi and Mombasa.

The Kiundi family home church was Kisaani Africa Inland Church which was part of the Machakos District Church Council, known as DCC in short. There would be regular one day evangelical meetings hosted by various churches starting from the Sub DCC culminating in a National three day conference in August of each year. One day in 1966, both my parents and I boarded *Kameme* bus from Emali very early in the morning, headed for a District Church Council A.I.C meeting at Matiliku some 23 kilometers from Emali, with driver Joseph at the steering wheel. As the bus descended the slope towards Yandia river, about two kilometers past Mwanyani market, the brakes failed and the bus hit the opposite bank and rolled. Fortunately, there weren't any serious injuries though I remember a pregnant woman writhing on the ground but recovering after a while. I clambered out through the shattered windscreen and ran off in confusion headed back home. Some grown up managed to chase and catch up with me and bring me back into my parents' custody. I am told that when asked why I was running away from the scene of accident, I seemed to have forgotten where we had been traveling to. I am not sure if we found another way to attend the meeting or how we eventually got back home.

My father was keen on education and he would sit me down and show me how to write neatly, especially the alignment of words making sentences. He would also coach me on easier ways of solving mathematical puzzles as we sat on a rock under a croton tree called *kithulu* in Kikamba in the family compound. He told me stories that conveyed life lessons. I remember one about a man who went to a dentist to have a tooth extracted. The charge was Ksh. 1/- and after the extraction, he paid with a Kshs. 5/- note but the dentist did not have change. After some thought, the man then told the dentist, "Extract another four teeth to use up all my money." My father also told me that in earlier times whenever a child was born a medicine man would be invited to foretell the child's life. One time it was

foretold that a child, a boy would be killed by a rhino and he was never allowed outside their home compound. Old men normally carried horns from which they would drink beverages mainly alcohol that would be offered by their hosts. One day, one old man visited this home and he had a horn that he was carving for future use as a drinking horn. Some of the slivers fell in the compound and one pricked the young man as he wandered around the 'safe' compound. It was a rhino horn and the young man's leg got infected and he eventually died from the infection. And thus the medicine man's prediction was fulfilled. He was killed by a rhino as foretold.

In August 1967 while I was in standard two, at the start of school holidays my elder brother William Makau and I were called to the shop very early one morning. After a delectable breakfast at nearby Taifa hotel operated by Isaiah, my father then took us to a clinic operated by David Mbevi Katambo, the hugest person I had ever been physically close to up to that time. He had a bushy beard that made him look extremely fierce, then he proceeded to make men of us by circumcising us. A couple of weeks later in the wee hours of Monday 28th August 1967, tragedy came calling and my father died in a train accident at Emali. I understood very little about death but the grief that engulfed the home was immense. I have very vague recollection of the events that followed but I remember that Ismael Bhanji, the Emali Indian wholesaler provided transport on the funeral day. I also remember some whispers about suspected foul play in my father's death but I was too young to grasp the implications. A neighbor was heard to exclaim that if Danson Kiundi Yambu had died, then everyone else would surely eventually die too.

My life as well as that of my other siblings, especially for those still in primary school changed tremendously as my mother was henceforth the one to mind the shop at Emali, meaning that we had to make do without her guiding wisdom at the homestead. During the school term, the four of us, Makau, Mutindi, Loko and I had to take care of ourselves by fetching water and firewood and cooking for ourselves. The family compound had a brick and iron sheet-roofed main house that had two bedrooms, one for the parents and the other for the girls and a sitting room. There were three mud and grass thatched huts, one was the kitchen, the second one for Makau and myself and the third one for our farm workers.

There was a detached pit latrine near the entrance to the compound with the

cattle shed to one side. A manual maize grinder was a source of income as neighbors would use it to grind their *ugali* flour for a small fee. I have a deformed left hand middle finger nail from a mishap with this grinder. At the far end of the family compound Joel Mweteeli, the eldest of the Kiundi family children had built his own two bedroom brick and mortar iron-roofed house. He had quit teaching and established a bicycle garage next to the family shop at Emali. He also got married to a girl from Mwanyani called Anna Ngunya Kilonzo, *Ng'a Kunga* and they lived in this house. For some reason Ngunya took an intense dislike for me and would bear false testimony against me to her husband. I later on learnt that some of my other siblings suffered the same fate too. Mweteeli would then mete out severe punishment in her presence, and her face would glow with pleasure as this was happening. Matters would turn for the worse from 1971 when I, then aged twelve and in primary standard six with my then nine-year-old sister Loko in Standard three were left to fend for ourselves as Makau and Mutindi joined boarding secondary schools. We would come from school, fetch water from the river and firewood to cook supper and leave enough for breakfast and lunch for the following day. One puzzle was that our water and firewood would run out very fast. The puzzle was solved when we discovered that Ngunya would take them for her own use while we were away in school, as generally houses were hardly ever locked in those days. Many were the nights we were at risk of sleeping hungry, but Aunt Wayua Mutisya's generosity, may her soul continue to rest in peace, would save the day.

I was afraid to tell my mother about the theft of utilities by Ngunya as I feared punishment from her husband. Luckily, she found out and hired a neighbor called Nzilili Mavyuva, who was also our grandmother to fetch water and firewood for us and provided a lock for our house and the utility theft ceased. On weekends and school holidays we would go to help my mother in the shop at Emali and at least have some peaceful time except when it was my turn to look after our cows. Herding the family cattle on weekends and school holidays including at night at *kinyoo*, the Nguu Ranching Cooperative Society Ranch which was a protected area was a normal chore. My night cattle herding came to an abrupt halt in 1974 when I was in form two after a neighbor, Muiu wa Makau brother to Kwinga was speared to death by Maasai raiders who drove away the livestock he had been herding. My mother declared she was not paying school fees for me at Alliance

high school to risk my being killed by cattle rustlers. She arranged for a neighbor, Ngemu Ngungu to take over herding the cows at a fee. As stated earlier my eldest brother Mweteeli had quit teaching around 1965 and established a bicycle garage adjacent to our family shop at Emali. He bought a BSA motorcycle and taught me how to ride it. This caring side of my brother would puzzle me greatly as at other times he would mete out cruel punishment based on lies from his wife. Ten year old me was quite a sensation as I rode around the town. My other brother Joseph came for leave from Mombasa in 1968 and freighted his Vespa scooter. For a while I had a choice of which of the two bikes I showed off with. Mweteeli had put up a building at Emali in the standard design with a shop at the front and rooms at the back which became the family dwelling. He was appointed a Coca Cola distributor and his wife managed the business from this shop and family from the rooms at the back. He had designated one of the rooms as his office.

A common pastime was hunting dik diks, birds and other small edible wild life with agemates in the then quite forested countryside. We got into the usual boyish mischief and I must hasten to confess that I was quite mischievous and adventurous. A cousin called Musyoka, son of aunt Nzali and I enjoyed swinging goat kids round and round over our heads then put them down and find great fun as they staggered all over the place out of balance. One day we were caught and received such a severe thrashing that we never repeated the mischief again. Some of the time we would hang on the trailer of tractors that ferried building sand and stones to various building sites as they sped along the village roads. One time I scraped my shin very badly on the edge of the moving trailer as I tried to climb onto it. Knowing how strict my mother was, I hid the injury for a few days and it became septic. It was only discovered when I started running a fever and I think my mum considered the suffering and the several antibiotic injections I had to undergo from a clinical officer called Ogwenso who had a clinic at Emali enough, and meted out no further punishment.

A major outing would be on the last Friday of the month when together with my elder brother Makau, some cousins and a few other boys from the village would trek to Emali in the evening to watch cowboy films screened from a mobile van operated by Factual Films. The tradition of mobile films had been introduced by the colonial government as a propaganda dissemination tool during the Mau Mau rebellion, copied from the Soviet Union and Italy during the second world

war. A hero of many of these films was a cowboy whom we nicknamed *Mumia Mwaki* meaning 'the one who brings forth fire.' I have always suspected that the actor of the role was Clint Eastwood. In 1967 when tarmacking of the Mombasa to Nairobi highway was in full swing, my father took me to the construction site of the Emali railway bridge. The huge caterpillar earthmovers were impressive as they went about their assigned chores in flawless synchronized clock-work. Many of the workers at the bridge would take provisions from our shop on credit and I made friends with some of them. My cousin Peter and I would visit their camp some Sunday afternoons and one of them had a record player on which I heard the song 'FC Gor Mahia' by Hodi Boys for the first time and I have loved it to the present.

My parents were strict Christians and as stated earlier, had been instrumental in the establishment of the Africa Inland Church at Kisaani. It is here I attended Sunday school and got baptized by immersion in Yandia dam near Mwanyani market by Rev. James Mathang'a, then based at Matiliku Africa Inland Church, whose niece would become my wife many years in the future. I chose the name Richard because my elder brother John and the coolest guy that I knew at the time loved Cliff Richard music. Sunday school attendance was rewarding as in addition to presenting nativity concerts on Christmas day we also received presents including sweets, cups and plates for consistency in attendance. Based on my later failed attempts at acting, I however doubt that I ever played any significant parts in the concerts. Christmas time was exciting in other ways as well as we got new clothes and shoes and partook of delicious *chapati* and other rare meals. One time in early December, Mzee Danson on a trip to Machakos to buy stock for the shop also bought a roll of red corduroy material for all of us and some mod outfits for the ladies of the family. He then called in the local tailor, uncle Kinguli Mutaki who proceeded to make Christmas outfits from the corduroy material and boy, did we rock that Christmas!

During the Christmas season the older boys and girls would stage dances or *tumandiko*, as they were called in special enclosures referred to as *kituto* in the local language constructed for that purpose in one of the homesteads. My agemates and I would watch from outside the *kituto* as couples twirled round with the girls in flowery dresses and renowned local guitarists Matheka Kathivu nicknamed *Kilaiku* and my uncle Dismus Kisavi Mavyuva providing the music.

My all-time best and favorite dancers were uncle Kiawa Kilonzo, cousins Cosmas Nguluvai Muange, Mwangangi Mulungye, his brother Titus and nephew Kivwenyi accompanied by village belles. Sometimes there would be fist fights among the dancers which I assumed were over the girls. Once in a while Kaki or Kyeve, visiting guitarists from Kateiko in Masumba would grace the occasion. None of the Kiundi girls would dare attend this part of the festivities as they would have been skinned alive by *Ndumbu* and *Ng'a Ndaku*, our parents as a result of which I doubt they ever had the desire to be party to that phase of the festivities. In my later years I would be part of the festivities and became an accomplished dancer of sorts. My being a student at Alliance high school gave me a running start in dance partner choice.

I followed my elder siblings and was a member of the church choir for all my primary school days from standard three, and became quite adept at playing the flute. I had bought one at a place called Himo near the Kenya- Tanzania border past Taveta during a visit to grandfather Maati's home. The rather young pastor at the time called David Muange taught me how to play the accordion too, and the instruments made my choir experience that much more enriching. Pastor Muange's wedding to a member of the church choir, and who was a daughter to one of the church elders which I attended was very colorful and a conversation I overheard by two men how the bride had put on weight, especially around the middle puzzled me. I was to later learn that the pastor had been defrocked after the wife gave birth within seven months of the wedding.

After joining high school I became a Sunday school teacher during the holidays at the A.I.C branch that had been established at Kiliku Primary School. With time another A.I.C branch was opened at Emali and it became our new family home church. I was a full blown cigarette smoker by this time and would take a sip or two of available alcoholic beverages when the chance arose leading me to quit Sunday school teaching. The Emali A.I.C pastor the Rev. Stephen Kiswili made it his goal in life to change my evil ways, and would spend hours preaching to me in an effort to make me stop smoking. One day he made me calculate the cost of cigarettes I smoked within a year and, holding aloft the paper with the answer declared, 'You have just smoked a whole heifer. *Ajabu sana!*' This however did not deter me and in fact at this time, my close friend Makite Lati and I together with a couple of other agemates had started experimenting

with *marijuana*. We coined the nickname *Cloud* with one of the partakers and it lasted even after I had kicked the habit until he passed on in 2009. Interestingly, one of my best friends at the time was Rev. Kiswili's son David Mutumwa who was in Bible school at the time. His company probably ensured I did not veer off too far from the straight and narrow path. We got our regular supply of the *marijuana* from Muthama Lavai whose *dhobi* business was next door to my mother's shop. Every time he would threaten to report me to my mother or brother, but he never actually did and continued to supply us as and when we could raise the money. We christened *marijuana mulavai* since we got the supply from Lavai. I continued to smoke *mulavai* infrequently right through high school and quit it together with cigarette smoking in early 1982 after a 'bribe' by my sister Ruth as narrated elsewhere in this book. I had also tried my hand at chewing khat, *miraa* but I would have a dull throbbing ache around the kidney area the day after and quit after a couple of tries.

In the Africa Inland Church calendar year in addition to regular Sunday church services, there would be annual religious three-day conferences in August, one for men and another at a different time and venue for women. The three most memorable ones for me were at Ndolo in Kilungu in 1971 where I was awed by the preaching of one Rev. Job Mathanga, father to Rev. James Mathang'a who had baptized me a while earlier. The expertise of Tanzanian Evangelist Methuselah Uzele Mesa on the trumpet as he blasted out heady religious songs left a long-lasting impression on me. Memorable was *Nyumba Imwe Yi Kati Wa Andu*, the Kikamba version of the hymn *The Church In The Wildwood*.

NYUMBA IMWE YI KATI WA ANDU

1. Nyumba imwe yi kati wa andu
 Vai vangi vaseo mbee
 Vala ngoo yakwa yonete muyo wa wo
 Niyo yumbania andu ma Ngai

Chorus

Ukai tuthi tumutaiei
 Ngai waitu nyumbani yake
 Vai vangi vambiwithitye muyo

- Ta wumbano wa andu make
2. Ni useo muthenya wa kyumwa
Ngengele yaisya kyathi
Nukile na andu makwa onthe
Tukavoye na kutaia Ngai
 3. Nitwaitwe ni mbitano nyingi
Sya andu na sya satani
Indi ungi uutwita useoni
Niwo wa kutwonania na Ngai
 4. Nivo nyie nathaiwe muio
Wanthinitye ngooni na mwii
Nivo nyie nonethewe wovosyo
Nthini wake Yesu Mutangii

The other memorable conference was at Mumbuni near Machakos town in 1977 with the beautiful voices of the Machakos Town Choir lifted in songs of praise deeply touching my soul. The beautiful and glowing faces of the young lasses in the choir tugged at my heart too. My amorous advances on one of these beauties were however thwarted by David Mutumwa, the Emali pastor's son who at the time was in Bible school and who stuck to me like a leech and seemed determined to keep me away from Jezebel. It is also at this meeting that a young boy called Muthini, aged around ten years at the time amazed the congregation with his ability to recite whole chapters of the Bible from memory. The final one was at Kyangala near Kola in 1982 where I and a number of fellow University of Nairobi students from Ukambani held a thanksgiving session for having escaped the August 1st attempted coup unscathed. In the evenings we had very candid counselling sessions on relationships with the opposite gender, in my view a bit late in the day as most of us, if not all had most probably been in intimate relations with women already. We also had sessions on how to lay the foundations for a strong Christian family.

In 1969 I had attended a parliamentary campaign rally at Mulala market and the oratorical prowess of one of the candidates, a newcomer and fellow *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* clan mate Jackson *Kasanga* Mulwa impressed me greatly. With hindsight, I later realized that it was my first experience of personal branding

because Jackson had changed his name from Kyengo to *Kasanga*, meaning the young one designed to portray an image of energy and ability as opposed to his aged opponents for the parliamentary seat. In the olden days before Christianity, the Akamba people would consult oracles and ancestral spirits before they went out on significant business. The family patriarch would pour out a libation on the ground where the spirits were believed to rest and ask them for journey mercies and success. He would pronounce a blessing on the supplicant on behalf of the ancestral spirits and tell him, *Ukinyae kithanze kivoo*, roughly translated to mean tread on peaceful grounds. *Kasanga* Mulwa prayed *Nikinyae Kithanze Kivyu nisembange nimuthukumie mituki*, meaning that he should tread on stormy grounds so that he could be in a hurry to serve us the electorate. He went on to win the seat and when I learnt that he was a lawyer, I decided I would become one too though I had no idea what profession it was at the time. Over time I came to appreciate the depth of that *Kasanga* Mulwa prayer as I went through the many storms of life that I came across. I became more determined to meet whatever challenges life threw at me, in a way making me negotiate the ups and downs swiftly as I made a way for myself. I also envisioned myself on a dais giving a great campaign speech and a notion for political leadership in the future started to form in my mind. It would eventually be still born, as I grew up and got to understand what it was really all about and also learnt of a curse by one of my forefathers against involvement in elective political activity.

Nduundune Primary School which I joined in standard one in 1966 is about seven kilometers from Emali on the Emali-Matiliku-Nziu road near Mwanyani shopping center. It gently slopes in an East to West direction with the top being teachers' houses. Standard four to standard seven classes and administration offices are in one block near the top. Standard one to three classes were a block on the lower end near the Kisaani Africa Inland Church and pastor's house. To the South and flowing gradually westwards to mark the school's lower boundary is the Mukameni river. From Emali direction you turn right into the gate and on your left would be the gently sloping football field with the remarkable giant *Kisaya* tree whose scientific name is *Barchemia Discolor* that gave the Kisaani Africa Inland Mission later Africa Inland Church its name to the extreme left hedge. Straight ahead will be the school buildings with the lower right hand side having the church buildings and volleyball and netball fields, the ablution block

and the school farm. By standard two I had perched myself on top of the class with a sometimes stiff challenge from Kamene Masila, but she never ever managed to beat me. A number of my elder siblings were in the school, and in 1966, I had a sister, Ruth Mutindi in standard three, a brother, William Makau in standard five and two sisters, Rabeca Nthambi and Esther Ndunge in standard seven. In that class seven were, if my memory serves me well Kivutha Kibwana, the first governor of Makueni county and Dr Alfred Mutua's father Thomas among others. Dr Alfred Mutua was the first governor of Machakos county.

In October 1968, the school organized a trip to the Nairobi International Agricultural show. We contributed money and hired *Muamba wa Mbitini* bus that picked us from school at the crack of dawn with driver Mutuku in the driver's seat. We stopped at Burma market along Jogoo road in Nairobi for a breakfast of tea and human-head sized *mandazis*. After an awe inspiring day at the *Jamhuri* showground, the bus dropped us back to school in the early evening. This became an annual pilgrimage up to the time I left standard seven with the buses alternating between *Mumo wa Mbitini* and *Muamba wa Mbitini*. In 1972 I had visited my brother-in-law Chris Lati in Nairobi's Woodley estate. He and his wife my elder sister Rabeca managed to get me into an above-my- age gangster movie called *Dillinger* at Nairobi Cinema by dressing me up in one of Chris's shirts, making me look quite grown up, though I think I saw a suspicious handshake between Chris and the gate keeper. That shirt became a prized possession for quite a while. In the meantime, *Mumo wa Mbitini* Bus No 3 a Leyland Albion was launched and became a sensation among us pupils. The sound of the engine as the driver changed gears as the bus went up and down the slopes along the road near the school made me decide to be a Leyland Albion bus driver, and do it better than anyone else ever. At this time I was clearly the most traveled pupil of Nduundune Primary School and had lofty souped-up tales to tell!

By standard five some of the girls in my class had started to experience their menses and a few of us cheeky boys would tease them to no end. They did not have access to sanitary towels, which were largely unknown at the time and would therefore have the tell-tale stains on the seats of their dresses. It must have been traumatizing for them but what did we know? They would remain in class during break and lunch time and be the last ones to leave class. One time I picked on a much older girl, a relative and neighbor and so on the way home after school

she attempted to teach me a lesson but unfortunately for her, she came off the worse from the encounter. She got home with swollen lips and face, and the father reported the matter to my mother so I was summoned to the shop at Emali that Friday night. We closed the shop after the first Mombasa bound passenger train had passed at 9pm as usual and after supper I was called to account. Suffice to say I did not beat up any other girl but would be in an occasional scrape or two with other boys mostly in self-defense.

Shoes were a luxury and were not allowed in school. We would trek to school barefoot in the mud during the wet season and in the dry season on the hot midday dust which was so hot, squirrels would climb trees to escape the torture. The path that passed below uncle Mutisya's second home was covered with gravel-like stones for quite a distance which were very painful to walk on, especially during the cold season. One very cold drizzly morning in July 1966, my uncle Samson Mwongela Kimei found me crying unable to walk on the stony surface. I tearfully told him I was cold and he gave me a lift on his bicycle all the way to school, and from that day on for the rest of his life, he called me *Mbevo*, cold.

There were annual athletics competitions that started from zonal level all the way to provincial and national levels. I was not good in any sport but did enjoy P.E, physical education which was also included in the competition. In 1971, under the patronage of teacher Daniel Musau Muia, we managed to reach the provincial level. There was also a music festival that followed the same format. While practicing to compete in one such festival, the words of one song taught by pastor David Muange of A.I.C Kisaani stuck in my mind: It was in Kikamba of course, and went like this: *Kethwa ni ndelewa, ndyitikila utwaa mbasi, indi ndwaa ndeke kana ngali ya mwaki, indi nio mumanyiwa* (If I was a driver, I would never drive a bus, but I would pilot a plane or drive a train, but I am but a pupil.) *Kethwa ni mwalimu, ndyitikila ukuna kana, indi nzomethya nyie, nguma ikatonya itu, indi nio mumanyiwa* (If I was a teacher, I would never punish a pupil, but I would teach, until my fame would reach to high heaven, but I am but a pupil.) It had many verses extolling different but ordinary professions like farming, preaching and so on but the gist was to be the best of what one is.

When I got to class six in 1971, some two pupils joined our class from Tutini primary school after repeating when they scored low marks in their Certificate of Primary Education the previous year. Our English teacher, Nicholas Musau Muteti

announced that I finally had challengers for the top position. Cocky me replied, “The reason they have repeated is the reason I shall beat them!” And I did, hands down! And so did my perennial challenger Kamene Masila. It was also in 1971 that we were joined by new pupils who had escaped from Kamwanga in Uganda fleeing from Idi Amin’s regime, a notable one but in lower classes being Richard Kalembe Ndile eventually to be my form one student at Emali secondary school in 1977. He later became Kibwezi member of parliament and leader of Tip Tip, a political party. During that year teacher Muteti introduced the phrase *round table* to the class. He would dictate English and one would get strokes of the cane commensurate with number of wrongs scored. He would announce ‘round table number one’ and those with a wrong answer would go round the teacher’s table and receive one stroke of the cane. ‘round table number two’ would be for those with two wrongs and above. He would call round table number three, four and so on until all had been punished. I am proud to aver that I never went round the table even once.

One’s religious faith, or rather that of the parents and locality determined which primary school one attended. For us who were Protestants, there was Nduundune, Kiliku and Tutini and in class seven we used to do regular joint exams. Representing Nduundune, I would invariably emerge top in the exam with school mate Kamene Masila and cousin Titus Mukai Mukeku of Tutini competing for number two and three. Mbilo Malonza, Joanah Kiio and Patrick Mulumba Ukumu from Kiliku would be among the top five and so on. Meanwhile when I was in standard five, my teachers Nicholas Musau Muteti, Paul Kalei Kinyenze and Michael *Kalulini* Lungati, who had been in Mang’u high school with my brother John suggested I attempt the Certificate of Primary Education examination but my brother Joel Mweteeli vetoed the idea. One time some teachers ate *Kalulini*’s lunch without his knowledge and permission. He let out expletives in French, learnt at Mang’u high school and the other teachers were reported to have been amazed at his knowledge of complicated English words! In those days, those who did well in the Certificate of Primary Education would join Machakos, Kabaa, and occasionally Mang’u high school. I was certain I was headed for Kabaa high school and by standard six had started keeping the company of the local Kabaa students, namely Henry Kimanthi Mailu, Alois Wambua Nzalu and Dominic Mbevi Matheka among others. This was my plan to cultivate protection from

bullying which was reputed to be rampant when I would eventually join form one.

Having firmly established myself as number one in class, I would receive a gift every August from my mother for excellence. In August of 1968 and 1969 the gifts were fare to visit my elder brothers Joseph and John in Mombasa, and in 1970 to visit my grandfather Maati in Kibaoni, Tanzania just past Taveta. The trip from Emali to Mombasa cost Kshs. 4.05 by third class train which I would board at 9pm and arrive in Mombasa at 8am the following morning. Joseph worked for Standard Chartered Bank on the then Kilindini road where John joined him after a short stint at Express Kenya Ltd sometime in 1968. One afternoon during the visit in 1968 I walked from Ganjoni where my two brothers lived to Mtongwe ferry to watch ships as they arrived at and left the port, and did not return till around 6:30pm to find everyone in a panic believing I was lost. Joseph gave me a stern lecture and threatened not to allow me another visit. Sharing the Ganjoni flat was *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* clan mate Job Kata working with Express Kenya and who had a most infectious laugh! There was also my two cousins Cosmas Nguluvai Muange who was a driving school instructor, and Kamwanga Kaviti who took care of household chores. Some evenings Joseph would take me for a ride on his Vespa scooter around town and sometimes to Mama Ngina drive to marvel as the huge ships sailed into the harbor. Some other days Joseph Nthuka Kite, a fellow *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* kinsman then working with East Africa Power and Lighting Company would take me around on his Honda motorcycle. One evening my brother Joseph took me for an evening meal at a restaurant near Bondeni, and I put too much pepper in the food and was unable to eat. He asked for some sauce which he added to the food, and amazingly the pepper taste became bearable. I really did enjoy myself during these visits. Some other time, mostly Saturday afternoons, I would visit Shimanzi, where a number of people from Kativani, Kiliku and Mulala areas resided including two Kamuta brothers, Kyevulo Nzivo, Mzee Musomba, Mzee Kileti and quite a number of others who worked with the East African Railways and Harbors. Other people working and living in Mombasa from near my rural home included maternal uncle Musyoki Kimongo, his son Victor Kavati and a few others.

During my trip to Mombasa in 1969, the train was full and we were unable to get space. We resolved to travel by bus the following morning but before the bus arrived, a personal car a Peugeot 404 saloon with only the driver stopped and

offered us a lift to Mombasa at a fee. I was traveling with my big brother William Makau and he negotiated a reasonable fare. This marked the first time in my life to get into a private car and it was quite an exciting experience. We arrived in Mombasa in the early afternoon and found that Joseph had traded in his vespa scooter for a car, a Fiat 850 special christened *Kapepsi* as it had a Pepsicola sun visor on the windscreen. He had also gotten married and moved to a flat along Tangana road, but still within Ganjoni estate. It was during this visit that I witnessed the launching of the East African Shipping Line's *MV Mulungushi* on 16th August 1969 by the then President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia accompanied by his host Jomo Kenyatta and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere. Police Inspector Muriithi, a good friend of my brother Joseph one evening arranged for us a visit to State House as part of the audience as Coastal traditional dancers entertained President Kenyatta. Inspector Muriithi would crush raw cassava and extract juice which he would then spread on his police uniform khaki shorts before ironing them to keep them crisp and shiny. Many years later, I met Inspector Muriithi who had by then retired from the police force when I had a contract at the East Africa Breweries Ltd where he was a security officer. He was tickled to no end by my childhood perspective stories of my encounter with him those many years in the past.

My father Kiundi was the son of Yambu son of Mukai, son of Nzau whose home was around Ukonze near Ukia, and as the Nzau family grew, they migrated to various places with some settling in far flung places. Grandfather Maati Mukai settled on the lower plains of Mount Kilimanjaro in North Eastern Tanzania near Taveta at a place called Kibaoni. A section of Wakamba had migrated from parts of Machakos into this area towards the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, initially to hunt and seek to establish trading partners but eventually settled in the area. In August of 1970, while in standard five, I traveled to Taveta to visit grandfather Maati and grandmother Nguta at Kibaoni, and partake of her inimitably sweet *kinaa*. *Kinaa* was made of stone ground roasted millet mixed with sour milk, and is a most delicious traditional food of the Akamba people. Traveling to Taveta was by train and possible only on Saturdays and Wednesdays, the two days the connecting passenger train between Voi and Taveta operated. This meant boarding the Mombasa bound train at Emali and disembarking at Voi for the connecting ride to Taveta.

I arrived at this homestead near Lake Chala, in the village of Kibaoni sometime in the afternoon of a Saturday which was also a market day in Taveta after a very tiring walk in very hot sun. One of the highlights of that visit was a day I spent at nearby Mahoho Primary School. I wowed everyone including the teachers with my ability to speak English. This being in Tanzania, instruction was mainly in Swahili. On another day, with one of my uncles nicknamed Kinyatta because of his fierce demeanor, we visited the border town of Himo where among other things I bought a flute. Maati's homestead had a huge cattle pen as he had hundreds of heads of cattle. Most homesteads had very high fences to keep out marauding wild animals, mainly lions from the nearby Tsavo West National Park. The lions would occasionally raid the area and make a meal of some of the livestock. Maati had ringed his homestead with a fence of normal height, but his herds were never threatened by the wild animals and I was told he kept them away by magical powers that he possessed. The legend was that his father, Mukai wa Nzau before he was murdered by the colonial police had blessed each of his children with specific talents, some with crop farming, others with commercial acumen, and yet others like Maati with animal husbandry and so on. The legend continued that in the land of the hereafter, all living things that transitioned from the world lived in communion and partnerships would be struck between the animal and human communities to safeguard their descendants still living on earth, thus Maati would not harm any wild animals and the animals would leave him and his possessions alone. Indeed, during that month of August, a couple of high fence ringed homesteads lost some of their animals to lions but none visited Maati's home.

Occasionally, a cousin and I would go looking after this huge herd of cattle in the great plains called Katune on the lowlands of Mt Kilimanjaro. One day the cattle got lost as we swam on the shores of Lake Chala, an amazingly beautiful crater lake with very steep sides. We looked all over for them without success and eventually crept home just before dark, before we became dinner for some hungry carnivore with the bad news. Grandfather Maati had two huts in the compound, one which he shared with grandma and one which I had never seen anyone else enter. He went into this second hut and came out covered in a blanket and sat quietly at the homestead gate and after sometime, the cattle walked into the homestead to my great consternation. I was told that while covered in that

blanket, he used his special powers to summon his cattle home. I also later learnt that he had known immediately we had lost them. I asked why then they had to be looked after as he could summon them home whenever he wanted, and what I was told made little sense to my young innocent Christian mind. I was told that he summoned them through communication with the ancestors who would only help in genuine need, and that each communication affected his psychic health and it took a number of days for him to recover fully. However from my observation done at a safe distance, as Maati was reputed to have a fierce temper, I did not see any change in his physical appearance. I was later told that before Maati died, he had decreed that he was not to be buried without the presence of his eldest son Ngumbau who then worked in Mombasa. When he died, the son was sent for and there were delays both ways while waiting for the scheduled train days as no buses plied the route. It took quite a while for the son to get the message and arrange to travel home. By the time he arrived there was a mighty stench emanating from the hut Maati was kept in. I was told that the son then went into the hut and for about two hours the people outside could hear two voices conversing within the hut, one with Maati's pronounced stutter. Then the grand old man, stammer and all was finally interred that afternoon. I was also told the son never divulged the subject of the conversation but he immediately went back to Mombasa and resigned from his job and relocated back home. Today, more than five decades later I am still puzzled by those stories about my grandfather. Certainly stranger than fiction.

At the beginning of August 1978, my mother and I boarded a bus at Emali headed for Mombasa to visit my sister Esther Mulli's family. On the 22nd of the same month, I boarded an Akamba Public Road Services bus in the morning at Mwembe Tayari in Mombasa headed back to Emali and eventually on to Kikuyu a week later for my last term of Upper Six at Alliance high school. When the bus stopped at Kibwezi for a lunch break, I noticed people huddled in small groups and radios blaring out gospel music. I then learnt that Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, first president of the Republic of Kenya had breathed his last the previous night. I remembered I had taken my mother sight-seeing the previous day around Mama Ngina drive. We had watched massive ocean liners arriving and leaving Kilindini port as we munched on cassava crisps garnished with lemon, salt and pepper among other delicacies. We then took a ride across the channel on the Likoni

ferry and spent some time on the South Coast mainland. On our way back, we were briefly barred from boarding the ferry as the presidential motorcade got on to it. With hindsight, I now remembered noticing that the motorcade was in an unusual rush and the curtains of the president's limousine were drawn but I did not think it of significance at the time. Later I learnt that the president had collapsed while at a function in Msambweni and was being rushed to State House for medical attention.

I was determined to become either a lawyer or a civil servant as in my limited experience at the time, these seemed to be the only occupations that one had time to set up side businesses to enhance income and ensure a manageable life after retirement. As a lawyer I could also become a politician. At the same time I was determined that the last of three children I intended to have must have been through with schooling to a minimum bachelor's degree or equivalent by my retirement age of fifty five years. This meant getting married latest at the age of twenty seven years. As I grew up, I had a heartbreak or two from lasses who I thought were the ones that carried my missing rib and were meant to be at my side for the rest of my earthly days. While at Alliance high school we would go on walks in the leafy Kikuyu countryside in the evenings and on weekends. We would occasionally come across children from Thogoto Junior School, later renamed Musa Gitau and one particular girl would hide behind other children whenever she saw us. I later learnt that her name was Syekonyo Katambo and that she was from Emali and was apparently hiding from me. She was the second and last-born daughter of the David Mbevi Katambo who had circumcised my brother William and I in 1967. Her then widowed mother owned and operated the up-market Blue Chonjo bar and restaurant at Emali and was also a nominated councilor in the Machakos county council. Syekonyo was niece to the Rev. James Mathang'a who had baptized me by immersion at Yandia dam. Fast forward to 1982 April, on Good Friday to be precise, I was then on my last semester at the University of Nairobi I meet this same girl now baptized Margaret, but this time a grown up beauty with her elder sister Charlene and another girl as they came from the A.I.C church in Emali. She was carrying some mangoes and she shared with me when I requested her. I learnt that she was then in form four at Precious Blood School, Kilungu. In my mind I thought, this lady would give me a beautiful family and so I courted her as I had never courted anyone before.

Towards the end of 1984, I was then a civil servant based in Kilifi, I felt settled enough to start a family and I sent my mother and two uncles, Mutisya and Ngonzi Yambu with some goats and assorted consumables to my intended future mother-in-law. My reputation as a hard drinking civil servant apparently did not sit well with my prospective mother-in-law and my emissaries were sent packing, in spite of the fact that Margaret and I had a baby girl Ndunge born in June 1983. My future wife's mother sent a stern message to me that she would take care of her daughter and granddaughter and did not need any help from me. I was home from Kilifi nearly every weekend thereafter trying to convince Margaret to marry me but she was adamant that she needed her mother's permission to do so. I then roped in her elder sister Charlene and my younger sister Josephine, the two were great friends and we hatched a plot. I normally left for Kilifi from Emali on Sunday mornings aboard a Mombasa Peugeot Services, MPS mini bus whose driver had become a good friend and which I would book as I left Mombasa on the previous Friday evening. On this particular weekend, I had booked two seats and as usual Margaret escorted me to the road with our young daughter but on this day, according to plan both Charlene her sister and my sister Josephine were in the escorting team. When the mini bus stopped, I told Margaret to get in and as she hesitated in bewilderment, the two women urged her to get in, and the driver per prior arrangement hooted with impatience and that got the passengers excited too at being delayed. Margaret and daughter, aptly named Ndunge after my elder sister had no choice but to board the mini bus. We bought a change of clothes for Ndunge at Mtito Andei and eventually arrived in Kilifi late on Sunday. The following day I placed a call to Emali, the exchanges were manual and it took most of the day for the call to come through and spoke to Margaret's mother to inform her not to worry as her daughter and granddaughter were safely with me in Kilifi. She asked me, "When are they coming back?" I answered, "I do not know."

Following this monumental event, on 13th February 1986 the day before Valentine's Day at the ripe young age of nearly twenty six years, Margaret Syekonyo Katambo and I appeared before James Kigathi Ndegwa, District Officer 1 in Kilifi district and swore to love, to cherish and to hold till death did us part. Due to certain prior happenings, my request not to post the notice of our intended betrothal for the required two weeks on the notice board had been accepted. Our

best couple were Richard Chege working with Prisons and Rhoda Minoo Mulika working with Ministry of Cooperatives both based in Kilifi. I then got Margaret admission into Shanzu Teachers College for a two year P1 course which she completed in mid 1987, by which time I had been transferred to Wundanyi in Taita Taveta district. My mother had come to live with us to help take care of her granddaughter Ndunge as my wife finished college. My mother was to become a part of my household for many years and we eventually built her a modern home at *Kwakakulu* and she translocated.

After a period of time, another visit to my in-laws was arranged and this time around the reception was very cordial and the *mbui sya ntheo*, the initial three dowry goats were happily accepted. However, my mother-in-law declined the formal bride price and declared that she had acquired a son. This meant I would forgo the beautiful Kikamba dowry and betrothal ceremonies. By 1989 we had what we considered the perfect family with Ndunge born in 1983, Kyavi 1987 and Mbevi 1989. We had by then moved to Nairobi where I was working with Toyota Kenya, a Division of the Motor Mart Group which was part of the Lonrho conglomerate. As the children grew up some parenting incidences would crop up and we would handle them in the best way we could. Ndunge had started sucking her thumb and we got worried that it could deform her upper teeth, so we took her to a dentist who gave us an unpleasant tasting solution to smear on her thumb at bedtime. A weekend or two later my wife and I travelled upcountry, and when we came back on the Sunday evening the house help told us Ndunge had confided to her that she wished we would die in a road accident and not come to torment her anymore with the foul tasting solution. We immediately threw out the solution and opted to deal with any consequences that may arise at a later time.

Kyavi our second born joined his sister Ndunge at Shepherds Junior Academy in Buru Buru Phase 2 and during one parent/teacher meeting, his name was missing in the class list and we were puzzled as we had paid fees and dropped him at the school on the way to work every day and the house help would pick him at midday when school ended. As we stood there in puzzlement, he walked in and the teacher called him and it turned out he had introduced himself in the class as Michael Jackson and the puzzle was solved. Earlier on at the Kindergarten he had first joined in Buru Buru Phase 4 one closing day, he told us they had

been told to go in home clothes and we disbelieved him and insisted he goes in uniform. Photos taken on the day show him as the only one in school uniform. Such is parenting.

Ndunge had started school while we were in Taita Taveta and on arrival in Nairobi joined Shepherd's Junior Academy in Buru Buru Phase 2. In the year 2000, my younger sister Josephine Loko passed on and we adopted her then five year old daughter Grace Mumo and that balanced the family perfectly, two girls and two boys. The children went through various schools including Shepherd's Junior, Makini, Riverside, St. Austins, Mutungoni and St. Mary's for primary education and Buru Buru girls, St. Lucie Kiriri, St. Mary's, Lukenya Girls, St. Hannah's and Kabojja in Kampala Uganda for high school. After a short stint at the University of Nairobi law school between 2002 and 2004, Ndunge opted for a bachelor of communications degree at Nazarene university while Kyavi followed his passion in music and joined the Kenya Conservatoire of Music. Mbevi's passion and goal in life was to be a pilot and he joined flying school at Wilson airport after completing high school in Kampala, Uganda. Mumo has graduated after a four year course at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology with a degree in Animal Sciences and Production.

As the children grew up, it became a tradition to tour areas of interest in the country and we did tours of the Coast, Central, Rift Valley, Western, Nyanza and visited tourism sites like Mzima Springs in Tsavo West national park, Aruba dam in Tsavo East national park, Nanyuki trout farm, lakes Naivasha, Nakuru and Bogoria hot springs and many other places. In 2007, the family took a seven day holiday to Johannesburg in South Africa. In 1990, my wife and I had visited the Kyatha family in Nova Scotia, Canada and in later years toured Austria, Netherlands and Germany at various times. We visited Den Haag, The Hague in 2009 long before certain prominent Kenyans found their noisy involuntary way there. In the trip to the Netherlands and Germany we took an Egypt Air flight as it was the most affordable to Amsterdam via Cairo. In addition to the Hague and Harlem in Amsterdam, we travelled to Witten and Oldenburg in Germany by train. Our plan to see a bit of Paris did not materialize however as we ran out of funds. On our return trip, the 4pm flight was delayed for about four hours at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport as the plane was being 'repaired'. To pass the time I bought a book to read and it was quite dark when we eventually boarded.

After the plane got airborne, I switched on the overhead reading light and all the other lights went off plunging the whole cabin into darkness, leaving only my reading light on! "What else do you think has gone off?" I worriedly asked my wife. "Do not even go there" she replied calmly. And we flew all the way to Cairo in darkness. Our Air Egypt connecting flight had already left and we were put into a spanking new KQ aircraft for the home stretch.

In December 1999, we took a memorable road trip to Dar Es Salaam and onto Zanzibar by speed boat. We had been arrested at Arusha on our way as we did not buy Tanzanian car insurance at the border as required. We drove back the one hundred or so kilometers and bought the insurance and we got on our way once again. We spent the night in Dar Es Salaam with plans to visit Zanzibar the following day which happened to be Christmas eve. We parked the car at a Catholic cathedral near the port and were shocked to learn we needed yellow fever certificates to travel to Zanzibar. For under the table US\$5, we were allowed to travel as Tanzanians which meant a lower steam boat fare with no need to show our passports. I reasoned that we had come from too far and this small infraction was admissible. The Christmas Eve party at the Serena hotel in Zanzibar where we spent the night was a wonder to partake of. A major attraction wherever we went was Chivy, Mbevi's pet hamster that we traveled everywhere with. We spent one more night in Dar Es Salaam and on the way out of Dar Es Salaam the following morning, we were briefly detained near Chalinze by speed police but I was able to talk our way out of the predicament. We could not take a longer holiday as I was on the team at the Kenya Pipeline Company tasked with vigil and mitigation of the millennium bug. This was the expected system crash of computers worldwide at the stroke of midnight on 31st December 1999 that fortunately did not materialize.

In the year 2003, partly because of creeping health concerns and partly because I felt myself losing control, I quit alcohol cold turkey. After a weekend of particularly heavy drinking, I announced to my family that alcohol and I had parted ways for keeps after a partnership that stretched from 1975 to 2003. A week after I stopped taking alcohol, East African Breweries Limited, EABL put out a major advertising blitz for their Tusker Malt which had been my favorite tippie. My family would tease me that sales must have fallen drastically after I quit. The year 2017 ended tragically for the family when we lost Mbevi in December to the grim

reaper by suicide. When I was diagnosed with cancer in October 2013 and after discharge from hospital, I had called a family meeting and I was very categorical that when I die, I was to be cremated in a private ceremony within 72 hours. My wife Margaret also expressed the same wish and it was a family understanding that it would be the way for all of us. When Mbevi died we therefore arranged for a private family cremation and a memorial service a couple of days later at Ridgeways Baptist Church our home church.

David Mbevi Kiundi was born on 15th April 1989, our second son and third child. He spent his first month or so in an incubator at the Aga Khan hospital under the care of Dr Florence Manguyu. He died on the afternoon of Thursday 7th December 2017 by suicide aged 28 years in what started as a normal day when he dropped me at the Thika superhighway to board a *Matatu* to town on some errands. He was very excited about his final solo flight to Magadi that was scheduled for the following day to qualify for his Private Pilot License. The previous Saturday we had entertained some friends at our farm in Kithendu near Matuu Yatta and had surplus meat from the goat we had slaughtered for them which we brought back with us to Nairobi. When I got back home at around 2pm, I found him in the kitchen yard and there was a lovely aroma of boiling goat meat emanating from a pot on a charcoal jiko. He jokingly told me, 'You are not counted in the soup! It's for me and mum'. He then went to his room as I joined his mum in the family room to wait for the meat to cook. That was the last time we saw him alive. After calling him with no response, we opened the door to his room with a spare key and found him already dead hanging from the window grill of the bathroom. David grew up a polite child who would go out of his way to help out when required. He was extremely friendly and would be the life of the party even from a young age. He was also quite the prankster and was one time suspended from St Mary's School along with a couple of friends for playing a prank on a teacher. We then decided to transfer him to another school and we eventually settled on Kabojja secondary school on the outskirts of Kampala in Uganda. His mind was set on becoming a pilot and he was adamant on not going to A levels and he thereafter joined flying school at Wilson Airport as soon as his O level results were out.

Mbevi's younger sister Grace had this to say about him: You can tell a lot about a person by how they treat animals and Mbevi treated all animals with

respect. He was never cruel. That showed how wonderful a person he was. He was patient and kind with everyone that needed help or people that he met. This made many of the people that interacted with him like him. Two years after he died, a bike guy that used to carry him told me that they were friends and that he missed him. He taught me so much about everything because he was very smart. He was the best big brother, every time I moved into an apartment, he would help me move. He played jokes on me when we were bored and made me laugh with his wicked sense of humor. He bought me treats all the time too. I truly appreciated and loved him.

His elder sister Ndunge: During a family holiday trip to Zanzibar in December 1999, he carried his pet hamster along and it was a major attraction everywhere we went.

“The curtains were blowing in the gentle morning breeze.

Looking at the children, Death said quietly, “Cry, Heart, but never break. Let your tears of grief and sadness help begin new life.” Then he was gone.” ~ Glenn Ringtved

“I been in sorrow’s kitchen and done licked out all the pots. Nobody knows the trouble I seen. Steal away to Jesus. I ain’t got long to stay here.” ~ Elizabeth Alexander

To the moments, I reach for my phone to tell you something silly, to the moments I hear a song or I read or watch something and think how much you would have enjoyed it. In those moments, and my darling they are endless and countless and vast, I think of you, I miss you. For the friends who stepped in and send me silly shit, and watch movies with me, thank you for bringing parts of yourself; for taking up space in this forever gap. To understand that grieving isn’t linear, it’s wibbly woobly timey wimey. “Grief, when it comes, is nothing like We expect it to be. ... Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life.” I didn’t know I needed Joan Didion. I didn’t know I needed Elizabeth Alexander, she of “Loss is not felt in the absence of love.” The loss is so large, multitudinous and we feel it, I feel it. “Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. Just keep going” and we are. We are we are. That was a fast year that flew by, I am still focused on the spaces that are emptied of you. It’s memories

now, no new ones. To anniversaries that I am not really counting....but I am. We've survived, we love you, we miss you. It's all love. It will always be, love.

A MEMORY

The thing about death of a loved one is that there are no new memories. Everything they were is saved in pictures in videos in your mind and heart, you don't get any new ones. My memories of Mbevi no matter how painful I never ever want them to fade away. "I get a text from my brother asking if I have listened to the new Fally Ipupa album, I'm like dude nah, you know I like him but not like that. He insists like dude for real for real listen. Me, I go aight! And I proceed to forget this conversation happened. Weekend I go visit and he's like yo that new fally Ipupa, I go damn I didn't listen. So he puts a song in my telegram, I listen and an hour later we are blasting Fally. Weeks later I find out Fally is coming, I buy tickets immediately they go on sale. Call my brother (who hated concerts and being around a lot of people) but he agrees to go. And we go, and we have a blast (his smile shinin') and it's one more lovely memory of you, my love. Forever love.

In the family collections of photos, he is simply the most photographed with all of us. I say to his mother, "It is like he knew he had only 28 years to be with us and took maximum advantage". And through the sadness, she agrees. A non-argumentative child, he would accept reasons given why his wishes could not be fulfilled. He would say that one of his best moments was when I took him and his siblings to Toy World at ABC Place, and told them to pick whatever they wanted. In my thoughts about Mbevi, this quote by Lillian Eichler always pops up in my mind:

The Pendulum of Life swings everlasting to the tune of life-death, life-death... ad infinitum. While the arc of life swings with the pendulum across time, and plays and eats and reproduces his own kind. He divides the gift of life into little cubes called years, and each cube is a bit of a lifetime cut from the whole. Then comes death and the long silence.

Now with an empty nest syndrome looming with only Grace around, our high point is when the children and grandchildren come visiting. We sometimes spend wonderful Sunday afternoons at their home.

CHAPTER 2



WHERE IT ALL STARTED



M*ulungu* (God) created a man and a woman and placed them on a rock at Nzaui hill in the present Makueni County where the footprints of this first couple and their livestock can be seen to date. *Mulungu* then caused a great rainfall and from the anthills around a man and a woman emerged, the initial members of the 'spirits clan' or *Aimu*. The couple from heaven had only sons and those from the anthills only daughters. The couple from heaven paid dowry for their sons to marry the daughters of the couple from the anthill. The people then increased greatly in number and prospered and forgot to pay tribute to their creator. *Mulungu* then punished them with a great famine that led to a great dispersal as they searched for food, and some became the Kikuyu, others the Meru and so on while others were left as the original people, the Akamba. In the blog '*Trip Down Memory Lane*', Akamba people are described as intelligent, brave, skillful craftsmen, drumming and dancing people of Kenya who also founded African Towns in Paraguay.

My earliest recorded forefather was called Wangesu. He lived in Mbooni from late 1600s to mid 1700s. His son Mutyeti then moved to Ndolo in Kilungu in 1770 where his son Nduvu was born and lived. Nduvu's son Mutyaia migrated to Utaati in 1810 and his son Nzau also lived in Utaati. Nzau's son Mukai moved to Makuli in 1850 and settled there. Mukai's son Yambu migrated to Ukonze in Ukia. Yambu's first born son Kiundi was born in 1913 in Ukia before Yambu moved his family to settle in Mbitini in the late 1910s. Most of Yambu's descendants are domiciled in Mbitini to date. Majority of my forefathers lived long before Christianity was introduced in Ukambani and they practiced the Akamba traditional religion. Rituals that covered the entire life cycle of an individual were strictly followed from conception to death and beyond. Akamba people traditionally believe there is only one world, no heaven or hell and those who die become spirits in the same world. The traditional view of what can be referred to as salvation to the Akamba means help in times of trouble, healing from illness, ability to have children and success in life's ventures, resulting in a happy and fulfilling life on earth before transition to the spirit world, *Aimu/Uimuni*. A Mukamba was *born* into the traditional religion and did not have to *choose* reverence to God called *Ngai, Mulungu, Mumbi or Mwatuangi*, a Supreme Being who is the source of all things and is universal, as is with the Christian God. Religion is greatly influenced by culture and the Akamba traditional religion is organically entrenched in every individual, is intertwined inseparably with the Akamba culture and I can state without fear of contradiction that with Christianity they are birds of the same feather greatly influenced by the culture of the practitioners. The great difference between the Western culture of me/mine and the Akamba one of us/ours marks the great divergence between the two religions.

By the time my great grandfather reached Makuli, Kenya was at the time under the British colonial government, which among other things levied hut taxes on the populace in a strange currency called the rupee. This became locally known as *kilovia* (singular), and *ilovia* (plural). One had either to provide labor for a white settler or some colonial authority set-up or sell some livestock to earn the *ilovia* to pay the tax. Lack of *ilovia* resulted in confiscation of livestock of a far greater value than the actual tax. The colonial officials preferred this option because they would then sell the confiscated animals, pay the required tax and pocket the difference. My great grandfather Mukai got tired of paying these taxes or getting

his animals confiscated. One day in 1910, he shot dead a white colonial officer with a poisoned arrow when he came to collect the hut tax. Mukai was in turn gunned down by the armed colonial police. His father, my great great grandfather Nzau was so greatly outraged and saddened by the murder of his son that he laid a curse on all of his descendants who would involve themselves in *uteti*, which loosely translates to politics. The curse was placed on future potential political wannabes and on all their descendants.

Since money had no other use other than payment of colonial government taxes, grandfather Maati had a place where he would keep the *ilovia* in a special hiding place in the roof of his grass thatched hut, or *musonge* as it was called in Kikamba. He would sell enough livestock to take care of several tax instalments. One time when the tax collector came the *ilovia* could not be found at the usual hiding place and the colonial officials gleefully confiscated some of his livestock. He was livid and a great quarrel ensued when he accused his wife grandmother Nguta of having stolen the *ilovia*. He physically assaulted her although she too had no use for money, just like him. Grass used to thatch the *musonge* would over time become degraded by the vagaries of weather and would eventually begin to leak. This meant that once in a while the roofing would be torn down and replaced with fresh grass. During the next regular renovation of the roof of Maati's *musonge*, the missing *ilovia* was found. It had sunk deep into the now nearly powdery grass and Maati was greatly distressed for having assaulted his wife over something that none of them had any value for. For this reason, the tale goes that he increased his resolve to never value money for the rest of his life. One time grandfather Yambu did not have the currency and the colonialists confiscated the only lactating cow which provided milk for his only daughter at the time, *Mwiitu Umwe* and that's how she henceforth became known as *Mutave*, the confiscated one. Kiundi Yambu nicknamed *Ndumbu*, was born in 1913 in Ukia in the then colonial district of Masaku. The first born son of Yambu Mukai and Susana Ngusye Yambu. He had three brothers Kyavi, Muange and Mutisya and three sisters *Mutave*, Kalondu and Munyiva. Kyavi and his younger sister Munyiva died from illness at a young age. He also had step brothers and sisters from Yambu's second wife Nduku, namely Ngonzi, Nzevuli, Kavwia, Nzali and Kinyamasyo who later changed his official name to Kiliko.

Christianity was first introduced in Ukambani by a group of Africa Inland

Mission, A.I.M missionaries led by Peter Cameron Scott who arrived in Nzaui in present day Makueni county in 1895. History as written by the missionaries does not document the resistance to this new foreign religion by the locals, led by a woman called Syombesa who was their leader and a famous magician and medicine woman. While it is recorded that the missionaries died of tropical diseases, the locals believe that it was as a result of spells cast by Syombesa. Peter Scott is reported to have fallen from the roof of the church building they were constructing at the time due to these spells and died. Three deaths are said to have happened the same day due to Syombesa's magic spells. When Scott lost balance, his son tried to help him and lost balance too, and they both fell to their death. Scott's wife reportedly fainted and also died upon seeing the two bodies. Due to the frequent deaths of the missionaries, the mission station was closed down in 1897 and did not reopen until 1934, by which time Syombesa had probably died and was no longer a threat. My grandmother Susana Ngusye would tell us how they would dump pumpkin waste at the missionaries' doorsteps at night. The waste attracted mosquitoes and the locals had noticed how the Europeans were terrified of them. The missionaries had deliberately chosen Nzaui as the entry point since the area was famous for witchcraft and other Akamba traditional practices, hence a prime target to 'civilize' the natives and convert them from their 'errant ways.'

Syombesa was a greatly respected leader as well as both a famous magician and medicine woman. Since many people knew how to treat themselves using locally available herbs, Syombesa's compound would have relatively few patients coming for treatment on a daily basis. People visited the medicine woman when a disease seemed to get out of hand. A while after the arrival of the missionaries, Syombesa's compound started experiencing an influx of patients. There were strange diseases spreading over the land, diseases the Akamba people had neither seen nor heard of before, causing an increasingly large numbers of people to go to Syombesa seeking treatment. These were new diseases which she had not faced before, so she tried her best to treat the strange new diseases but none of the knowledge passed down to her could help cure them.

Peter Scott and fellow missionaries had in the same village set up a camp that had a medical facility that also had some patients. Word had it that the camp belonged to Jesus, and His servants were the white Scottish men who the locals

nicknamed *Musungu* or *Asungu* in plural. *Musungu* claimed to have a remedy for all the diseases now afflicting the Akamba people and according to him, Jesus could heal any disease that the locals might have especially a skin disease that made the skin dry and itchy and which the locals called *ung'uu*. *Musungu* invited all Syombesa's frustrated patients to his camp and when a patient accepted the invitation, *Musungu* would apply oil on their skin, give them new clothes and give them some medicine, *mithea* in Kikamba. A large number of *Musungu*'s patients would heal. When asked how they got healed, he would say it was the power of his master Jesus, which was stronger than that of Syombesa.

What *Musungu* didn't tell the people of Nzau was that this disease that Jesus was healing was brought by the white men themselves, the tribesmen of *Musungu*. The white men had brought *ung'uu* and had lived with it for so long that they had even developed remedies for it. It was the same disease they had used as a biological weapon of genocide against native Americans between two to four centuries before. They even knew the patient should wear new clothes since they spread it to local communities by giving out already infected blankets and clothing. That's why they would give their patients new clothes in a bid to stop the spread. With time, people stopped going to Syombesa's hut and turned to Jesus' man. The white man managed to make locals turn against Syombesa after a while and all she stood for and took over the place and built a mission center there. As if that is not enough, Syombesa's knowledge of traditional medicine would be lost. Her name became equated to a new evil supernatural being called 'Satan' that was introduced to the local people by the white man. A woman, a seer who had hitherto given her life to serve her tribe was now being associated with evil and the white man even openly told the people that they should gauge the power of Jesus against that of Satan represented by Syombesa and decide for themselves. However the local people would still wonder why Jesus did not heal the white people of the 'tropical diseases' that they were mortally afraid of which reportedly killed many of them.

There were several difficulties faced by the missionaries as they attempted to penetrate Ukambani as a whole in addition to resistance to the new religion. Traditionally only elders could negotiate and make decisions on behalf of the community, and one qualifying factor was marriage. Majority of the missionaries were bachelors and the elders could therefore not engage them in any meaningful

negotiations. The language barrier was another difficulty made worse by the fact that the missionaries relied on Swahili guides as translators. The Akamba people distrusted Swahili people because some of the Akamba porters employed by Swahili merchants never came back home and were believed to have been sold into slavery. The traditional religion was communal and it was therefore difficult for the locals to appreciate this getting 'saved' that established a one on one relationship with God meant to be for everyone in the community but not for a select few. In addition, they failed to believe in this new religion, owing to lack of clarity on a simple but practical question of "if God has a son, does he have a wife?". The response that he didn't have a wife made the locals ask among themselves "what kind of fools do these white people take us for?" Nevertheless Christianity took root and spread into the larger Ukambani area with education and medical care as sweeteners, with a set precondition for conversion to Christianity in order to access the two. A.I.M was able to spread fairly quickly by opening out-schools and prayer houses in places where they did not have mission stations. The Akamba people did not have a centralized 'Kingdom' but depended on local village elders to guide the community, making it easy for the missionaries' penetration as there did not exist a coherent community wide response to the new way of life.

The story of witchcraft and magical spells in Ukambani continued well into the 1970's with markets where one could buy them in Nguni in Kitui and Kibaoni in Machakos among a few other places. Stranger than fiction stories would be narrated of incidences that defied modern logic. Teachers normally punished pupils with strokes of the cane and the story is told of a teacher called Mutuku in Kibaoni area who had lined up pupils to receive their punishment and when he got to one of the pupils, a girl, on his first strike the girl's father miraculously appeared in the class and told him "my daughter is not to be punished". Mutuku chased him away and threatened to cane him as well. In the evening, on his way home, Mutuku entered into a hotel in the local shopping center and asked for a cup of tea. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a strong whirlwind materialized that swept through the shopping center with the epicenter at the hotel Mutuku was in. The hotel collapsed, the wall fell on Mutuku and he died. No one else in the whole center got even a scratch.

After Kiundi Yambu converted to Christianity, he was baptized Danson and together with fellow *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* clansman Mailu Mutie got employment

at the newly established A.I.M mission in Kijabe. He thereafter took advantage and enrolled at the A.I.M school, the present-day Rift Valley Academy and studied up to primary four. Kiundi got married to Mbuve Mukoma who also converted to Christianity and was baptized Serah. This was around the close of the 30's decade, and Africa had been drawn into the second world war that had broken out by then. Danson was conscripted into the war along with many other natives, as they were referred to at the time. He saw action in far off places such as Madagascar and Burma as an army driver. During the tour of duty in the colonial armed forces, they would be given daily rations which among other items included cigarettes. Kiundi never smoked and would pass on his cigarette allotment to a friend. One day he gave the cigarettes to someone else and the friend he used to give to got so enraged that he never spoke to him again. Danson Kiundi Yambu and his war compatriots were demobilized in Moshi Tanzania in 1945.

After the war, Danson and some relatives started a bus company christened *Kameme* Bus Service. The buses would ply the routes between Makueni, Emali and other parts of Machakos district. The company would eventually collapse after the accident of the last of the buses at Yandia river near Mwanyani market in 1966. Meanwhile Danson had established a shop in Mwanyani after he came back from the war for himself and family. He subsequently opened another shop in Matiliku for his younger brother Mutisya who was then working in the catering department of East Africa Railways and Harbors. Still, much later he opened another shop at Mwanyani for his other younger brother Muange who was working in Mombasa at the time. Kyavi, Kiundi's immediate follower was a trained roads craftsman cum technician and was instrumental in the construction of roads and the low lying bridges that cross many of the rivers in Makueni. In Kyavi's work team was Musyimi Nzinga, the father of my mother-in-law Joyce Nduku Katambo. Incidentally, Kyavi means a quality inspector, which was a highly respected position in the railway work gangs that maintained the Uganda railway line.

Danson was a lay preacher as well as the leader of a team comprising of Samson Mwongela Kimei, Julius Koti Kiunga, Joel Mulwa Muthengi and a few other like-minded locals who championed the establishment of an Africa Inland Mission church at Kisaani, where a prayer house had been opened in 1941 along with a number of other places by the A.I.M missionaries. This heralded the establishment

of a school in the same place. Nduundune Primary School was originally licensed to the Catholic church and was to be located at the area called Nduundune, a few kilometers from Kisaani A.I.C on the way to Emali. This would have put paid to the project by the Africa Inland Mission faithful to establish a school at Kisaani as it would have been too close to the Catholic one. Intense lobbying to the licensing authorities resulted in the school being relocated to Kisaani, but had to keep the name Nduundune Primary School under which it had been originally licensed.

My father, Mzee Danson Kiundi trod a path familiar to many of his contemporaries that embraced the newly introduced Christianity, but would once or twice veer back into the Akamba culture. As noted elsewhere in this book, the white missionaries' entry into the African society was three pronged, Christianity, education and medicine. The Africa Inland Missionaries had established churches and schools in various parts with a dispensary at Mukaa that covered areas as far flung as Mbitini. The medical personnel would hold regular outreach clinics centered in the schools and churches they had established. Mzee Danson's second born son Nzeve started ailing from debilitating severe stomach pains, and the outreach medical personnel who visited and examined him at Ngoto intermediate school where he was a pupil, referred him to the Mukaa dispensary. He was diagnosed with an incurable liver ailment and was given some medicines that were probably painkillers, and advised to go home and await death to occur within a maximum three months. Mzee Danson then decided to seek other alternatives, and Nzeve ended up in a traditional healer's compound in the Spaki area of Mombasa where a medicine woman, she came from some place in Kitui, made some incisions on his stomach in the general area of the liver. She then proceeded to suck the area using a special kind of horn where she had made the incisions and eventually presented him with pieces of a green bottle which she informed him had been implanted, through witchcraft by a jealous neighbor who she proceeded to name. Of note is that Nzeve healed completely from that moment, and the sickness has never recurred to this day. Mzee Danson, possibly taking cognizance of his position in society as a Christian leader did not accompany his son for the treatment, but be that as it may his son was healed completely.

Upon return from the war, Kiundi seemed to temporarily backslide from Christianity and got married to a second wife called Nzeli, but the short-lived relationship did not bring forth any offspring. He also seemed to have taken to

drinking alcohol and in one drinking session kicked Mavuti, a younger brother to Lati Muli in the stomach. The kick was devastating because Kiundi was wearing *makovo*, as army boots were called and unfortunately Mavuti died. Kiundi's clan *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* had to pay *maambo*, as this kind of compensation was called to Mavuti's *Akitutu* clan after which Kiundi never touched alcohol again and eventually rejoined the church. He thereafter established a classroom in his house complete with a blackboard on which he would teach his wife, sisters and his brothers' wives to read and write. In line with his resumed pastoral duties, and possibly to attend some training, he went to Kijabe in the early fifties. It is here that he came face to face with the agitation for independence from British colonial rule that was then gaining currency in many parts of Central and Rift Valley provinces. On his return to Mbitini he became active in a group of locals who were also agitating for independence and coordinating Mau Mau activities, as the freedom fighters' movement was called which included recruiting members to the movement, and despite being the staunch Christians they were, he and his wife Serah took the Mau Mau oath.

In 1952, a former colonial army motor-boat operator Simeon Musyoki Kivati replaced William Muia as chief of the restive Mbitini Location. Muia was suspected of being a Mau Mau sympathizer and may have taken the oath himself. It is reported that he assaulted the white colonial DC who accused him of being a member of Mau Mau and he was subsequently locked up. Ndavi was the highest ranking Kenyan African, a Sergeant Major in the Colonial forces and he and his troops had saved many British soldiers lives in Burma and elsewhere during the war. When word of his arrest spread, and after agitation from fellow world war veterans mostly Britons, arrangements for his release were set in motion. Upon his release, as Kivati had already taken over as chief and the colonial government wanted Ndavi on their side, he was awarded a contract to provide catering services along the Nairobi to Mombasa railway line. One of the two main tasks of the Wamunyu-born Kivati when he was appointed chief was to stop a pipeline of hijacked valuables from train wagons offloaded by local Mau Mau freedom fighters at Ngulai between Masimba and Emali railway stations. There is a very steep hill which slowed the train down considerably, enabling the fighters to climb on board, break into the wagons and offload valuables mostly armaments and army rations. These goods would sometimes find their way into Central

province and into the hands of Mau Mau fighters in the region. The railway line was problematic to the colonial government in other ways too. All roads leading into or passing through Ukambani had been placed under nighttime curfew to curtail the movement of Mau Mau oath administrators and their paraphernalia into the region, but they still found their way in by stowing away at night in goods trains on the Mombasa-Nairobi railway line. The oath administrators comprised mostly of Wakamba and Kikuyu second world war veterans operating from Nairobi. Of note is that the Mau Mau oath borrowed heavily from the Akamba *kithitu*. The second main task for chief Kivati was to fight the Mau Mau oath in a 'de-oathing' program, by administering a cleansing process for those who were known or suspected to have taken the oath. It is said that he recommended the bombing of Mbitini as he was unable to stop the Mau Mau hijacked goods pipeline, but the authorities vetoed the recommendation. The colonial government was desperately looking for a trigger to escalate the genocide against the freedom fighters and Paul Ngei and Achieng Oneko provided the trigger when, during a public meeting in Machakos stated that they supported the Mau Mau movement together with Bildad Kaggia, Kung'u Karumba and Fred Kubai. Mbitini had become the focus of the genocide because in addition to the theft of valuables from trains, there were oathing ceremonies reportedly taking place in *Kithituni*, a trading center in Kasikeu within Mbitini location. *Kithituni* loosely translates as the place of the oath. In general however, Ukambani had become a focal point for the colonial government as it was judged vulnerable to Mau Mau recruitment and oathing due its close proximity to Nairobi, as well as the large number of Akamba people working and living in Nairobi who numbered around 29,000 by 1954. In addition, the large number of the second world war veterans from Ukambani who had been demobilized were considered a fertile ground for Mau Mau recruitment.

There was already an active political movement in Ukambani that sprang up to protest the badly implemented compulsory livestock destocking program in 1938, ostensibly as a soil erosion control measure while in reality, it was meant to provide livestock for the newly established Liebegs meat canning factory in Athi River. Liebegs main market was to be provisions for the British army during the then imminent war. A large number of Akamba people that included women and children from Northern Machakos marched to Nairobi to protest

the soil erosion measures instituted by the colonial government that in addition to the compulsory livestock destocking program, also included the digging of terraces on sloping *shambas*. Eventually the colonial government backed down and the programs were withdrawn but would appear in later years as *kaminoo*, or communal work for at least the terracing program which would also include the building of roads and bridges.

A massive program during the mid-1950s of Mau Mau screening, confession, and cleansing along the lines laid out in a secret Rehabilitation Advisory Committee Report, whose members included Louis Leakey and Harry Thuku was instituted by colonial administrative officials in Machakos District. In keeping with the report's recommendations, the 'de-oathing' had to have a 'local' character. Chiefs, in most cases second world war veterans were appointed specifically to participate in Mau Mau screening and cleansing activities. In Mbitini for example, Simeon Musyoki Kivati was appointed chief aided by home guards headed by Ngundi Nthanga, 'to fight the Mau Mau oath.' The Mau Mau cleansing oaths were themselves a form of *kithitu*, the well-known and widely respected Akamba oath.

It is worth noting that it is at Kasikeu that the colonial governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, accompanied by the Machakos district commissioner is reported to have declared the State of Emergency on 20th October 1952 that led to the arrest of Paul Ngei, Achieng Oneko, Bildad Kagia, Kung'u Karumba, Fred Kubai and Jomo Kenyatta, the so-called Kapenguria six. The inclusion of Kenyatta in this group was curious and is said to have been a long term plot crafted by British and Israeli secret service agent Bruce Makenzie, later a minister in Jomo Kenyatta's government, senior chief Koinange wa Mbiyu and the colonial governor to portray Kenyatta as a freedom fighter to replace Dedan Kimathi as the leader of the Kikuyu people. My father along with his wife Serah my mother who was heavily pregnant at the time and gave birth while in detention, younger brothers Muange with his wife Telesia Katuku, Mutisya and wife Wayua, sister Joyce *Mutave*, cousin Kaviti Kiokote, Muithi Usui, Ngindu Sila, Mukwate Liti, Athanas Nthakyo, Kioko Nthanga, Mbevi Makenga and many others were rounded up and incarcerated at the Mulala chief's camp. Muithi Usui had led a team detailed to execute captain McAusland, a British settler nicknamed *Kituvu* by the locals but his pistol jammed and they were eventually rounded up by the authorities. They were tortured to reveal what they knew of this Mau Mau pipeline, and were possibly

also being coerced into taking the Mau Mau cleansing oath, *kithitu*. For a while, my mother's arms were so swollen as a result of the beating that she could not even hold her new born baby in order to breastfeed him. Fellow detainee Kalwe Kavila had to hold him up for her to nurse.

A number of the detainees, those considered hardcore were transferred to Embakasi detention camp where the officer in charge called Dunham and nicknamed *Luvai* in Kikamba proceeded to castrate some of them, and possibly murder others including Kioko Nthanga and Mukwate Liti who disappeared never to be seen or heard of again. Several attempts to execute *Luvai* and his family including his Mkamba wife failed. My uncles Muange and Kaviti along with some of the other detainees managed to break out of the detention camp and escaped to Tanzania and Kaviti, the last to return did not come back into Kenya until the late 1960s. The story further goes that Ngindu Sila, an almost seven foot tall giant of a man could not fit in the torture chamber and was let off for this reason. The colonial authorities were also not sure what damage he might cause if he chose to fight back. My brother born at the time was named Makau because of the terrible beatings the parents experienced at the hands of the colonial authorities at the time. Danson *Ndumbu* Kiundi Yambu died in the wee hours of Monday 28th August 1967 in a train accident at Emali. In later years, my mother would be in anguish when Simeon Musyoki Kivati's son, Cosmas Maingi got married to her last born child Josephine Loko though the union did not last long.

Grandfather Yambu had two wives, who between them gave him seven sons and five daughters. One son and one daughter died at an early age but the rest grew up to adulthood and have their own families. Of the six sons who grew to adulthood two, one from each wife married two wives each and the girls all got married and settled in other areas with their families. When Yambu moved his family from Ukia in the early 1900s, he had settled on a 42 acre parcel of land in the *Kwakakulu* area of Mbitini. By the year 2000 the Yambu family had multiplied greatly and were beginning to exert pressure on the land. Disagreements over land occupation and space flared up sporadically and in 2012, I got the bright idea of spearheading the subdivision of the 42 acres. Records available at the time indicated that the land had been registered under my mother's name. I got together my cousins, the heads of the families of the six Yambu boys with two

from the two-wife homes, and proposed that we engage a surveyor to subdivide the land into six equal pieces with a further subdivision for the two parcels in the two-wife homes. The cousins, except one concurred and we collected funds as per the surveyor's quote. I had to top up the difference for the family that declined to contribute in addition to meeting the Kiundi portion. The surveyor got on the ground and the representative of the family that declined to contribute claimed a larger portion. I was able to convince the other six cousins to allow an extra acre for this family. We also discovered that the parcel had two titles with the larger one in Uncle Douglas Ngonzi Yambu's name. I advised the Ngonzi family to apply for letters of administration to enable eventual subdivision of the land among the Yambu sons.

My elder sister Esther and I had been tasked by our siblings to be administrators for our late mum's properties, and after court confirmation we presented ourselves at the Land Control Board at Matiliku deputy county commissioner's office. After we presented the application for the distribution of the land registered in our mother's name in the manner laid out by the surveyor we had hired, all hell broke loose. There were all sorts of wild claims by people who should have known better that we were hell-bent on defrauding the other Yambu family members, and that we had taken loans with the property and so on. There was a frenzied fundraising to *stop the Kiundi duo* and my sister and I quietly withdrew and applied to have the titles revert to mum's name and let the matter die down. A short while thereafter, towards the end of 2013, I was diagnosed with cancer of the stomach, my cousin from the family that declined to contribute the survey fees and claimed a bigger portion of land went round claiming he had consulted a traditional medicine person and invoked *kithitu* to stop my machinations on the Yambu family property, and that I would not live long and would die from the cancer. My oncologist advised me to seek further treatment in India and on the day I applied for the visa I met my cousin Peter 'Bob' Mutisya as I was heading to Bank of India on Kenyatta avenue to pay the visa fees and we agreed to have lunch together. On coming back Peter told me another of our cousins had called him a few minutes after we had parted and asked him "Have you heard the news about Kioko?". When Peter informed him that he was waiting for me we go for lunch, the cousin disconnected the call. Apparently, word had spread around Emali that I had died. Later on I learnt that the cousin who claimed to

have invoked the *kithitu* assured his followers I would come back from India in a coffin.

CHAPTER 3



ALLIANCE HIGH SCHOOL



I first heard of Alliance high school in 1972 when Justus Mwaiwa Mutie of the neighboring academic and sports rival Kiliku Primary School was selected to join The School. There was an unmistakable awe when the name was mentioned though at that time, I had no idea why. It was however clear that it was a good school to go to, well ahead of the other schools I had been eyeing. From then on, encouraged by teachers Paul Kalei Kinyenze and Nicholas Musau Muteti with support from headmaster James Mangoka Mbululu, I set my eyes firmly on Alliance high school P.O. Box 7 Kikuyu to pull one back for my primary school as it were. It was impressed upon me that merely being number one in school would not guarantee me admittance unless I scored highly in the exam, as I would be competing with the whole of Kenya. Interestingly, my elder brother Joel Mweteeli would have none of it and wanted me to apply to the Duke of York, Lenana School instead. I later came to learn that he had taken into consideration the then widely held view that Alliance high school was elitist and only admitted

children of the well to do in the society. I would therefore be throwing away the chance to join a 'good' school. Little did he know that 'ordinary' Justus Mwaiwa Mutie from Kiliku primary school had broken that myth the previous year. It therefore became a closely guarded secret between the teachers and I, making me feel really great having a secret with grown-ups and teachers at that. I sat the Certificate of Primary Education examination in early December 1972 and the wait for the results expected in early January began. During December those from Machakos and Kitui districts, the only two Lower Eastern Ukambani districts at the time who had selected Alliance high school were called for an interview that took place in Machakos high school. My cousin Joshua Mutisya who was then in sixth form at the school escorted me. We were given both oral and written tests administered by Mr. Williams, nicknamed 'Confucius' as I was to learn after I joined The School, a teacher at Alliance high school assisted by a student Peter Kimatu Muli, who I was to later on learn was transitioning to form two.

In January 1973 after the results with yours truly perched at the top as expected, calling letters to form one started arriving. Mbilo Malonza was called to Kabete Technical high school, Joana Kii to Machakos Technical high school and Titus Mukai Mukeku to Machakos high school with others receiving letters from other schools as well. Surprisingly, none came for me and when schools opened my mother suggested I join a local *harambee* secondary school. I declined and declared I would rather repeat standard 7. I was later told though I have no recollection that I told her "People who do not know how to learn are the ones who attend such schools." Chances are that I did actually voice such thoughts. On a Tuesday of what would end up being a fateful week, a friend who was a local primary school teacher had some business at the provincial education headquarters in Embu. As I escorted him to board *Mumo wa Mbitini* bus, I requested him to check for me which school I had been selected to. When he came back on the Thursday, he brought the great news that I had been selected to join Alliance high school but obviously I could not go without a calling letter. After a brief conference my mother gave me some money to telephone The School. Those were the days of manual telephones, so I booked the call at about 3pm and by 5pm when the post office closed the connection had not come through. Early the following morning a Friday, I was at the post office as it opened at 8am and Mutua Mulala who managed the post office rebooked the call. It came through

in about an hour and the headmaster's secretary said the sweetest words I had ever heard, "We are waiting for you!" She then proceeded to read out to me what I needed to take with me.

Letters were delivered by an Akamba Public Road Services bus which would normally pass through Emali at about 11am and at last my calling letter arrived in that day's mail. Some of the items and places mentioned in the letter such as a pillow case, bed cover and a town called Kikuyu were unknown in my circles. A mighty conference was held to determine where this Kikuyu town could be found, and it was agreed that since when one said Ukambani it was in reference to the then two Ukambani districts of Kitui and Machakos which were part of Eastern province, Kikuyu must refer to the districts settled by Kikuyu people in Central province with its headquarters at Nyeri. My elder brother Joel, who interestingly did not question how I ended up being selected to join a school I had not chosen was then mandated by my mother to take me to Alliance high school Kikuyu near Nyeri. We were to travel by night bus on Sunday night to arrive on Monday morning. All buses were full and we ended up hiking a lift in a truck carrying what my brother told me was contraband sugar from Tanzania. We made the journey freezing under a very heavy and dusty tarpaulin. Around Konza, the truck was stopped by policemen who climbed on board and it was by sheer luck that they did not step on any of us under the tarpaulin. They were then given a bag or two of the sugar and they allowed the truck to continue on its journey. We arrived in Nairobi in the morning and the truck driver was very cross with my brother for letting a child ride in the freezing conditions. What the driver did not know was that in my excitement to join Alliance high school, I was even ready to walk all the way and riding in the back of a truck was a small inconvenience. On arrival at the Machakos country bus stop, we headed to the Nyeri bound bus terminus but inquisitive me asked the bus crew before we boarded how far Alliance high school was from Nyeri, causing quite some merriment. We were then redirected to Kikuyu and eventually took a taxi which cost something like Kshs. 20.

On Monday January 29th 1973 just under two weeks after the official opening day, my brother and I arrived at The School as the morning parade broke up, and after reporting to the headmaster's office and meeting headmaster Allan Chamberlain Ebbelwhite Sanders, my brother and I were directed to the Bursar's

office to pay school fees, where I learnt that my school number was 3073, pronounced thirty-seventy-three, one of the few that would periodically coincide with the year of admission at The School. I was then directed to form 1B and I entered into the class with my wooden box wearing home clothes and thus stood out like a sore thumb, and to my great surprise was assigned a lockable desk. I had never seen one before and I was then issued with various types of stationery. The subject was English and the teacher was a Mr. Ramscar of Welsh extraction. Having been taught by teachers who spoke perfect *Kikamba-English*, I had never heard English-English spoken before, so whatever he said to me passed over my head to the merriment of the rest of the class. As mentioned earlier, I was about two weeks late and even those from other rural schools like me seemed to have caught up fairly well with the accents. A bell tolled somewhere and everyone stood up and I did too and grabbed my box. I was however advised to leave it as we were going to another class which turned out to be French by Monsieur Andre Assaraf who spoke only French. The next lesson was geography by Mr. Evans with what I was to later learn was an Australian accent which I found impossible to decipher. Being unable to understand what all the teachers were saying, I was ready to go look for my brother we go back together I eat humble pie and agree to join a local *harambee* secondary school. Form twos Peter Kimatu Muli and Justus Mwaiwa Mutie were waiting for me outside form 1B at break time and they picked my box and I. I had met Muli during the interview held at Machakos high school the previous December. Mutie, who turned out to be a fellow Franciscan was new to me though I had heard of him as he was from the nearby academic and sports competitor Kiliku primary school. I told them I was no longer interested in Alliance high school and had decided to go and join a local school back home. I gave them my reasons for the change of heart and they both burst out laughing. They assured me that most of the students from rural primary schools like myself went through the same unsettling experience, and they were certain I would be fairly comfortable within a week or two.

We passed via quartermaster Owiti's office where I was kitted with two white *shikibo* shirts, two khaki shorts, a blue jersey, games kit, brown work shirt, two pillow cases, a bed cover, some toiletries and a tie before heading to my allocated dorm 17A of Francis House. I changed into my newly issued uniform before Muli and Mutie helped me make my bed, put away my personal things and lock them

in my allocated locker before trotting off to class. Luckily, the two lessons between break time and lunch were taught by fellow Africans, Swahili by Mr. Syambo and History by Mr. Matende and that gave me some form of comfort as I was able to follow the lessons. This major language problem persisted for at least the first two weeks, and I would occasionally ask my desk mate Steve Makimei to translate! The cheeky classmate would tease and laugh at me. This is probably the reason I became fluent in both French and Lingala, to show everyone I was no dummy because everyone started from zero on these new languages. I eventually took first prize in the National French essay competition in 1978 when I got to Upper Six. The tie got me into some kind of trouble with Johnson Murila, Henry Nyachae and Stephen Thuo later in the evening. These were the form twos in dorm 17A who wanted to know why I had a tie and I had not sat the *tie test* yet. I learnt that the *tie test* to be administered on the Thursday 1st February of the week I arrived was meant to educate the new students on The School's history as well as current affairs. My two new friends Muli and Mutie took me in hand to ensure I learnt enough in the four days to pass. And pass I did! One light hearted *tie test* practice question that was shot at form ones by form twos before the actual *tie test* was "What is the color of the headmaster's blue car?"

In the recent past, both mainstream and social media have been awash with the controversial **#IWentToAlliance** slogan. Many of those who did not go through Alliance high school and who consider themselves to have done reasonably well in school and in life in general appeared rather irritated, while some proud Old Boys like Governor Anyang' Nyong'o and lawyer Mugambi Kiai fanned the flames by writing articles in the local media on why going through Alliance high school has remained special. For those not in the know, Alliance high school was the very first secondary school for locals started in 1926. It was then led by well-educated and trained heads and teachers mostly from the British Isles. Modeled on an English public school, it sought to offer an all rounded education that included sports, travel, foreign languages, debate, music, current affairs etc., in addition to excellent academic instruction. Within the first few years, a place at Alliance high school became so coveted that only one or two students from each district would qualify annually. Subsequently virtually all the students were A material and after the introduction of O and A levels everyone passed well and The School was invariably at the top up to the 1980s, when the competition stiffened. But as

a mark of resilience, and long after The School staff room was occupied entirely by local staff, the school has never been too far from the top position. In the early days, most senior jobs in both the public and private sectors were populated by Alliance high school Old Boys, as were the tertiary institutions like Makerere, Dar es Salaam, and Nairobi universities. The rural boys that entered The School shoeless in form one left a few years later as erudite and sophisticated scholars, effortlessly slipping into leadership roles in academia and in both public and private sectors. More than half of the Kenyan independence cabinet was made up of Alliance high school Old Boys and this dominance went up to the 1980s, though with a reduced percentage. Add to this permanent secretaries, professors, captains of industry, and you get the picture of the mystique. That this culture of excellence has endured up to now just 5 years shy of a century makes the mystique that much more poignant.

The Kenyan schooling system starts from the twin invasion of British missionaries and colonizers. The missionaries take the credit for introducing education and medicine for they knew that religion on its own would be a hard sale. It was the Anglicans that started the first school in Rabai at the Coast in 1846. Missions and schools then started springing up, with the pace increasing after the declaration of the East African protectorate in 1888. The History of Alliance high school can be traced to the Free Scotland Mission, inspired by pioneer missionary Dr David Livingstone and executed by the *defacto* leader of the protectorate Sir William McKinnon and his partner Alexander Bruce, a son-in-law of Dr Livingstone. Money was raised for construction of a mission at Dagoretti but the team sent out changed the instructions and settled on Kibwezi for fear of hostility by the Kikuyu people, after the famous altercations that led to the burning of Lugard's Fort and the building of Fort Smith. However due to serious incidences of disease and pestilences which the locals believed were due to magic spells used to resist this new religion that caused many deaths, they abandoned Kibwezi in 1898 first pitching tent at Fort Smith in Kanyariri, before buying land for the mission from the *Mbari ya Hinga*, whose *Muramati* or representative was Munyua son of Waiyaki wa Hinga. School proper started in May 1901 marking the real epiphany of education in Kenya. The School was generally referred to as the C.S.M, Church of Scotland Mission school or *Mambere*, first in the Gikuyu language. The first students of The School were mostly the sons of chiefs and newly

converted Christians whose families still represent some of the elite families in the country today. Due to a general resistance to all things European, religion, education and medicine by the general populace, chiefs and the newly converted Christians had been ordered to take their children to school.

The original objective of mission schools was to impart just enough education to enable Africans read the Bible and acquire some technical skills. Four years were considered quite adequate, and it was feared that too much education would make Africans *grow horns* especially because many whites and Asians were not that educated. After some time a few students were allowed to go on for another four years so as to become teachers, priests and supervisors. It took the leadership of the Church of Scotland and the personal involvement of Joseph H Oldham of the International Missionary society to form the Phelps/ Stokes commission that recommended the founding of secondary education for a select few. Local interests were represented by the *learned* chiefs Josiah Njonjo and Philip Karanja. As all education was missionary led at the time, an alliance of protestant churches comprising of the Church of Scotland Mission, C.S.M, Church Missionary Society, C.M.S, Africa Inland Mission, A.I.M and the Methodists were the first off-the-block, with the then aptly named Alliance boys high school started in 1926 located within the C.S.M mission. The first boys included well-known names such as Eliud Mathu, Peter Mbiyu Koinange, James Muigai, Magugu Waweru, and Clement Mwaura Phillip, all sons of either chiefs or Christians in keeping with the prevalent practice at the time. The name 'boys' was dropped in 1938 when two girls, the first of a dozen or so were admitted. These first two went on to be reasonably famous. Zibia Wangari school number 484, daughter of Rev. Ishmael Wango went on to become Queen Zibia of Uganda after studying nursing at Mulago hospital, while Loise Njeri school number 490, daughter of Rev. Paul Mbatia of Weithaga went on to become Mrs. Peter Mbiyu Koinange school number 5. As pointed out earlier, the first teachers were carefully selected and were all-rounders. The first head teacher was George Arthur Grieve, MBE, MA, B. Ed, followed by the legendary Edward Carey Francis. It is a matter of pride that the local headmasters, starting with Jackson Githaiga Munyori in 1974, have kept The School flag soaring high. The full list of headmasters/principals of The School so far are:

1. George Arthur Grieve

1926-1940

2. Edward Carey Francis	1940-1962
3. Laurey J Campbell	1962-1970
4. Allan Cameron Sanders	1970-1973
5. Jackson Githaiga Munyori	1974-1975, 1977-1981
6. Ernest Muchoki Wangai	1975-1976
7. Samuel Sawa Maneno	1981-1985
8. Miricho Kahihu Wagitu	1985-1996
9. Cyrus G Wahome	1996-1998
10. Christopher Situma Khaemba	1998- 2008
11. David Gideon Kariuki	2008- 2017
12. William Macharia Mwangi	2017-May 2022
13. Kamau Chomba	June 2022- To Date

Incidentally, most Old Boys of Alliance high school are so proud of its heritage that they try to make sure that their sons and grandsons follow suit. One subtle competition is that of the generational records especially attaining the coveted G3 status. Claimants in this area include the Murilas, Wakos, Kiptoons and a few other families. Jackson Githaiga Munyori has a unique record in that apart from being an old boy, he also became a teacher, deputy headmaster and was the first indigenous headmaster. He is also the only one to have served two stints as headmaster and I am proud to affirm that I was a student at The School during the first stint and part of the second one. His wife Annah was both a student and teacher at Alliance girls' high school, while all their children have attended either of the two Alliance schools. Today The School exists in a much more competitive atmosphere and cannot claim any monopolies. It also long lost the automatic first slot in national exam performance. It still doggedly keeps the spirit of 'Strong to Serve' and is always in the top ten with the oldest and best managed Old Boys Club, the Alliance High School Old Boys Club, AHSOBC and I am proud to lay claim without fear of contradiction, that I played a positive significant role as Vice Chairman in the first decade of the current century.

During the first Sunday of March every year, a Founders' Day Service is held at The School to commemorate the day The School admitted its first students in

March 1926. Since The School's inception, former students have dominated both the public and private sectors giving The School a special place in the social fabric of the Kenyan society. This has over the years resulted in The School becoming the preferred choice of an overwhelming majority of students. It has also been the subject of much vilification for generally unfounded reasons that mostly boil down to envy and lack of information. The School would be referred to as 'Bush' by students of the surrounding schools. This was considered a great insult in my time at The School and *Snyidho*, Shungulah and I with a couple of other year mates roughed up one Nairobi School student who called us 'bushmen' one Saturday afternoon in 1977 as we chased the Alliance girls high school girl, or *Acrossian* as they are referred to, he was with back to her school. Nairobi Saturday was the last Saturday of every month when students were allowed to go beyond the 5 km radius restriction and visit Nairobi city. The origin of this name 'Bush' is mysterious but the story I heard is that during the Nairobi Saturdays, students who had no one to visit in Nairobi would hide in the surrounding bushes all day. To pass time, they would carry books to read and thus the legend of those who *read in the bush* began, later to be shortened to just *Bush*. Over time starting the mid 80s, the terms *Bush* and *Busherian* have come to be accepted and are worn with great pride.

Opening day at Alliance high school has been Thursday for the longest time and traveling to school in public transport was not very easy, except for those traveling by train as they would be picked by The School bus from Kikuyu station. Once one got into Nairobi, the choice was two routes both starting from the country bus station called Machakos airport. Kenya Bus Services had not yet started serving the area, so one got into the Gikambura and Thigio bound buses and dropped off at Thogoto, or the Limuru bound ones with a drop off at Gitaru for a Kshs. 2/- fare. One then had to trek with their box all the way to school, sometimes on a muddy track during the rainy season. On closing days, The School would arrange for a number of the buses to come pick the boys at The School. Students from the coast would be picked by Goldline bus and I would board and drop off at Emali some of the time, but would travel all the way to Mombasa at other times to visit my brother-in-law's family in Buxton, Mombasa.

Like in most schools there was some bullying of form ones but it was neither physical nor severe. It mainly consisted of verbal jibes like being called a jigger or

a dot who is there to be seen and not to be heard. There was also mouth exercise which was a ritual by form twos for newly arrived form ones, but it was however light hearted and supposedly meant to prepare the form one's tender jaws for eating *murram*. *Murram* or *githeri*, a meal made of hard-boiled beans and maize was the most common. The form two would hold one palm over another and mimic jaw movements which the form one would have to also mimic but with his jaws. The only physical bullying that happened was being *pillowed* or being hit with a pillow but quite lightly. Pillowing was a ritual also performed on the last night of the third term to *promote* form ones to form two. The bullying did not last long because once the form ones could identify and report the form twos, they could be punished and the bullying usually petered out within two or three weeks. There was however a couple of groups of form twos who were especially vicious and would move through various dormitories just before lights out harassing form ones. It is also unfortunate that a couple of form fours took it upon themselves to give form ones an especially rough time for most of that first term. Painfully memorable is a punch to my midriff from one of them as we queued at lunch hour at The School canteen to *deck* or buy bread as it was called.

Early in 1973 I encountered what I would later realize was an annual Challenge Weekend designed to harvest souls for Christ, especially of the newly arrived form ones. There was great singing and dancing during praise and worship at the Carey Francis Memorial Lecture Theatre from Thursday evening to Sunday afternoon. Evangelist Joe Kayo and his troupe of Singing Beauties would raise lovely sounds unto the Lord. Peter Anaminyi who was in Upper Six and also the Christian Union chairman was on hand as a guide and I quickly gave my soul to Jesus. I realized a few weeks later that I had actually surrendered my soul to Joe Kayo's Singing Beauties as the fire gradually died out once they left, and I was back to my old not too sinful ways.

Beds were double-deckers with form threes paired with form ones on the upper deck while form fours would likewise be paired with form twos. Each dormitory had 18 students with 3 from each of the 6 classes. The Upper Six students in dorm 17A of Francis house in 1973, my home away from home for the next four years were John Odero who was house captain, Patrick Kiige and Titus Kiraitu Murungi. My year mates were Silas Obukosia in form 1A and Stephen Waweru in form 1C. Francis House upper block consisted of dorms 17A and 17B

while the lower block had dorms 18A and 18B. This lower block was next to the swimming pool and a pit latrine referred to as an *aluminium*. The *aluminium* was meant for use when there was a water shortage but had been turned into a *fungusing* den, pronounced *fangasing*, as cigarette smoking was called. No one could tell me where the name *fungusing* originated from, but my guess is that *fungusers* were warned against growing *fungus* in their lungs thus the name. There were several other *aluminiums* spread across The School and only Grieve and Sellwood houses did not have one. The dormitory and house were the units that defined most of The School's activities. There were eight houses, all divided into four dormitories except Aggrey House which had five. The houses were in the following order: Livingstone, Aggrey, Wilberforce, Grieve, Arthur, Francis, Smith and Sellwood.

All the houses were named after notable figures connected to The School. More houses have since been built and named following the same pattern. The first houses were inspired by the following people:

1. Livingstone House: Scottish explorer Dr David Livingstone, who inspired the C.S.M mission at Kikuyu.
2. Aggrey House: Dr Aggrey of Achimota Ghana who advocated for education for Africans.
3. Wilberforce House: Scottish slave trade abolitionist Sir William Wilberforce. He was also a founder of the C.M.S.
4. Grieve House: First principal of The School George Arthur Grieve from 1926 to 1940
5. Arthur House: Scottish medical missionary John Arthur who served the Kenya Church of Scotland between 1907 and 1937.
6. Francis House: School's second principal Edward Carey Francis from 1940 to 1962
7. Smith House: Longest serving member of the teaching staff James Stephen Smith from 1927 to 1969
8. Sellwood House: Major Sellwood who joined The School as a teacher in 1930 was apart from being a soldier, a very good mason/construction

supervisor. The core of AHS additional classrooms from form 1 to form 4 were built under his direction. Major Sellwood is said to have learnt Kikamba and made it a point to visit every Mukamba student in their home during school holidays. He also wrote a booklet titled “Kamba Customary Law”

The dormitories were named numerically from 1 to 11 then changed to A and B from 12 to 22. Sitting in the dining hall and chapel was arranged according to dormitories. Of great importance too was and still is The School number that one was assigned on admission and it became a second identity. The official reporting day for 1973 form ones was Thursday, 18th January 1973. When year mate Peter Wainaina reported at the Bursar’s office, there was a flurry of consultations as apparently there were two boys named Peter Wainaina in the admission list, school numbers 3068 and 3095 respectively. One was from Murang’a and the other from Nakuru. When this Peter said he came from a school in Molo he was told. “Your school number is 3095 and you are in Grieve house” he was then sent off to dorm 13B under the care of Benson ‘Benji’ Mwangi of form 3 in block 13. Peter, school number 3068 was to go to Livingstone house. Coincidentally both of the Peters were in Form 1C and after a year, Mr. Grainger the form master recommended one of them adopts his surname and school number 3095’s father wrote a letter of no objection, and he officially became Wainaina Kamau from form 2 onwards. During the year the various houses would compete in sports, cleanliness and singing and would occasionally provide Saturday evening entertainment. The competitions would be staged at specified times in the school calendar year, with highly coveted trophies being the ultimate prize for the winning house. Each house had a house master and a house captain while each dormitory had a dormitory prefect. In 1973 and 1974, Noah *Kibogoyo* Omolo led the Mighty Francis house to first place in the annual singing competition, and I was a proud member of the choir that belted out folk songs in the two years. The tune of one of the winning Luo songs still rings a bell in my mind, though I lost the exact words long ago.

Time was everything in The School controlled by a bell at the top of the science block that rang remotely on time signaling the whole school to move to the next task. Morning work included scrubbing the dormitory floors where I first came

across a cleaning tool called a squeegee for removing water from floors. Other chores included cleaning windows and toilets, *specialization* as cleaning toilets was called to tending the flower gardens around the dorms. The chores as well as making sure one's bed was neatly made and personal effects neatly arranged in the lockers needed little supervision, as it became embedded in one's DNA after a while. Students would move to different classes for different lessons unlike in primary school where pupils were assigned one class to which the different teachers would go to.

I was to later learn that Dorm mate Patrick Kiige and housemate George Muthuuri had been admitted to A level schools in England, after their O level exams on account of their brilliance. They were then brought back to sit the local EAACE just for the record. Muthuuri was subsequently admitted to Leeds University to study Computer Science and Kiige to the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology to study Chemical engineering. Kiige died in tragic circumstances soon after his arrival at the British university. In the Kenyan education system of the time, dubbed 7-4-2-3, one sat CPE, Certificate of Primary Education at standard seven with highest pass marks being 3 A's equivalent to 36 points enabling one to join form 1. EACE, East African Certificate of Education was sat at form four and one was examined in 8 or 9 subjects with scores 1 for best and 9 for worst performance. Grading was in the best 6 subjects that had to include the scores for Mathematics and English language. Division 1 was 6-23 points, Division 2 was 24-33 points, Division 3 was 34- 39 points, and Division 4 was 40-53 points with Failure at 54 points. In EAACE, East African Advanced Certificate of Education one could sit 3 or 4 principals with a compulsory subsidiary of a General Paper. The scores were Principal A, B, C, D and E. A was 6 points, B 5, C 4, D 3, E 2 and Subsidiary 1. Those sitting 4 principals had possible top marks of 25 points and 3 principals had top marks at 19. I sat for 4 principals and one subsidiary and scored 22 out of possible 25 marks, assuring myself of a place in any arts based faculty I chose at the University of Nairobi, the only public university at the time.

The Alliance high school dining hall was in the shape of a cross, with one end serving as the kitchen and the other three as the dining areas. The sitting arrangement was by dormitories and houses as stated earlier, with form ones sitting at one end with the other classes arranged in order of seniority, with

Upper Six at the farthest end and the dormitory prefect at the head of the table. The senior prefects table, *SPT*, was right in the center of the hall. The hall had a public address system and before lunch and dinner, prefects would make various announcements on matters to do with running of The School. Cooks would place lunch and dinner in *sufurias* at the head of each table and the necessary utensils. A student from lower school was then given the duty of serving everyone in equal portions although bias could be noted occasionally but all taken in good humor. *Dissolving* or eating more than one's fair share and *draining* or drinking more than one's fair share of beverages was fairly common. Breakfast would be loaves of bread with jam and tea in an urn and the serving would be as for the other meals. It was the first time I came across people that drunk sugarless tea or *ndubia* as it was called. The dining hall captain had the duty of coordination to ensure timely and quality meals. On some of the days there would be special meals like the much-loved dumpling, a small mass of dough cooked by boiling or steaming which were served for dinner on Wednesdays and Sundays and a boiled egg with Sunday breakfast. It is worth noting that some students who I think included Michael Majale, Simon Nzioka, Alex Nderitu and John Nyamu wore ties at dinner on the days dumplings were served.

The school dinner on the last night of the term was truly special being the only time students were served chicken topped up with pudding. In addition, there would be a floral arrangement competition judged by teachers' wives (who were mostly British), with the best house winning a box of House of Manji biscuits. The order at meal times starting with announcements by prefects was followed by Grace, one which I found profound in meaning was "*Some people have food and no appetite, others have appetite and no food, thank you Lord for giving us both.*" To which I would silently add "*I wish the food was more!*" A silence followed broken only by the clink of spoon against plate after which the assembly broke up. One day in 1978, the dining hall senior prefect Ken Obimbo declared the food for lunch unfit for human consumption on account of a strong paraffin taste. We eventually ate a lunch of tea and bread at around 3 pm, the bread ordered specially from Aurora bakeries of Gikomba, and a crisis was thus averted.

The transition from parade ground to the chapel to class gave the impression of a perfectly synchronized metronome that had a life of its own. Coming from the *bundus* of Ukambani I found this order intimidating until it grew into my

DNA and it became almost automatic to be where I was supposed to be at the appointed hour. On my first Saturday at The School, I witnessed a constant stream of vehicles of parents visiting their sons. I was awed by the variety and luxury of many of the vehicles and the smartly dressed parents and siblings bringing to the fore the great difference in economic backgrounds represented at The School. I had ridden in a car only once, a Peugeot 404 saloon quite by chance otherwise I was a bus and train traveler although not that often. The total population was just under 600 students with each class of form one to form four having 3 streams A, B and C with 33 students each. The placing was such that in each stream, there was at least one representative from every part of the country. It was a school requirement that the boys were allocated to classes and dormitories in a way that made it impossible to have a dominant tribe in any of the cohorts. A level classes were based on subject combinations in both Arts and Science streams but the total of 99 students per class was still maintained.

A typical day would start with morning work between 6.50 am and 7.20 am, followed by breakfast at 7.30am, parade at 8am, with chapel on Thursday between 8.05am and 8.20am, then class from 8.30am to 10.30am for a tea break, back for two lessons between 11.00am and 12.20pm before lunch at 12.25pm. There were 3 classes in the afternoon between 1.45 pm to 3.45pm in time for a tea break. Between 4.20pm to 5.20pm would be time for various games until parade at 6pm during which announcements would be made. There would be hymn singing on Thursday which was clubs and societies evening and there would be no preps. After dinner during the rest of the week days, preps would start at 6.50pm and end at 8.20pm for forms one to four and 10.45pm for the A level classes. Lights out for form ones to four was at 9.30pm and 11pm for A level students. Headmaster's talk on Saturdays was at 8am in the school hall before classes from 8.30am to 10.30am and after tea, the punishment parade would follow for those that had broken school rules within the week. On Saturday evening from 7.30pm there was entertainment in the school hall which began with the Saturday Evening Paper or SEP. SEP was started in 1943 in place of the school magazine that had been suspended at the time due to a paper shortage occasioned by war deprivations. It was a series of satirical articles mostly about school life written by the students and collated and presented by the SEP editor, a fourth former elected by students. SEP would be followed by either a movie

or some other entertainment presented by students arranged by houses, and sometimes teachers would entertain the students.

I made very close friendships with fellow form ones Felix Musili Kamanda of Wilberforce house and Dominic *Munoa Mana* Mutuku of Arthur house. One Saturday, the movie *The Three Musketeers* was screened and we started referring to ourselves as the three musketeers and would stage mock sword fights with sticks. Sundays included inspection at the morning parade before proceeding to the chapel for the Sunday service. The service was conducted by either a visiting preacher, one of the teachers, or sometimes by the members of the Christian Union. There was also a Sunday evening service before supper. Punctuality, cleanliness both for self and surroundings, decorum, concern for others and other standards which are enshrined in the Alliance high school rules and traditions became ingrained into my psyche. These and more all designed for self-discipline were punishable offences at The School and have informed my outlook on life to date. Due to exam pressure students sometimes concealed themselves in various places to *rocket*, meaning to read beyond the allowed hours, an infraction that was punishable if one was caught. In Francis house dormitory 17A, the work implements store was perfect for this activity while some of the students would be caught reading with torches under blankets. I got hooked to various entertainment programs on Voice of Kenya general service that included the *Late-Date* music program that ran from 10pm to 11pm and I would have a pocket radio under my pillow. There was also the daily *Sundowner* program from 6pm to 7pm and *Yours For The Asking* on Saturdays between 10.30am and 12 noon. The radio alternated between the owner James Okong'o of dormitory 17B and myself depending on the amount contributed for purchase of the radio batteries.

I was always top of my class in primary school with the number two more than 100 marks behind. That meant the elimination of a whole paper's scores from my marks would not affect my position at the top. I arrived in Alliance high school with this solid achievement and acclimatization with the very new environment and way of doing things destabilized me for a while. During that first term I was uncomfortably near the bottom of the class with boys from urban schools taking the upper hand to the detriment of us rural folks, who took a very severe beating. It was very difficult to explain to my folks the apparent drastic change in performance. I was traumatized right from day one by both the

language of instruction and introduction to new mathematics, as well as the fact that the other classmates were already comfortable with the English-English spoken by white people, and solving sums in base two and three in New Mathematics. The trauma created a mental block against mathematics and sciences in general that I was not able to break until form three. By form two the ground had shifted significantly in favor of us rural folk and many of us claimed a place in the top 50%.



In 1975 while in form 3, I visited my cousin Joshua Mutisya at University of Nairobi during a Nairobi Saturday. I found him with friends who included Mutua Kilaka, Philip Mulwa, Paul Mwake, Michael Muteti and a few of his other friends all from Mbitini location except Kilaka who was from Muumandu. Taking lunch in the Central Catering Unit, CCU, and mingling freely with university students was the highlight of the day. I spent the day listening to their friendly banter that included talk about *Boxes*, *Boxers* and other mysterious university student terminologies. The events of that day cemented my determination to study hard and get a place at the university when the time came.

Across a wooded valley one gets glimpses of Alliance girls' high school from the south western side of The School, and in particular from Wilberforce and Aggrey houses. The relationship between these two schools goes way back to 1938. Two girls were admitted to Alliance high school on an experimental basis in that year and this led to other girls being admitted at various times in the course of the following decade. Headmaster Carey Francis was not amused as he did not want his boys to lose focus because of the presence of girls in their midst. African girls' high school, later to be renamed Alliance girls high school opened its doors in 1948 across the valley from Alliance high school. The boys and girls refer to each other as *Acrossians* in reference to the valley between the two schools. Admission of girls who wished to study sciences continued into the early 1950's until the girls' school was able to offer the sciences option in its curriculum. During the daily after classes strolls to Mai-a-Ihii, seeing and waving at *Acrossians* basking across their school fence was a high point in school life. To receive a letter from Across, especially in a perfumed *croxley* envelope was every boy's dream. Mail arrived twice per day, during lunch time and after classes

except on weekends. For the smitten ones, a visit on a weekend afternoon to Across was the week's highlight with endless walks around the games pitch most of the afternoon holding hands if one was lucky, and I was lucky often especially when I was in the lower classes. I had joined the Scottish dancing club coached by Mr. Elson aka *Cartoon*, because it was bi-gender and once a week we trooped to Across for lessons. I must say I mastered the elegant dance moves quite well and became a choice dance partner. I also became a quasi-Catholic because Mass was on Sunday afternoons again at Across and in addition to attraction by *Acrossians*, there was Holy Communion which featured wine. The priest held the cup in such a way that one only managed to wet the lips, but that did not stop me and I guess others from trying for a gulp though sadly I never did manage. As Across did not have a swimming pool, they shared the one at the boy's school and year mate Ken Obimbo of Arthur House dormitory 16B became the most visited student at break time. *Acrossians* would be taking their swimming lessons at that hour, and presented a delectable view from the 16B dormitory window. Two of the most loved occurrences in the chapel were the Easter and Christmas carol services performed by a joint choir with *Acrossians* on the last Sunday of first and third terms.

Students were allowed out of The School compound on weekdays except those engaged in games from Monday to Friday between 3.45pm and 6.00pm in school uniform. On Saturday it would be in home clothes between 10.45am up to 6.00pm except for those under punishment. After the Sunday service they would go out in school uniform up to 6pm. This was subject to keeping within a 5km radius of The School except on the monthly Nairobi Saturday. Some of the students created romantic relations with girls from the surrounding area. One of my classmates spent the last two terms in Upper Six locked up in the school compound as he was being hunted by relatives of a local girl he had put in the family way.

In my stream B was one Charles *Chamish* Munene who introduced me and a few other classmates to writings by an author called Tuesday Lobsang Rampa, a Tibetan monk. Hitherto, I had only been exposed to Christianity and now realized there were other religions and beliefs. The Rampa writings opened up my young mind to new ideas about reincarnation and ancient wisdom that predated Christianity. I became an avid reader on spirituality and religion especially

those from the Far East. I would marvel at the similarity of origins of religious personalities that were centuries apart. I started questioning everything religious that I had been taught and this became a lifelong pursuit.

In 1973, our class lost one student Moses Omwenga who passed on from sickness, and in 1974 Peter Chege passed on by way of suicide. The School had been traumatized earlier in 1973 with the suicide of Chris Ohanga of Upper Six. To most of us, the deaths were uncomfortably near and our sadness was mixed with an acute sense of puzzlement.

Our class had some humorous episodes like in 1974 when three boys were suspended from school for some infraction. Afraid of their parents' wrath, they opted to call it quits with education and look for work as horse caretakers in white peoples' farms in the Rift Valley. They did not have enough money for fare and opted to walk with the great trek starting at around 2pm, and they had made it to Limuru by nightfall. With the little money they had they could not afford to hire a place to sleep and so they spent the night in a nearby forest. The following day the great trek resumed and they managed to get to the escarpment by which time the futility of what they were attempting to do had started to *sink* in. One of them dropped out of the venture and opted to turn back at this point and walk to Nairobi where his father worked. The other two continued for a while but must have come to the same realization and as they still had some little money, they boarded a *matatu* heading to Nairobi and picked up the first guy somewhere along the way. And another budding enterprise came a cropper.

One day in 1975, a newspaper reported that the world would end in 1977 and a great debate ensued between Livingstonians Timothy *Tissot* Mutiso and Harmerton Shungula with Aggreyians Stanley *Snyidho* Otieno and Naftali Afanda *RepairMan* as they listened to Voice of Kenya's *Sundowner* radio program. They came to a consensus that as they would only have made it to Lower Six by the end of the world, there was no need to continue with schooling. They then decided to spend the last years of the world at the coast, where one could even get a chance to become a seaman and travel to United States of America and the rest of the world. They set out the following day after classes with the intention of hitch-hiking to Mombasa. With little money and with no public transport at that hour, they left on foot armed with classmate Mwangi Ndegwa's radio. Shungula made it to the University of Nairobi's Adult Education center before pulling out while

Afanda made it up to Dagoretti market before abandoning the venture. *Snyidho* and *Tissot* soldiered on and reached Adams Arcade by nightfall and with the little cash they had, they bought a dry loaf for their supper. They then proceeded on along Ngong road but could not go beyond Ngong Hills hotel which was under construction at the time as it got too dark. They tried sleeping behind the construction site by spreading out empty cement bags on the ground, but the place was wet and heavily infested with mosquitoes and frogs. They sought refuge at a nearby petrol station and they were allowed to spend the night in the back of a parked Peugeot 504 station wagon.

In the morning, cold and hungry they set out to sell the radio to raise money for food and fare for the journey to Mombasa. They started at a popular second-hand shop in Adams Arcade. They were asked for the radio permit which they did not have, so they decided to try their luck along River road or Luthuli avenue in the Central Business District. They were asked for the radio permit at every shop they went to. By noon, with no money in their pockets and hunger pangs intensifying, and faced with the reality of failure of their project, it was time to make that important decision of surrender so they chose what they reckoned to be a soft landing. They went to *Snyidho's* mum's office at the University of Nairobi. When they reached the university's engineering block, they tried to cook a story but none was forthcoming possibly due to the acute hunger pangs and so they proceeded on and at the door of the office they stopped, looked at each other and slowly pushed the door open. *Snyidho's* mum was on the phone and when she saw them said, "They are here!" They realized she had been talking to *Tissot's* mum who arrived within a short while. She did not talk to them, but made another call repeating the same message but this time in Dholuo. Then Sheriff, *Snyidho's* dad as they called him came and all hell broke loose. Back to school and headmaster Ernest Wangai meted out several strokes of the cane but declined Sheriff's request to be allowed to administer some strokes of the cane too. And the two wannabe seamen-cum-musketeers rejoined their respective classes much to the amusement of their classmates.



1975 was quite the year for my Alliance high school class that exited from Upper Six in 1978 as we were probably at our cheekiest and most inquisitive. The

school farm at the top of the hill featured an Ecology plot as well as several types of crops and animals such as dairy cattle, pigs and chicken. The chicken were kept in a locked cage and Timothy *Tissot* Mutiso had by some fluke discovered that his locker key could open this cage. Armed with this very important information *Tissot*, accompanied by three other hungry fellow form threes namely *Snyidho*, Shungula and Simon *Ceaser* Mahugu set out on a Saturday afternoon for the farm. In a well-coordinated maneuver, Shungula engaged the farm hand and led him a distance away while *Tissot* opened the cage, *Ceaser* grabbed the chicken and passed it to *Snyidho* who quickly broke its neck and threw it into the nearby bushes. They then proceeded to the lower field picking the now dead chicken on the way and roasted it, using their bare hands to disembowel it as they did not have any of the necessary tools. They then sat down and devoured it ravenously. On the way back they came across a baby duiker which they captured. They decided to hand it over to teacher Nelson who was in charge of the Ecology plot hoping for a prize, but he chided them for having taken the duiker from its natural environment as he took it away from them. But they were never caught for the chicken caper though, and I am not sure whether they ever repeated the ‘operation’.

Sometime later in the year, *Snyidho*, *Tissot*, *Ceaser*, Ireri and myself took a plate of *murram* that had been served for lunch that was full of weevils to headmaster Wangai in protest demanding more palatable food. “Do you think I am your grandmother?” Wangai asked us as he chased us back to the dining hall. The matter died out and we continued to enjoy weevil protein in our lunch *murram* and did not suffer any discernible damage.

1975 is also the year that classmate Joseph Ng’ang’a won a water pump at the young farmers exhibition at the Nairobi ASK Show. He sold it for what was a lot of money in those days. On the last Saturday of the third term, he offered to buy some liquid *karara* as the local brew was called for fellow form threes Timothy *Tissot* Mutiso, Stephen Waweru, myself and a couple of form twos including fellow Franciscan Geoffrey Mutonyi. At Karanja’s bar and restaurant at Mai a Ihii, we found Hon. James Gichuru MP, EGH, minister for defense, old boy and former teacher of Alliance high school having his afternoon tippie. We settled down on a nearby table and Ng’ang’a true to his word bought us a round of drinks. The minister then invited us over to his table and proceeded to regale us with stories

about his school and teaching days as well as politics, and we quite forgot ourselves until the headmaster Ernest *Babyface* Wangai suddenly walked in. "Can I take my boys back to school?" he politely asked the minister. "Are they your boys?" asked the minister, as if he did not know already. When Wangai answered in the affirmative the minister replied, "By all means, take them!" We ended up in the headmaster's car and when he dropped us at the parade ground after taking our names and school numbers, he told us "I will allow you to sleep out your drunkenness the rest of Saturday and all Sunday and miss all parades and chapel." But no one took up the offer. After Monday morning parade we were summoned to the headmaster's office where he told us that we would receive six strokes of the cane each, but we all collectively refused. He then told us cheerfully "That is okay. Collect letters from my secretary and report with your parents in March next year." Several things flashed in my mind, one, it was November, and two, I was beginning form four an exam class the following year. How could I stay away a whole term from school? Three, how was I to explain to my mother why she is required at The School? It appeared the other students followed more or less the same thought process and there was a rush to get the punishment and be done with it. We all left happy that the matter had been sorted out and would not reach the parents.

Closing day was the following Friday 28th November 1975 that same week we were punished. Francis house master F.G. Welch on Thursday 27th afternoon in addition to giving me my report form, in which it was clearly indicated that my grades could have been much better if I had not been drinking in local bars, also handed me a letter addressed to my father. It also detailed my drunken habits and he remarked "Since you may choose not to deliver it, we have mailed the original through the post office." The standard report form was for a whole year with space for the parent to append a signature to confirm having seen it before it is returned for the following term. Since this was third term, I did not have to return it to school. I therefore tucked both letter and report form safely in my locker as I traveled home for the holidays. At home I reported that we had done exams late thus the reports were not ready by closing time and were to be sent by post. Normally one of my brother's shop assistants collected the mail and placed it in my brother's office from where the rest of us collected any mail addressed to us. I used to receive letters frequently from schoolmates and

friends from other schools. I made it my business to collect the mail from the post office every day in an attempt to intercept the letter about my encounter with alcohol in the previous school term. By the third week of the holidays, just before Christmas I relaxed and assumed the school administration had been playing with our psychology. A day or two later, I passed by my brother's office to check mail and on top of the pile was a letter in an Alliance high school envelope! There were several other letters addressed to me but I only took the one from school and swiftly headed to my mother's shop and hid it in some boxes. After a short while I went back to my brother's shop and asked his wife with the most innocent face I could muster whether there was any mail for me. She confirmed there were, including my report form. I pretended to be eager to see it and asked how my grades were and she replied she had not opened it and had left that to my brother. I made a great show of going through the mail, got my other letters but could not find the letter supposedly with my report form and I pretended to be very upset. I maintained my eagerness to see my results as we searched for the letter. I offered to get a copy when school opened and post it which I did not do and by the time I came home again, the matter must have been forgotten and never came up again. And that is how I escaped home punishment.

I was lucky I had been exposed to the normal conveniences of electricity lights and flush toilets during my visits to my brothers in Mombasa. In 1974, a form one joined Francis house dorm 17A from what must have been a really remote rural area somewhere in Nyanza and who was mesmerized by the magical light that came on when he pressed a button on the wall. He nearly fell for a form two's prank in the dining hall when he was told a fork was to comb his hair to be smart before the meal. For a while he refused to use the flush toilets but preferred the aluminium pit latrine, but within a fairly short while he was able to get all the newness in his stride. Students were introduced to careers talk in form three and during my very first careers talk, I decided I would become an Entomology Lab Technologist because it sounded sexy and exotic. However, when I found out it was about insects, I changed my mind.

During the mid-term break, those traveling by train departed on the eve of the mid-term after an early dinner and were dropped by the school bus at Kikuyu station before 3pm. This was to enable them catch the trains to their various destinations armed with concession forms that enabled students to travel by

most means at a quarter of the normal fare. Mombasa bound students would board the Eldoret-Nairobi train at 3pm and on to the Mombasa train at 5pm at the Nairobi Railway station. The Westward bound ones would board the Kisumu and Eldoret trains a bit later. After being dropped at Kikuyu station, I usually had enough time to board a bus at Gitaru and get to the country bus station in Nairobi before *Mumo wa Mbitini*, the last bus bound for Emali and beyond departed and I would be home by 7.30pm the same day giving me an extra mid-term night at home. The couple of times that I missed the bus, I was able to get on the 5pm train and be home by 9pm.

As happens often to testosterone laden youth, I fell in love with a lovely lass from Kinyambu about ten or so kilometers past Kibwezi on the Mombasa to Nairobi highway. She was a student at Muthetheni Girl's school and I was convinced she was my soul mate. I was then in A level and she was in O level and during one mid-term that coincided with theirs, we agreed I visit her at her home in Kinyambu. I sneaked from home on Sunday morning and boarded a *matatu* financed by Mr. Opiyo, God rest his soul, a Ugandan national teaching in a local secondary school who had gotten married to one of my cousins. The following day Monday, I had to board a *matatu* very early in the morning from Kinyambu so as to get back home before my folks realized I was not around. It was also the day mid-term was ending and I had to head back to school in time for the 6pm parade. In the *matatu* I met a cousin heading to Emali to report the attempted and fortunately failed suicide of Joseph Kala Mwongela, a cousin who had settled in Thange the next town after Kinyambu as one heads towards Mombasa. He requested me to convey the information to the relevant people in Emali and then he disembarked. A great dilemma arose how I could report this matter without letting out that I had journeyed to visit my girlfriend all the way in Kinyambu without informing anyone at home and explain how I financed the trip. When I reached Emali, I got my cousin Peter to tell his father Mutisya that he had 'heard' of the news from someone who was in a *matatu* heading to Nairobi from Kibwezi. At around 10am just as I was getting ready to leave, another cousin arrived at our shop and found my mother and uncle Mutisya and was surprised when they asked him to confirm the news. He then asked me pointedly why I had not passed on the information as given to me that morning at Kinyambu. It was a difficult one hour or so before I finally headed out to the stage to catch

transport back to school. Within a fairly short span of time, my infatuation with the Kinyambu beauty petered out and we moved our separate ways.

Sports played a great part in the school curriculum and The School had great sportsmen in many fields who led their teams to national championships in soccer, hockey, athletics, swimming, and rugby among other disciplines. The School had linkages with other schools in Kiambu and joint practices for specific tournaments were frequent. During the first week of the April holidays in 1978, the hockey team had gone for joint practice at Limuru girls' high school. The two schools had qualified to represent central province in the National championships due the following week. Teacher Geoffrey Njoroge, nicknamed *Baroka* was in charge of the hockey team and after practice the girls offered to show the boys around the school. In earlier times when boys went for debates, dances or plays at the school the routine was strictly from the bus to the event venue and back to the bus when the event ended. About nine of the fourteen boys of the team took the offer and included Aineah Anika, Gerald Mahinda, Ken *Obish* Obimbo and Michael *Tank* Otieno. After the tour, the boys realized the van had left with the teacher and the other five boys but they assumed it was to come back for them. After a sumptuous dinner of chips and sausages with ice cream for dessert, they watched a movie as they waited for the van. The girls organized a dance but by midnight realization hit them that the van was not coming back and the girls' school watchmen were now on their case urging them to leave. Armed with hockey sticks they felt brave enough to start on the long trek back to school. As they made their weary way back to Kikuyu, they branched into one or two petrol stations and shocked motorists with their story. Who could comprehend how Alliance high school students would be out on such a dangerous road at night? A Safari Rally crew in a Peugeot 504 station wagon offered to take a few of the boys but they declined insisting it was either all or none. *Baroka* had left instructions that the boys were to see him when they got back. On arrival at around 4am, cold and wet as it had rained along the way, they went to his house but he did not respond to their knocking so they went to sleep. At around 5am, just about an hour later he woke them up and ordered them to go for roadwork which instruction they declined. Maybe he did not insist too much because at this point, he may have realized he could also get into trouble for leaving testosterone laden boys in a girls' school at night.

During the annual speech day in late 1978, a football game between the Alliance high school first eleven and Gor Mahia A team was played at the school's upper field. In the school team were the likes of David *Sudden* Kihurani in the goal, Mtula Rock, Daudi *Termite* Wekesa, Ken *Obish* Obimbo, Nasiombe *Ayatolah* Mutonyi, Michael *Tank* Otieno, Bernard Adanje and another student nicknamed *Avunja*. Alliance high school were first to score and Gor Mahia equalized after a while. Then the clearly biased referee awarded Gor Mahia an undeserved free kick which was taken by John Bobby Ogolla renown for hard free kicks. In the defense wall was among others *Ayatollah*, at whose head Ogolla aimed the ball. *Ayatollah* ducked and the ball hit the back of the net. In his own words he explains. "There were two choices: I let the ball pass and go to goal uninterrupted, or put my head and have it chopped off, in which case both the ball and my head would have wound up in goal anyway. I have a knack for avoiding exercises in futility, especially one that would have landed me in hospital, if not six feet under". The Alliance high school team then walked off led by *Obish* to protest the referee's biased officiating. It took the intervention of the Gor Mahia's secretary Jasper Okello to convince the boys to resume the game that ended on a 1-2 score. Edwin *Kinyash* Kinyanjui, Malaki Otieno *Shaft* and I made a formidable cheering team whenever either the football or rugby teams played and this prowess extended even to away games. Many are the times we outcheered Mangu, Thika, Nairobi, Lenana and many other schools on their home ground. During a rugby game at the Rift Valley Academy however, we were strangely quiet as we were awed by the cheering troupe of scantily dressed nubile young mostly white girls, and for a while the team too lost concentration, mesmerized by the sight. No wonder we lost the game.

As the saying goes, all work and no play make Jack a dull boy and in Alliance high school there was play too. Saturday evening entertainment could either be a movie, a variety show by members of one of the houses or the teachers but always preceded by the Saturday Evening Paper, SEP. One Saturday, there was a variety show staged by Grieve House which included a bread eating competition. My year-mate and mischievous friend Stanley *Snyidho* Otieno remembers the eventful night in his own uncensored words: "Sheriff, as we had nicknamed my father, used to come to school to see my elder brother *Odhus* and I every fortnight and *focus* us Kshs. 20 each. *Focus* was in reference to being given pocket

money. This was not one of those Saturdays and I had no money and could not afford the much-loved aurora bread from the school canteen, nor *karara*, the very savory *chapati* from Thogoto, so I strolled into the school hall for the Saturday evening entertainment which was organized by Grieve House, hungry and angry” he narrates. “As the entertainment went on, three half loaves were placed on a table on the stage with Onuchukwu the man to beat already seated and the rules of engagement announced for the competition to eat a dry half loaf of bread. Two more competitors were invited from the floor and driven by my hunger, I waved my hand vigorously from the back of the hall. I was chosen and I walked down the stairs to the stage amid deafening cheers from the rest of the students. Another competitor, who I believe was Lawrence Gumbe was chosen. After a further briefing by the master of ceremony, the competition started with my focus on my hunger and the winner’s prize the gold medal of a whole half loaf, but my fear was the main competitor the then much dreaded Onuchukwu who unfortunately for him but fortunately for me choked on the dry bread, and I crossed the winning line ahead of the remaining competitor. I remember year-mate John Were Onundu seated near the stage cheering me on. I was awarded the gold medal and a glass of water. I ate the prize in the school hall without sharing it with anyone. The love of bread those days was all consuming!”

Teachers were not left behind in variety shows as teacher of English Michael G Mowat writes in an email: “The ‘Staff entertainments’ of 1975 and 1976 were ground-breaking and daring ventures; the first one included much funny and highly entertaining material put together by Martin Trent. Fred Welch feared that the boys would misbehave and take advantage of having seen Staff members ‘play the fool’, and he wrote a note to me pleading for me to persuade Martin Trent not to lead this initiative in 1975. However, I decided to fully participate myself acting and singing English folk songs along with others. Staff members actually played comic parts on stage and even Mr. Wangai the headmaster made an appearance. Pollard, the teacher in charge of swimming with his “There will be swimming for flies tonight” on ‘finding a fly in his soup’ literally brought the house down. I collected bits of comic drama for the second year that we did this as staff, including a ‘shadow play’ (figures illuminated behind a large cloth sheet, with Julius Mareteh and myself conducting an excruciating hospital operation!). On the following day the boys were still laughing and talking about it and I felt

strongly that they had very much liked watching the Staff members behaving in ways they had never imagined that they could! The staff members suddenly seemed less remote and 'different' as human beings."

The annual school play brought schools from all of Central and Nairobi provinces to watch as the play would be based on a set book for O level Literature in English for that year. Some of the plays would however be written by students themselves, such as Francis Imbuga's 'Betrayal In The City' which he wrote while in Upper Six that was staged in The School in 1969. Imbuga eventually won the best actor award when Alliance high school presented the play at the National drama festival. It would eventually be presented at the Festival of African Arts and Culture, FESTAC held in Lagos, Nigeria. Popular presentations included The Insect Play, Every Man, Merchant of Venice, Pot of Gold, The Government Inspector and many other best sellers. The shows would run in the evenings throughout the week and we would all be chaffing at the tethers that dictated we be in class for evening preps as all those beautiful girls made their leisurely tours of the grounds around the school hall. Classmates Fred *Gish* Mwangi, Apolo *Alunyu* Katerega and I decided to be part of the fun enjoyed by the actors by volunteering into the props team in 1976. The play was staged at the National Theatre one night among several other plays and since it was the first on stage, we had time to roam around the city. We stumbled into an establishment where there was a shocking display of sex and we quickly found our way back to the National Theatre only to find the van had left as the team did not watch the other plays being staged. We called the coin box at school and the student who answered confirmed the school van was already at its parking. We then trekked to Highridge to my brother in law Chris Lati's home, he was not amused, where we spent the night and arrived in school the following day at about break time and luckily we were not punished.

There was a robust culture embracing all things music, with a hard core following of the rock music genre that is said to have originated from some Sellwoodians led by one Ken Oluoch nicknamed *Chang'aa* for a reason I eventually found out. Ken and a classmate from Grieve house had been sent by a Sellwoodian Upper Six student to buy for him the then fabled Ugenya chang'aa from Kisumu during one half-term holiday. On the way back to school they decided to drink some of it and top up with water. The owner made a lot of noise when he discovered this

water dilution mischief. Ken from then on became known as 'the junior boy who drank the Upper Six student's chang'aa and the name stuck. There was a great collection of contemporary music albums in the possession of various students. The *Murram* Grinders band the precursor to the Gravity band was formed in the mid 70s made up of Mike Majale, Stephen *Papa* Onwere, Vincent Kayanda, Eddie Ngacha, Solomon *Stone* Maina, Ken *Chang'aa* Oluoch, Mike Musembi, Philip Nderitu, Steve Gus Chege and Mel Mkwaya. The band had a wide repertoire of music with Lingala, Swahili, Rock, Soul and R& B hits as they entertained the rest of The School some of the Saturday evenings. Anthony Irvine nicknamed *Boffin*, a physics teacher had introduced students to the assembly of electronic circuits in the project room. They were now able to build functioning transistor radio amplifiers and radio transmitters and indeed one time the communications authorities issued a warning when some radio signals were picked up outside the confines of The School. It was a heady time indeed, with the freedom to explore and embrace talents that went beyond academic pursuits. I wonder if the later generations ever experienced such freedom in learning and exploring their talents.

After the clubs and society meetings on Thursday evenings during refreshments, normally tea and biscuits it had become normal to play some music which would result in a dancing session. When I was in charge of the French room which was actually the languages room as it included Swahili too, the department gramophone earned me entry into many of these social gatherings of all levels in The School as the resident DeeJay. I had created an easy camaraderie with fellow students as well as many of the visiting girls from the various schools. This led to my as yet unchallenged crowning as the all-time *sinker* between 1975 and 1978. I had become the official DeeJay at these sessions with music borrowed from various students with my assistant DeeJay, Edwin *Kinyash* Kinyanjui helping in facilitating this. We would play extended versions of most of the songs giving us a chance to *sink*, the terminology for getting to dance with the opposite gender. There is something about the provider of music entertainment that attracts the opposite gender and a number of times while in form three, I would *sink* at the expense of some Upper Six students. One weekend, year mate Simon *Ceaser* Mahugu borrowed the gramophone for some function of students from Nyeri and connected the wires wrongly. The machine blew up thereby bringing my budding DeeJaying career to an abrupt end. Significantly, my class grades improved

greatly thereafter.

As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I am not sure when or how this started but I slowly drifted into the *fungusers* club. I believe it started when year and dormitory mate Stephen Waweru and I came up with a far-fetched notion that fellow Franciscan Lincoln Kinungi was an accomplished cross-country runner because he *fungused*. Since we wanted to be winning cross-country runners too, we got into the club. I had become quite good at short cuts and in 1974 while in form two, I mistimed and rejoined the runners too early and found myself among the top 20 finishers thus making the school cross country team. I was outed during the subsequent practice runs when I could not come within an hour of the second last runner. The *fungusers* club was a tightly knit fraternity and an Upper Six student would have no issue sharing a *mozo* (cigarette) butt with a form three, the class during which many joined the *fungusers* club. The club had an unspoken code of secrecy, an *omerta* of sorts and members were their brother's keeper unless one became a frequent taker without putting in any contribution into the nicotine pool. Match sticks were valuable and *mozos* would be lit from other glowing *mozos* to 'save a matchstick and buy an aero plane' as the saying went. I had taken my *fungusing* habits home during the holidays and as mentioned elsewhere in this book, got into experimenting with *marijuana* with my best friend Makite Lati and a couple of other agemates. Back in school I confided this fact to one of my close *fungusing* brothers and one thing led to another. Once in a while when there was a dance or some event that required courage to approach members of the fair gender, a puff or two of the *holy herb* was a necessary fortification. During one such school dance one of my close friends must have added a generous helping of liquid *karara* to the puffs he had inhaled, as he could hardly remain upright and hit the floor a number of times. He ended up with a swollen face only to famously claim the following day that the floor kept on coming up to hit his face. The then headmaster Ernest Muchoki Wangai, aptly nicknamed *Babyface* on account of his youthful looks especially when attired in his white trousers and jacket, as he often did in the evenings and weekends visited terror on us students as he looked like one of us. It is rumored that he once joined a *fungus* queue when so attired at one of the *aluminiums* and a *funguser* actually passed on the *mozo* to him.

As mentioned earlier, it was not all work at The School, there was lots of play

too. School dances were eagerly anticipated with junior school dance for forms one and two, a middle school one for forms three and four and the senior one for the A level classes. We would pay an entrance fee that was used to provide refreshments, a cup of tea and biscuits or queen cakes to the boys and their guests during an intermission. During the junior school dance in 1973, one form one tried to eat a queen cake together with the wrapping paper, never having come across one before. The school girls invited mostly would be from Alliance girls, Limuru girls, Loreto Limuru, Kenya high, Nairobi girls and Mary Leakey. The dances were full of drama as the boys tried to outdo each other in attempts to get dance partners. A few of them still *float*ed, not get dance partners as the joke went, after being handed hydrogen balloons at the entrance by Archimedes and would be recognized by the cobwebs collected in their hair as they floated across the ceiling, the opposite of which was to *sink*, since for some reason the girls were always fewer than the boys. I had by then come up with a fool proof way of recognizing the *sinkers* from the *floaters* after the event. The *sinkers*, who got a 'squeeze' dancing blues music would have shiny ears from the oil in the girls' hair. The committee that arranged the senior school dance in 1977 with George Opiyo of Voice of Kenya as the DeeJay wanted to make sure every boy *sank* by inviting more girls than the boys, twenty girls each from Loreto Limuru, Limuru Girls, Alliance Girls, Mary Leakey and Nairobi Girls and limiting the boys to eighty only. First to arrive were the twenty from Nairobi Girls and only a few boys showed interest. One hour into the evening it had dawned on the boys that the other girls were not coming, and never has such a competition been seen as happened that night. One Upper Six student, a tall muscular star basketballer snatched someone's partner as she left the washrooms and physically carried her to the dance floor and held on to her for the rest of the evening. Those of us with partners from that moment on could not leave them on their own for even a moment, and had to synchronize washrooms visits.

The new prefect's cabinet was appointed in November 1977 to take over from the Johnson Marie Murila led outgoing one. Fellow Franciscan George Ja'Ugenya Oloo was appointed School Captain deputized by Paul Kinyua Mwangi with among others Joseph Owuor Lala, Caleb Murila, Stanley Mutwiri, Victor Munala, Nasiombe *Ayatollah* Mutonyi, Mtula Rock, Mwendwa Mwithi, Ken *Obish* Obimbo, Joseph Nzuki Mwinzi and Daudi *Termite* Wekesa being house

captains and senior prefects. After a short while however, a general feeling that the new cabinet took their work rather too seriously and were too generous with punishment began to creep in. I actually got my first and only *gating* punishment slip at this time and a general resentment was growing. One Saturday evening, a fourth former, Godfrey Njoroge staggered from the prefects' common room with a bleeding face and was met by year-mate Benson *Stone* Macharia who raised an alarm. End of year exams were to start the following Monday, and exam fever coupled with the growing resentment of the prefect body sparked off emotions that saw a rowdy crowd start gathering near the Sellwood study cubicles. Someone, I think year mate Charles Ireri rang the school bell and someone else put off the main electricity switch and a general wave of stoning started, smashing windows of the school captain's cubicle and the prefects' common room. They also caused damage in other sections of the school buildings including the senior common room and the school bus. My cheeky friend and year mate *Snyidho*, a member of a generally anti-establishment shadowy group named the senate whose other members included Simon *Ceaser* Mahugu, Charles Ireri, Edwin *Kinyash* Kinyanjui and a couple of others, after brief consultations among themselves tried to address and cool the rowdy group of form fours baying for the prefects' blood to no avail. The police were summoned and everyone ran for dear life. Some ran out of The School while I and a few others hid in a maize plantation below Wilberforce house. The group in hiding with me included the school's Maasai watchman and Kibaya Laibuta among a few other students. From this incident Laibuta and I coined the nickname *Kamasai* and that's how we call each other to this day. Calm was eventually restored and things went back to normal. The following Monday *Snyidho* together with a few other students were summoned and accused of being the inciters of the riot and in spite of their protests that they were actually trying to cool the boys down, they were sent home to get their parents. *Stone* was accused of being the one who put off the lights because he had been seen near the main switch together with John Kanyonyo who was too short to reach the switch. In the meantime, Stephen Njuguna Makimei and Malaki Otieno *Shaft* took over as School Captain and Deputy respectively with a few other changes in the senior prefects' team and the senate was banned.

The prefecture set up was as follows:

Senior Prefects(Upper Six)
School Captain
Deputy School Captain
8 House Captains
Dining Hall Prefect
Games Captain
Entertainment Prefect
Medical (Sanatorium) Prefect
Chapel Prefect
Senior Library Prefect

Prefects

33 Dorm Prefects (form four)
Junior Library Prefect
8 House Prefects (Upper Six)

The two Alliance Schools the girls with the motto 'Walk In The Light' and the boys with 'Strong To Serve' did a lot of things together such as staging joint school plays, choirs and other curricular and extra-curricular activities as would be expected of brother/sister schools. In A level, the two schools cooperated greatly in French and would routinely attend French movies and plays together at the French Cultural Centre in Nairobi. The French team had seven students from Across namely; Joyce Mutungi, Wambui Kiereini, Mary Wahome, Joy Wandera, Penina Kariuki, Violet Njeru and Juliet Githieya. We on the other hand were also seven namely; Mwangi Makumi, Daudi *Termite* Wekesa, Seno Nyakenyanya, Fred *Gish* Mwangi, Charles *Saakul* Misiani, Robert Oduor *Blackie* and myself. In the national French essay competition in 1978 I took first price with school mate Daudi *Termite* Wekesa taking the second and *Acrossian* Penina Kariuki taking third position in the A level category.

Lifting, that old tradition of showcasing one's leadership talents with the aim of getting appointed into the privileged prefecture goes back at least to the fifties. This was narrated by an old boy from those years who was a guest preacher in the chapel at one time. This practice of brown nosing is aimed at the prefect

appointing authorities, normally the teachers and the sitting prefects. He said that when in those days they sang John Bunyan's famous hymn 'He Who Would Valiant Be', they (cheekily) sang the first verse thus:

He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster, Let him in constancy follow the Master. There's no discouragement shall make him once relent

His first avowed intent to be a *Mbeba*.

Mbeba is what later generations came to know as a *lifter*

As I wound down my six years sojourn in Alliance high school it was clear I had grown up both physically and mentally. My infantile distaste for authority had melted away and F.G. Welch, house master of Francis which had been by domicile for the six years with whom I had a mutual hatred earlier had become a great friend and mentor. He taught us General Paper in both Lower and Upper Six, and we engaged in robust debates that covered any and every subject which were great eye openers on the world outside school. School clubs and societies would invite speakers to delve into diverse topics and Fr. Donders of St Paul's university chapel was a regular and so was Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Kimani Wanyoike. Teachers like Emmanuel Mudidi taught Economics with real life examples from many parts of the world, in addition to what was found in text books. The headmaster's talk on Saturday on current affairs had greatly expanded the mental horizon and headmaster Wangai had brought home the interdependence of world economies.

By the time I stepped out of Alliance high school towards the end of November 1978 complete with a national identification card, I felt ready, willing and well equipped to face what the world was going to throw at me. I was determined to continue my journey to become a learned fellow because my cousin Paul Nguta, then at the Kenya School of Law would weave arguments with lofty and flamboyant turns of phrase and so the march to law continued unabated. My elder brother Joel was with uncles Makato and Ngaanga when I broke the great news to him. He looked at me and said, "You cannot be a lawyer! I will not allow it!" So I stood there crestfallen and asked him why I could not. He replied, "Lawyers are too argumentative to keep a wife!" And he gave me the example of two leading Ukambani lawyers at the time who were both in their 2nd marriages, and I lost the one sided argument when the two uncles supported Joel. Joel himself had a 2nd wife at the time too but not being a lawyer, I guess he was not a fitting example in the matter at hand.

Interactions with my Almer Mater would continue intermittently over the next two decades and my family and I were regulars at the Sunday service in the period between 1989 and 1992 when we lived at the neighboring Kidfarmaco near Ondiri swamp. The Alliance high school Old Boys Club was registered in June 1959. The Club's objectives are:

- *To keep the Old Boys of the Alliance high school (hereinafter referred to as The School) in touch with The School and with one another.*
- *To encourage Old Boys to live up to the ideals for which The School was founded and to put into practice the motto of The School 'Strong To Serve'.*
- *To assist The School and its Old Boys in any suitable manner, in particular in the maintenance and improvement of the standards of learning and conduct.*
- *To raise or borrow money for all or any of the foregoing objects in such manner and upon such security as may from time to time be determined by the club.*
- *To do all such other things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of all or any of the foregoing objects.*

I attended my first Old Boys Club event in September 2002 when fellow contemporary old boy Benedict Malonza invited me to the Old Boys Club annual general meeting and dinner at the Intercontinental Hotel. From then on, I became very active in The Old Boys Club matters and it appeared the *lifting* I failed to do in my school days came to the fore. I was seconded to the Executive Committee and eventually was elected vice chairman of the Club, a position I resigned from a while later due to personal concerns about some happenings at The School that rubbed my conscience the wrong way. At the time very few of the approximately 9,000 boys who had passed through The School were regularly involved in The Old Boys Club matters and I set out to publicize and popularize it to a wider audience, especially the young. Every so often on a Saturday afternoon, I hosted a get together at the Public Service Club in Upper hill where the main dish was roast chicken and the get togethers became popularized as *Kukucides*. They were well attended and various generous sponsors came on board. They brought together at various times the sitting Principal Kariuki, past principals Wagitu and Khaemba, the Old Boys Club executive members, some teachers and many Old Boys from all walks of life including university students. With the advent of WhatsApp I encouraged classes to form groups to catch up with their

contemporaries. A central information exchange of sorts made up 'The Class Marshals' group consisting of representatives from each year enabled the flow of information to a wide audience. I also made overtures to the older Old Boys and had a memorable meeting with Old Boys Jeremiah Kiereini, David Mutiso and Chris Obura at the so-called Alliance high school corner at the Karen Country Club. I became friends with John Koti of class of 1956, Nelson Kivuti class of 1957 and several other Old Boys from the very early sixties including Duncan Mindo of class of 1963, the first African state counsel for Rift Valley. I helped in setting up WhatsApp groups for classes of 1968, 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1976. I traveled to the Coast and put together an Old Boys Club Coast branch chaired by George Nesbitt of class of 1977 and we had the first successful meeting at the Mbaraki Club. The Coast branch has continued to gain strength and membership. By the time I left the Old Boys Club executive committee, plans to establish other branches across the country where the numbers warranted formation were ongoing. The message across all the groups was that their old school needed help from those that benefited from the excellent facilities and education that they enjoyed in their time.

I strongly believe that associations just like many other initiatives and more so with alumni activities thrive because of the energy, drive and passion of the persons behind them. So, with ill health dodging me from early 2013, while the passion remains the energy and drive has dissipated greatly and I have been unable to continue with the same zeal, but the flame had caught on and continues to spread. I am however still active in a few areas like the Endowment Fund in which I am a Trustee and part of the fundraising initiative. The Old Boys Club leadership encourages classes to hold get-togethers and stay connected by donating a goat for every event. I have been a guest in many of these get-togethers and the camaraderie among Old Boys spanning all ages is both amazing and encouraging. The number of Old Boys participating in these activities continues to grow and this can only result in greater impact by the alumni.

At the beginning of 2012, in an effort to launch an idea mooted earlier to digitize the school records, armed with a scanner donated by Muriithi Mutiga of class of 2000, Old Boys Barrack Obaga, Richard Kanaga, Kevin Ogutu and myself trooped to Alliance high school to start scanning the large collection of photographs. We were visibly uncomfortable mixing with teachers for a cup of

tea in the staff room when a lady was brought in tagging along a barefoot boy who we learnt was her son and had been admitted to The School. She was from Mwingi and told the teachers she had no means of raising fees for the son and she was 'donating' him to The School and at the same time she asked to be shown some work to do for her fare back home. An impromptu fundraiser was held in the staffroom and enough money was raised to buy a few items for the boy including shoes and provide fare for the lady back to Mwingi. I have followed this young man's progress and Joseph Musyoka Muasya graduated earlier this year as a mechanical engineer from JKUAT. Unfortunately his courageous mother succumbed to cervical cancer before she could enjoy the fruits of the tree she planted those many years ago. But they shall surely be enjoyed by future generations.

In 2014 in my capacity as the vice chairman of the Old Boys Club, I commissioned a committee chaired by John Mo Ohaga of class of 1984, with members Professor Alfred Omenya class of 1989, Professor Matilu Mwau and Samuel Ashene both of 1990 and Geoffrey Ogoti of 2011 to look into the possibility of setting up solar power as an alternative for The School. This was after a conversation with the then chief principal David Kariuki on the high cost of power. However, due to various factors the project did not see the light of day and was shelved.

Every year on 20th October on Mashujaa day, a great tournament pitting Old Boys, teachers and students in various games was held at The School and invariably the Old Boys would win. Old Boys also took advantage of the occasion and donated kits to various games teams. It was also a day for Old Boys not only to catch up with each other but to also interact with the students and create bonds. With the banning of visitors to schools in the third school term as a measure to curb exam cheating this initiative ceased to happen.

In July 2017, I had a major operation while on a routine annual checkup in India and as I recovered and being part of the Endowment Fund fundraising initiative, I mooted the idea of doing a cross country run partly to atone for the many shortcuts I took during my school days, but mainly to raise funds for the fund and this fitted perfectly with plans by some of the other Old Boys and the Alliance Classic Run or ACR was born and became an annual event. The first ACR in 2018 raised close to Kshs. 2,000,000/- of which I believe my own effort raised Kshs. 500,000/-

CHAPTER 4



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI



In our days the words 'University' or 'Campus' referred to only one place, that is the University of Nairobi UON with the main campus spread between Uhuru highway, University Way, Mamlaka road and Nyerere avenue. There was Kabete Campus for Veterinary studies, the Medical school at Kenyatta hospital for Medical studies, Chiromo Campus for Sciences and Kikuyu campus for adult education. Kenyatta University College was a constituent college that offered UON Bachelor of Education degrees, B.ed.

The school system right from before independence was such that very few people were invited to study here. It was thus the dream of those students, in our case A levels that felt bright enough to aspire to higher education. The UON was a great class equalizer for all of us from those in rural schools to those in national schools and even those rich kids in expensive private high schools. Once one missed the cut off points the choice for most people was to go to para secondary colleges or the job market. A few kids from rich families or those who could raise money through *harambees* would proceed to colleges abroad, mostly in

India, the UK, or the USA. A number of scholarships for the really bright ones especially in sciences were available for British Universities through the British Council and I believe six of my Alliance high school class of 1978 year mates were beneficiaries.

Post-secondary education had started in Makerere Uganda in 1922 in the then Uganda Technical College which offered courses in carpentry, Building and mechanics. In 1949 it became the University College of East Africa offering degrees in the faculties of Arts, Science and Engineering from the University of London. The Royal Technical College, Nairobi established in 1952 and University College of Dar Es Salaam established in 1961 became constituent colleges of the University College of East Africa. The University College of East Africa became the University of East Africa in 1963, breaking off the relationship with the University of London, with president Julius Nyerere of Tanzania as the first Chancellor with Nairobi and Dar ES Salaam campuses becoming constituent colleges of the University of East Africa. In line with the happenings in the other two East African countries, the University of Nairobi came into being in 1970 with president Jomo Kenyatta as the first chancellor and Dr Josephat Karanja as the first vice Chancellor. In our days, a university degree was a guarantee for a job and hence the hubris when one was invited to *receive* the power to read and do all that appertains to the degree.

Obviously, most of us at Alliance high school looked forward to joining this institution. In the meantime there were opportunities to get real jobs and real money and accelerate the process of growing up. After my A level exams, I applied and got employed as an untrained teacher at Mulala mixed day and boarding secondary school whose board chairman was Major General (Rtd.) Joseph Ndolo with John Kyuvi Matheka as headmaster at the princely monthly salary of Kshs. 984/- (a dollar then exchanged at 17.60 so the amount was equivalent to Kshs. 6,000 today). Beginning January 1979 I joined the staff with two other A level leavers Tom Nguli from Kagumo high school and Stephen Makau from Machakos high school. Among the members of staff at the school was Fr Michael O'Connor, nicknamed Fr *Kiteti* the first white man and Catholic priest I got to interact with closely on an equal basis. The really affable man loved his Tusker beer and *muthauki* as we named Sportsman cigarettes, but didn't we all? Many were the Tusker bottles and smokables we made short work of at Mulala trading center at the Nicholas Musau Muteti owned Unity bar with service from

Kachero, a most friendly and efficient barman. Taking cognizance of the priest in the happy group, one had to self-censor jokes though this would progressively become harder as the night wore on and the effects of the drink took hold.

During the first two months or so, I would board an early *matatu* every school day from Emali to Nduundune primary school and cross over on foot the rest of the way. Peter Mung'alika, a business man in Emali who was a very good friend paid for me a daily breakfast at the Chonjo bar and restaurant of tea and *bandika*, bread slices with Blue Band margarine which would energize me for the long trek to Mulala. I would then get a lift from the headmaster in the evening on his vespa scooter back to Emali. I got down to imparting knowledge to the young minds and really enjoyed teaching biology to form one and form two, and English to form three in addition to a couple of other subjects. I believe the pass rate for Kenya Junior Secondary Examination, KJSE in 1979 and 1980 by the classes I taught set a record that remained unbeaten up to the time the exam was abolished. This success was partly from the support by the school management as the headmaster furnished the text books I recommended. In addition, a large number of the students were really sharp and inquisitive and these combined to motivate me to give it my best shot. I also tried to introduce an after school French class but the takers were few, and it started to run into pub opening hours and so I abandoned the effort.

A couple of months into the employment, Tom Nguli and I joined forces and rented three rooms at Mulala market behind teacher Menze's hotel with one room as a communal kitchen and the other two as our separate bedrooms. The erstwhile daily evening lifts to Emali by the headmaster John Matheka on his Vespa Scooter changed to Fridays only. I had a choice to come back either on Sunday evenings by *matatu* directly to Mulala or early on Monday morning on my normal route of a *matatu* to Nduundune primary school and then on foot the rest of the way. A major challenge I found as a teacher was to fend off often blatant advances from the school girls, especially those whose academic performance was below par. I never did manage to find out what they would have expected in return and whether the other teachers faced the same challenges.

I reported at the University of Nairobi on Monday 1st October 1979 for a three year Bachelor of Commerce degree course together with other freshers. We started off on a one week orientation with lessons set to start the following Monday on 8th October. The orientation week was meant to give the freshers

an opportunity to acclimatize with the new environment of the university like classes, halls of residence, meal times and places and so on. On Sunday 7th Oct a large group of us University students staged a major protest demonstration along Nairobi streets to protest the banning of Ex KPU (Kenya Peoples Union) leaders, and former Kitutu East MP George Anyona from participating in elections. We also demanded the reinstatement of Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o back in the university's department of literature. We were sent home for a few weeks as a result. About twenty percent of the students in my BCom class were former classmates at Alliance high school and the sister school Alliance girls' high school but all in all, majority of the students were really cool guys and girls many of whom are friends to date. Most of our classes were held in Education Theatre II of the main campus. The academic journey commenced with introduction to new subjects in the curriculum such as accounting, auditing, quantitative methods, law of contract, computer science and behavioral science along with several others. I also learnt new terminologies like Continuous Assessment Tests, CATs that would account for 30% of the marks at the end of each semester. I had a fairly loaded post office savings bank book from my nine month teaching engagement and I furnished room 307 in Hall Seven, also known as Nile Hall which I was allocated with a serious music system and the latest LPs and singles.

The Central Catering Unit, CCU where we took our meals was filthy and sometimes the smelly food would be served on filthy utensils by insolent staff in filthy uniform. In February 1980, there was an outbreak of stomach ailments one evening from suspected food poisoning. A riot broke out the following morning in what became known as the Murathe food riots after the selfsame activist of today David Murathe with widespread breakage of utensils, windows and doors of the catering buildings. We were subsequently sent off on early Easter holidays. When the university reopened, the CCU was spanking clean with new utensils and three course meals with clean and courteous staff. Just before we broke off for the actual Easter holidays in late March, we received a refund of the fees for the February closure in a mini *boom*. The academic calendar was fairly light and allowed for social activities especially after I made sure my CAT marks were above 20% narrowing the gap for the main exam to attain the 40% pass mark. I fell into the university routine of being at the various places at the required times. Carrying a clipboard felt like a major milestone in academic achievement and set us university students apart from the rest of the populace.

Dressing in King Jeans or corduroy trousers and jacket with personalized T-shirts from Pop-In shop on Government road before it became Moi Avenue, and stiletto boots from the African Boot Company of Kenyatta Avenue set us the mod guys apart from the rest. In the faculty of commerce, there was apartheid of some kind with Accounting option glorified over the Marketing option and an Insurance option that was introduced during our first year. Socializing with Boxers, as the female students were referred to was the epitome of achievement for every male student and some who seemed to attract them effortlessly were the envy of the entire male fraternity. Their company was highly coveted in the hope that an unattached *Boxer* may notice the friend. Coming from national schools gave some of us boys a head start with Boxers as we had interacted a lot during frequent common activities in our respective high schools.

The Faculty of Commerce had Ngotho wa Kariuki as Dean. He taught Taxation, Accounting and Auditing with other lecturers like Joe Kimura and NTT Simiyu while Law was taught by J.B Kangwana, Pheroze Nowrojee, and Leonard Njagi who once cracked a hilarious joke during a lecture of a female student who had missed class for a number of days, when asked where she had been she had innocently replied, "I was under the doctor," causing great laughter all around. There were many other brilliant members of the faculty like Lukoma for Quantitative Methods QM, Mukhwana for Behavioral Science, Nick Dyson for computer science and others who did their part to shape us into future builders of the nation of Kenya.

For leisure Paul Mwake an engineer from Mulala whose father was in the second world war with my father in Burma and Madagascar, and one of my hosts at UON when I visited my cousin back in 1975 became a great resource for entertainment financing. Friday evenings would start at Hilton's Ivory bar and end up in the wee hours at the Eclipse discotheque on Kimathi Street where Voice of Kenya's Abdul Haq, the man with the longest Q in Town as guest DeeJay would spin the latest Motown releases. Some Saturday afternoons I would find my way to Panafric hotel where my brother-in-law Henry Kyatha worked, and we would end up at the famous Wakamba meeting joint of Falcon hotel on Mfangano street next to the widely known Njoguini bar and restaurant. I was generally spoilt for choice as other times I would join my cousin Joshua Mutisya who was then working at Mobil and lived in Nairobi West at the popular Jean's bar, or go to sample Kakai Kilonzo's Kilimambogo Brothers band offerings at *Athusi* bar and

restaurant on Saturday afternoon, before winding up at Park Road's Swanga Inn in the evening. Yet other weekends I would end up at Dandora where my elder brother John lived, and we would dance all night long to Muema Brothers live music at Dunia II bar. Somehow, I seemed to have adequate cash though not too much but enough to get along.

UON students were granted an automatic loan that was paid directly to the university to cater for tuition, boarding and other institutional expenses. Additionally, students received cash allowances – the famous *boom* for purchase of stationery and general upkeep not catered for by the university. It was called *boom* after Uganda's famous Chepkube coffee *boom* that saw Kenyans sneak to Bungoma to smuggle Ugandan coffee in the late 1970S. The *boom* heralded an intense but short lived session of partying before the cash ran out and the students settled back to studies. I had made friends with Kyalo who managed the Mount Kenya bar at Serena and he would allow me a few drinks on credit once the *boom* period checked in and before I got my own allowance. The huge discrepancies in the price of alcohol in the various establishments had not been introduced yet.

One Saturday afternoon, some friends invited me to accompany them to Small World Country club in Lukenya where we partied and danced to music by L'Orchestra Somajeko. I blacked out in the washroom and when I was woken up by persistent knocking, it was already Sunday morning and my friends had left after they failed to find me. I had very little cash and the only option was to try and get a lift as in the meantime, I set out walking towards Nairobi. I was flagging *matatus* as I went along but they were very few on Sunday morning. Finally one *matatu* stopped and I asked the conductor for a lift but luckily one of the passengers from Emali recognized me and offered to pay for me.

On one of the evenings in first year, a year-mate and I strolled over to Mount Kenya bar at Serena hotel where I took a few Tusker Export beers while my friend, a teetotaler took a few Coca-Cola's. On the way back we took a short cut just after the YWCA and as we neared the Suitcase, as the women hall 12 was called a guy came out of the bushes brandishing a *simi*. I thought since he was alone the two of us could take him on, but my friend ran off and I was left to fend for myself. I managed to beat him off but not before he landed one sword on my head, and I ended up at Kenyatta hospital casualty where I got six stitches. For the next several months I was in a hat until my afro hairdo leveled out. And that's how I drank my way through my university first year and barely scraped through

my end year exams. A number of my friends either sat supplementary exams, repeated first year or were discontinued. Clearly something had to change, and it did and I resolved to take my studies more seriously from that time onwards. Second year male students in what were considered less strenuous courses were accommodated out of campus and I ended up at the Green View Lodge, GVL near Serena. I had planned to cut down on social activities beginning that year but being accommodated at GVL came with its own challenges. GVL was the social headquarters of the who was who in Ukambani at the time, and they were very generous with us Akamba university students with an occasional request to introduce a *Boxer* or two.

In the second month, I camped at the office of the Dean of students with a self-written letter spelling out unequivocally that unless I was moved back to accommodation on campus I was heading for certain failure. I was then allocated room 210 in Hall 10, named Dag Hammarskjöld after the United Nations Secretary General who had died in a plane crash. Classmate Jacob Oludhe Ondik *Maxi* aka *A Man Is Good Is Good How*, the English equivalent of the original Dholuo nickname of *ng'ama ber to ber nadi* was in a room across the aisle and became not only a good study companion but a drinking mate as well for the rest of my stay at UON. I truly then cut down on entertainment to an occasional beer or two at The Pub at 680 hotel or as I listened to jukebox music at Afro Unity bar nicknamed *Hall 14* near Jevanjee Gardens. During my first year, classmate Julius Muvea Muinde and I had staggered out of this bar one morning heading for a CAT which I failed miserably. On some occasions I would find myself either dancing to Moreno's music at Hallians club on Tom Mboya Avenue accompanied by cousin Peter Mutisya, or Mangelepa music at Garden Square or either Super Mazembe or Samba Mapangala at Inn On The Park.

I had two very special friends who made my life pretty easy, Thomas Mbondo head waiter for banquets and outside catering at The Norfolk hotel and Julius Soo, Banquet manager at The Intercontinental hotel. On arrangement, I would occasionally entertain a guest of the fair gender for 10 am or 4pm tea at any of the two establishments at my two friend's cost. Tom was a steady source of packets of upmarket State Express cigarettes which gave me quite some class in the Sportsman smoking University of Nairobi community. After serving us tea and some delicacies at the Delamere Terrace of the Norfolk hotel, Tom would declare, "Mzee will settle the bill" giving me great extra mileage. I had gotten

into the nicotine dependent club in my early years in high school for reasons explained elsewhere in this book. Around this time, I tried to befriend a *Boxer* called Sophie who confessed that though she found me attractive, she could not stand the smell of stale tobacco that I carried around and so that venture petered out. The matter of my smoking had come up in various fora but in 1982 I visited my sister Ruth over a weekend at her home in Kikima, Mbooni. She complained that the cigarette smoke was adversely affecting her children's health. She asked me to stop the habit and made an offer, a motivator I could not refuse that she would give me Kshs. 1,000/- for every week I did not smoke for up to four weeks. I suppose there was an unspoken alternative of being banned from visiting her home. I had noted that after a heavy night's drinking and smoking, I would be nauseated by toothpaste and that is how I got through the four weeks, by carrying a tube of toothpaste and licking it when the urge to smoke reared its ugly nicotine head. This in addition to eating pears helped me kick out nicotine dependency for good and I have never looked back again. Do not ask if I went back to Sophie because I had already moved on and I guessed she had too.

In the course of the two years during my second and third years, we were sent home once or twice after a riot over some national or university issue. The Moi government tried to make peace with university students and I recall that he took a number of us on a trip to China. I tried to get myself into the entourage but it turned out you had to know someone, Kenya's euphemism for corruption to get on the trip. In third year a number of University mates proposed that I vie for a position in SONU the students' organization with a team that had Tito Adungosi vying for chairman. I declined for two reasons, one, my great grandfather had cursed political involvement for all his descendants and my brother, a hitherto successful businessman had subsequently lost everything after he dared vie for a councilor's position which he lost anyway. Two, the rate at which student leaders were being expelled from the university was a great demotivator.

In July of 1982 on a Friday evening, Mulu Mutisya who was the patron of the Akamba University Students Union, AUSU took us for a party at State House, he had hosted a couple of such parties at Green View Lodge previously. Amid merry making and drunkenness with a few currency notes in the pocket courtesy of Moi's generosity, the better known of us were offered jobs in various government institutions. We were to finish our studies the following month and I was placed at Central Bank while a few others were placed in various parastatals.

We were instructed to collect appointment letters to the allocated organizations upon completing our university exams from Mulu Mutisya's office on Njugu lane behind Barclays bank Market branch. Later that night we were a happy lot as we wended our boisterous and drunken way back to the UON halls of residence.

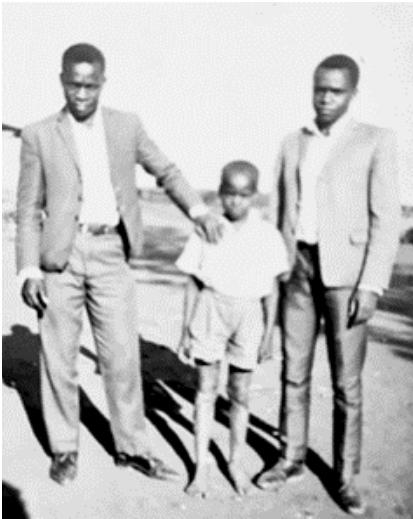
My three weeks final university exams were to begin on Monday 2nd August 1982, before Hezekiah Ochuka and Pancreas Oteyo Okumu decided they wanted to be President of the Republic of Kenya on the night of Saturday July 31st and disrupted life as we knew it in Kenya. As I burnt the midnight oil on that fateful Saturday night cum Sunday morning, powering my way to a first class honors degree I could hear sporadic gunfire from my room. I crossed over and woke up my classmate Jacob Ondik who remarked, "It must be Patrick Shaw battling robbers" as he promptly went back to sleep. Patrick Shaw was a greatly feared larger than life crime buster both physically and metaphorically, a police reservist who was also on the staff of the Starehe Boy's Centre. As the day broke, Nairobi woke up to a strange phenomenon with soldiers and young people driving Kenya Buses and other vehicles aimlessly all over the place, and clearly drunk soldiers firing in the air. Earlier on announcements had been made from Voice of Kenya announcing the take-over of the government by the armed forces with chairman of the Students Organization of Nairobi University SONU Titus Adungosi voicing support for the coup on behalf of the students. Having been promised employment at Central Bank, I had started window shopping for household items and had identified a neat Kenwood music system at a shop in Standard Building in town. As students were returning laden with various wares, I decided to go pick my chosen music system. I did not get far as loyal forces had already swung into action starting with the rout at the Voice of Kenya so I and other students ran back to the halls of residence literally for dear life. Before the end of the day, we learnt that the attempt had been by a small section of Air Force personnel who had been overpowered. They were being routed out progressively from the areas they had briefly captured and the word curfew was introduced into Kenyan national vocabulary. The university catering staff were housed in Kabete and were regularly bussed in early in the morning and could not come that morning and there was no one to prepare meals for us. We broke into the kitchen and made do with what we could for the three meals of that day which included boiled eggs, black tea or coffee and Weetabix cereal mixed with hot water as there was no milk.

The university was closed indefinitely and we were ordered to vacate the premises with all exits manned by army personnel who brutally manhandled students as we were all required to hold aloft our identity cards as we left campus. My brother Joel had bought for me a Raymond suit outfit complete with shoes and a briefcase in preparation for job hunting and attending interviews before the Mulu Mutisya facilitated Central Bank promise had come along. I suited myself on that crucial morning and hid my student identity card in my socks. I passed the check point like someone heading to work and boarded bus no 8 at the All Saints Cathedral bus stop, and ended up at my brother-in-law's house in Olympic estate Kibera. The following day word spread around that the army were doing house to house searches for air force personnel and university students and I therefore had to leave. I managed to get a *Matatu* heading to Kibwezi near OTC in town in which I found a couple of fellow students and I was truly glad to eventually see Emali, my home town. With the reported deaths of many university students, which thankfully turned out to be mostly false, anxiety was high and every arrival of a university student was cause for great celebration. I had traveled home with only the clothes on my back borrowed from my brother-in-law as I had to preserve the suit for its intended purpose of job seeking. A couple of weeks later I caught a lift with Major General (Rtd.) Ndolo as he went about his business in Nairobi, and I was able to collect my belongings from my room at the university. Our driver for the trip was the General's then fourteen year old son David Ngau. We had been ordered to report twice a week to the chief and I made friends with the Mulala chief's office clerical officer called Kasimba who had attempted his clerical accounts exams several times without success. I took to coaching him and he became a great friend and would occasionally mark me present on the twice weekly reporting days in my absence. He passed when he sat the hitherto elusive exams a month or two later which earned him a promotion and transfer to the district commissioner's office in Machakos. We had a great celebration at Unity bar in Mulala to mark the occasion.

On one of the reporting days late in August of that year, we were instructed to report to the Machakos district police headquarters complete with student and national IDs. We faced tough questions from grim faced Special Branch officers on personal movements in the days leading to, and on the day of the attempted coup including who we saw or were with and so on. A few days later a group of students were arraigned in court on a charge of taking part in a riot but they were

eventually released with no charges after 7 months of court appearances. It seemed those who were well known by their official names, sports people especially of the Mean Machine rugby team, thespians in plays presented at the university and those that had vied for leadership positions were the victims. Those known by nicknames escaped the dragnet except my good friend George *Sly* Kathembe. The reporting requirement was eased to once a week and eventually removed altogether. I moved to Mombasa and took up managing my brother-in-law's farm at Mtwapa. After about 9 months in limbo we were recalled towards the end of April 1983 and went directly into exams. After finishing exams I found my way to Mulu Mutisya's office to collect my appointment letter to Central Bank. The receptionist told me that neither president Moi nor Mulu Mutisya wanted anything to do with ungrateful students who had tried to overthrow the government. At the 57th graduation ceremony of the University of Nairobi held on Wednesday 7th December 1983 presided and over by the Chancellor H.E Daniel T. Arap Moi, I and other classmates were given the power to read and do all that appertains to the degree of Bachelor of Commerce accounting option. I attended with my visibly proud mother and was already working as a district accountant in the Kilifi Treasury at the time. The date, 7th December would have an extremely painful significance in the distant future when I lost my son David Mbevi to suicide on the same date in 2017.

PICTORIALS



▲ My elder brothers Joel Mweteeli, on my right and Joseph Nzeve and myself (1965)



▲ The Kwakakulu hill shrine Ithembo



➤ Kwakakulu hill with the Kiundi homestead in the foreground.



▲ The walk from home to school felt like 10kms those days(1966-1972).



▲ A view of part of the village from Kwakakulu hill.



▲ Sample Standard seven CPE Certificate.

A SHOT IN THE ARM

Life Insurance firm BimaNet has partnered with Alliance High School Old Boys Club to raise money for the club's endowment fund. In turn, the club endorsed BimaNet's flagship product, Linda Fanaka, and will now market it via its more than 10,000 members. For every product sold through the network, the fund will receive a donation from BimaNet. The move aims at helping the club raise Sh6.5 billion by 2025 for Alliance High School's centenary celebrations. This year, it aims to disburse Sh1.3 million in scholarships to students from financially challenged backgrounds at the school.

TEXT: SANDRA WEKESA PHOTOS: EUSTACE MAINA



BimaNet chairman Charles Ng'ang'a with the firm's financial director John Ndara.



4Up Digital founder George Kagwe with Alliance High School Endowment Fund trustee Richard Kiundi.

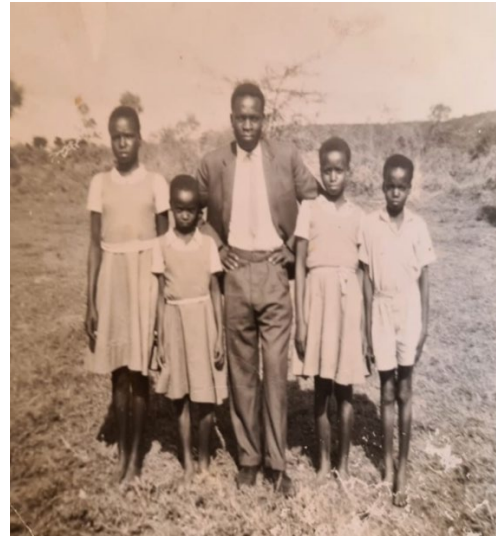


BimaNet CEO Wanjiru Githiomi Ng'ang'a with the firm's business development executive Cyrus Mettu.

◀ The team at BimaNet. I was engaged as a Business Development Executive. The BimaNet Linda Tanaka insurance product was truly revolutionary. Unfortunately, Covid 19 brought down the initiative.



▲ The Kiundis in order of seniority from left to right Joseph, John, Rabecca, Esther, William, Ruth and myself. Two, the first born Joel and last born Josephine passed on a while back. Day of our mother's funeral (2012).



▲ My elder siblings L to R: Rabecca Nthambi, Ruth Mutindi, Joel Mweteeli, Esther Ndunge and William Makau (1965).



◀ My family at the Monte Casino in Johannesburg in December where we watched a live performance of *The Lion King*. Margaret my wife, took the photo and is therefore missing in it. L to R: Myself, Mumo, Ndunge, Mbevi and Kyavi (2007)



▲ My family at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. I took the photo therefore missing in it. L to R: Mbevi, Kyavi, Ndunge, Margaret and Mumo (2007).



◀ My family at the Hector Pieterse Memorial in Orlando West, Soweto, Johannesburg L to R: Kyavi, Ndunge, Mbevi, Myself (partly hidden), Margaret and Mumo (2007).



▲ A most prized birthday gift from my children before our last-born Mumo arrived (1990).



▲ My wife Margaret and I with the Kyathas in Nova Scotia Canada when we visited them. L to R: Back row: Myself, Henry, Margaret, Ruth, Katinda and Mueni. Front: Kioko and Kay. (1990)



▲ Margaret and I with Mueni and Kioko when we visited the Kyatha family in Nova Scotia, Canada in the middle of winter (1990).



▲ Me with Dr Roland Jung and his children, a close friend of the Kyathas in Nova Scotia Canada (1990).

➤
At Arcadia
University, Nova
Scotia where
my sister Ruth
Kyatha was a
student (1990).





◀
*Armstrong
Nzamba Kioli
with family.
Wife Purity and
daughters Yvonne
Mutanu and Ivy
Syombua. A very
special family to
me (2020).*



▶
*Hanging out
with Armstrong
Nzamba Kioli
aka
VTOM
(Venerable Total
Old Man) (2009).*



▲ Margaret and I with our hosts on a visit to Southern Austria (2008).



▲ Getting ready for a trek across the hills and forests of Southern Austria near the Hungarian border (2008).



▲ Margaret and I at the ICC at The Hague. This was a number of years before certain prominent Kenyans found their noisy involuntary way there (2009).



▲ Lake Bogoria hot springs (1995)



◀
Lake
Nakuru
(1995)



▲ Lunch break at Lake Nakuru National park. Danson Kyavi (1995)



▲ Hotel Sirikwa in Eldoret (1995)



▲ At our house in Wundanyi, Taita Taveta, my mother holding Ndunge with my wife and nephew Wambua (1986)



▲ With family at Mzima Springs in Tsavo West National Park (1994)



◀
Ndunge
and her
cousin
Wambua
(1986)



▲ Nairobi family home taking shape. Lead consultant was nephew Felix Muli Lati who had just graduated as an architect from the University of Nairobi(2001).



▲ L to R: Sister in law Charlene, Mother in Law Joyce and wife Margaret at Kwakotoe near Emali (2021).



◀
With mother-in-law Joyce Nduku Katambo at her home in Kwakotoe, Mbitini Sub county of Makueni. (1986)



▲ My mother Serah and Uncle Mutisya Kambela Yambu (2008).



▲ On a visit to my wife's maternal grandparents in Ndolo, Kilungu. (1994)

► Samson Mwongela Kimei had requested me to buy a Kaunda suit and matching socks for him. Unfortunately by the time I delivered them he was quite unwell (2009)



▲ My father-in-law David Mbevi Katambo (1967)



▲ Danson Kiundi and son John Mutune (1965)



◀ *Danson Kiundi
in Moshi after
demobilization
from the
Colonial
army(1945)*



▶ *My first photo
at Alliance high
school. It was
on my student
identity
card(1973).*



▲ *Grandfather Maati and wife Nguta
with Kwakakulu family members when
they visited from his Tanzania home circa
(1965)*



▲ *L to R: Elder brother Joseph, Myself, Aunt Mutave
holding Georgina, Joseph's second born, my sister Loko
holding her son Wambua, Zipporah, Joseph's wife and
elder brother John holding Alexia Joseph's first born.
(1978)*



◀ On a weekend in University of Nairobi when there was BOOM as the student allowance was called. (1979 or 1980)



▲ Written interview for admission to Alliance high school. There was an oral one too(1972).

MM Michael Mowat
Re: HEADMASTER ALLAN C.E. SANDERS
To: Richard Kiundi

3 November 2021 at 2:29 PM

Dear Richard

I was surprised, after being recommended by the 'Teachers Abroad' NGO for appointment to the Alliance staff, when Allan Sanders (at the request perhaps of Fred Welch) took the trouble of travelling over from the Reading Bluecoats School in June 1974 specially to visit me in South London, to 'check me out' and (presumably) report back to Alliance about me! I never actually knew his other names. I arrived there in September 1974.

Anyway, I still tell people that, as I look back, I see that it was a huge privilege for me at the age of 24 to be involved for 5 years with outstanding pupils in superb facilities. The experience of sharing drama productions with them was a highlight of those years, and an achievement that I can be proud of. After Alliance, apart from a one-term teaching experience, I never taught pupils again!

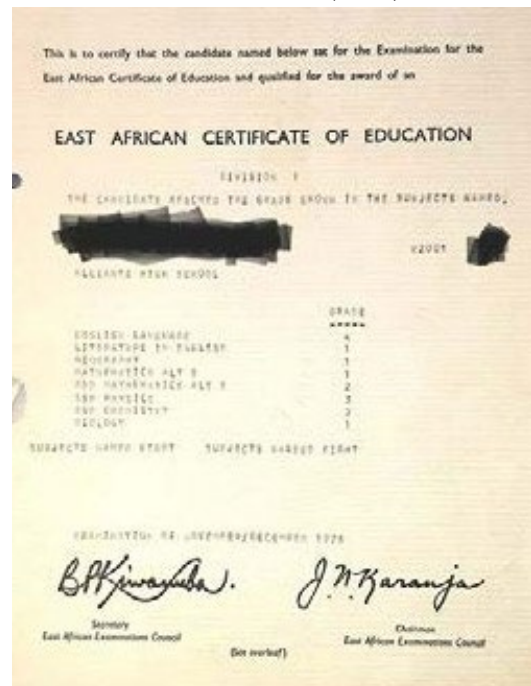
I still treasure the coast-carved ceremonial stick that Alban Mwendar presented as a leaving present from members of the Dramatic Society. Alban also has a complete set of the school magazines, 1973 to 1979 which I handed over to him in January 2019. These contain little school news, apart from Staff, Sports, Drama, Clubs, and House Reports, but one of them does include a rather interesting article by Mr Wangai on his relinquishing the post of Headmaster before Githaiga returned for his second term of office.

I remember hearing one or two overnight disturbances going on at school, but did not go outside my house to investigate. I think I was on leave from March 1977 for 3 months, when maybe what you refer to took place.

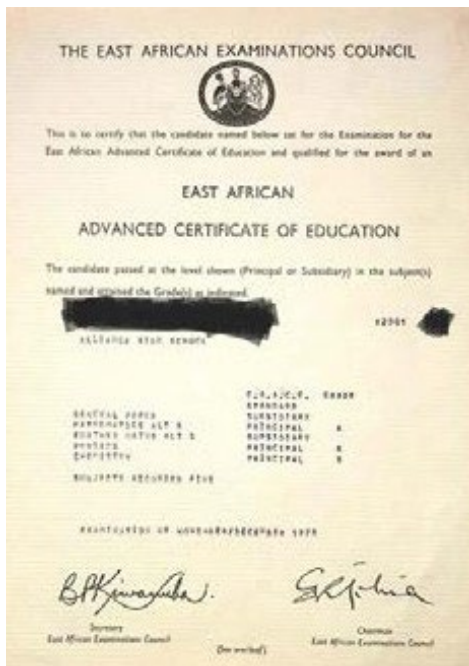
Wishing you all the best with your project!

Michael Mowat

▲ Expatriate teacher recruitment for The School, especially from Great Britain was very elaborate



▲ Sample form four "O" Level Certificate



▲ Sample form six "A" Level certificate



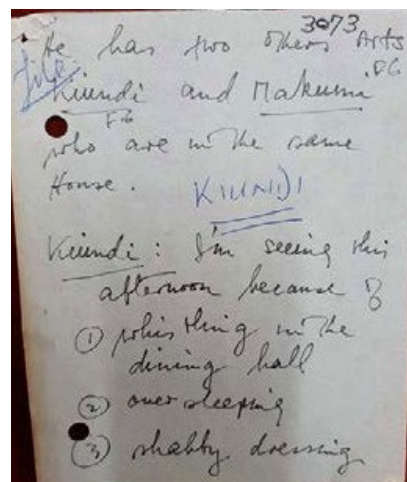
▲ The letter written to my father when I was caught with other students taking alcohol at the local shopping center called Mai a Ithi. I was then in Form 3(1975)



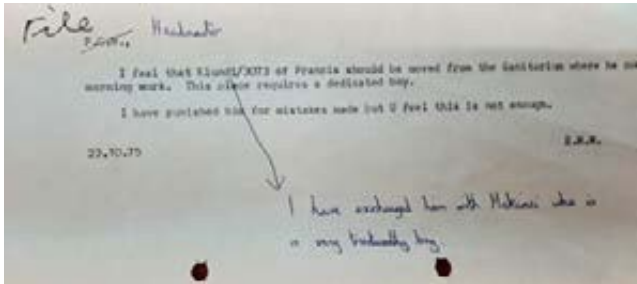
▲ At the finish line during the Alliance Classic Run with Teacher John Karimi, Endowment Fund chair Daniel Ndonye AHS class of 1969 and Kang'au Keega of class of 1992.(2019)



▲ On the ACR trail with J.B. Kimani of AHS class of 1992.(2018)



➤ My past rushes up to catch up with me!(1977)



▲ When you realize you were not the model student you always thought you were.(1975)



▲ On a visit to The School with other Old Boys most of whom were from my class of 1978(2015).



▲ National French essay contest winners I won first prize(1978).



▲ Senior prefects with headmaster Jackson Githaiga, and his deputy Wahome (1978)



▲ AHS Students from Lower Eastern Kenya- Ukambani (1975)



◀
*Class Upper
 Six Arts with
 Economics teacher
 Emmanuel Mudidi
 (1978)*



◀
*With fellow
 F3s L:R Myself,
 Steve Makimei,
 Hammerton
 Shungula, Stanley
 "Snyidho" Otieno
 and Joel "Kajiwe"
 Kupalia(1975).*



◀
*At Alliance high
 school class of 1990
 reunion at the
 Nairobi
 club (2017).*



▲ I joined the Alliance high school class of 1984 at a get together at Elementaita Resort three days after I turned 60 years old(2019).

►
With George
"Ja'Ugenya"
Oloo, Fellow
Franciscan
and year mate
at The School
swimming pool.
Wide belts were
in vogue at the
time.(1975)



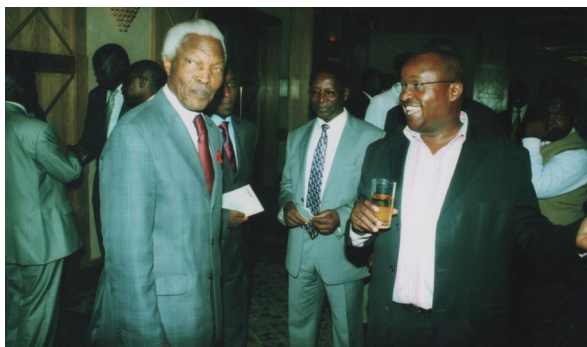
▲ Nelson Kivuti Sch No 1372, AHS class of 1957 and his wife visited me at home soon after I returned from hospital in India and I took the advantage to dress him up in a school sweater (2014).

►
A Kukucide
at Public
Service Club
(2011)



▲ Sharing a cup of tea with young old boy Phil Kimani of Nakuru (2020).





▲ With the founding chairman of the AHS Endowment fund Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat at an Old Boys Club event (2011).



◀ At Mwembe Tayari, Mombasa getting ready for upcountry travel (1980)



◀ In full school uniform (1978)

➤ With fellow Alliance high school class of 1978 students, standing left to right: Stanley Mutwiri, Musembi Munyao and Jackson Maingi with Julius Mwiti crouching and myself sitting (1978).



▲ Addressing an Old Boys Club AGM (2019).



▲ At a reception for old boy Ngugi wa Thiong'o hosted by AHS class of 1990 year (2015).



▲ With fellow class of 1978 Old Boys at an annual dinner and general meeting of the Alliance high school Old Boys Club at Intercontinental Hotel. L to R Paul Muinde, Edwin Kinyash Kinyanjui, myself and Ken Obimbo (2018).



▲ Reviewing and approving The Alliance high school Endowment Fund accounts with fellow Trustees Donald Kaniaru and Kihara Maina with Starlings Muchiri of The Secretariat (2020).



▲ I, with Alliance high school year mates from L to R: Dan Minjire Kibira, and Allan "Finyo" Omolo stopped at Karatina for a cup of coffee with fellow old boy and former principal Miricho Wagitu. We were headed back to Nairobi after attending a graduation party for the wife of another year mate Mathenge Gitonga at his home in Ihururu, Nyeri. (2020)



▲ Madam Tussaud's wax museum in Amsterdam (2009)



▲ With fellow teachers at Mulala Mixed Day and Boarding Secondary School (1979).

A photograph of a long, narrow list of names and numbers, titled "UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI 1979/80 ADMISSIONS". The list is organized into columns.

◀ UON BCom Admission for 1979/80 Academic year. I am number 1 on the list.



▲ Relaxing at the student center of the University of Nairobi with fellow students (1981).

With fellow Bachelor of Commerce students at main campus. (1982). ▼



Shooting the breeze with Miss Mulekyo, a teacher at Emali Secondary School. I was teaching at Mulala. (1979). ▼





▲ Graduation rehearsals with Elisheba, fellow Bachelor of Commerce graduand. (1983).

►
At the Halls
of Residence,
University
of Nairobi,
Main Campus
(1981).



▲ Outside my house at Cooperative Staff Village in Kilifi (1984)



▲ Graduation day on Dec. 7th 1983 with my proud mother Serah.



▲ Graduation day on December 7th 1983.

►
*Nephew Philip
Musembi and
I chilling in
his room at
the University
of Nairobi
(1980).*



▲ Lunch at Kitchen one (1981).

►
*With UON
BCom
year mates
Jennifer and
Rose (1980)*





▲ With UON BCom year mate Tom Nguli in his room (1982)



▲ Outside my office in Kilifi in (1985)



▲ My wife with daughter Ndunge and a family friend outside our government house in Kilifi (1985).



▲ In Kilifi Cooperative staff village (1984)



▲ My cousin Christine Ndeve Mutisya when she visited me in Kilifi (1984)



▲ *Our residence near Sungululu primary school*



▲ *With Nthiga on way from church in Wundanyi (1986)*



► *With Nthiga,
Assistant
District
Internal
Auditor, Taita
Taveta district
(1986)*



◀ *On a visit to Tsavo East National Park with wife Margaret, Daughter Ndunge, Mother Serah and cousin George Mukai (1987).* ▲



▲ With Ndunge at Aruba dam in Tsavo East National park (1987)



▲ Chief Accountant Yamaha Motors in the office



▲ Tussling for the ball as part of the Motor Mart Group football team (1994)



▲ At Aruba dam, Tsavo East National park. L to R Cousin George Mukai Mutisya, Wife Margaret, Ndunge, Game Warden Munai and Serah my mother (1987).



In BimaNet office where I was engaged as a Business Development Executive (2019)



Kenya Police Reserve recruit Kiundi reporting for target practice sir! My days in Kenya Police Reserve in the early 90's. (1992)



▲ My first car bought for Kshs. 18,000/- and sold a year later for Kshs. 32,000/- after I joined Toyota Kenya and had to declare my loyalty in word and deed! (1985)



▲ *My first company car met with a nasty accident as I cruised in the back routes near Kambu Four Farm (1990).*



▲ *My first company car at Toyota Kenya in (1989)*



▲ *Hanging out with fellow Wazee at Kionyweni bar before John Kilonzo bought it and renamed it Wagon Hotel, Park Road, Nairobi (1993)*

Motor Mart Group Football Team (1994) ▼



MEMO

RECEIVED
27 DEC 1995
KPC

To: SA
From: SAM
Cc: (b)(6)
Subject: **RE: ABSENCE ON LEAVE**

This is further to my discussion of this morning regarding an absence on leave. As indicated, I am strongly recommending that Mr. R. Kiundi join after the office in my absence. I am basing my recommendation on my evaluation of all the staff holding under my portfolio.

I trust that my recommendation shall not be misinterpreted for any reason.

Wakiba Sam.

A.C.O. ODIAMBO

ATMO confirmed I could handle the office. And I did! ▲

SPO(GA) THRO/CA
ATMO(C)

Staff Kiundi (MO)
11st January 96

CONFIRMATION - RICHARD K. KIUNDI CONO.TMO

Mr. Kiundi joined the company at the beginning of February, 1995 as Accountant II in Product Accounting.

Since joining Mr. Kiundi has shown alot of interest towards his job and he has satisfactorily performed the following duties:

Comparison of:-

1. Receipts from Mainline to mainline
2. Deliveries to WKPL Depots as well as Nairobi Shippers Depots.
3. Ship tank movement
4. Month end tankage balance

In addition, he has participated in month-end stock taking, preparation of shippers' invoices, authorisation of petty cash payments and delivery of advice notes to Shippers.

Upon SAM processing on leave, Mr. Kiundi has performed the duties of that office very satisfactorily. During this time he was assigned duties of posting and reconciling KPCF stock movements and any other duties assigned to him by ATMO/C. He has shown excellent leadership qualities.

Taking above into consideration, it is recommended that Mr. Kiundi should be confirmed on permanent basis as Accountant II Product Accounting.

F. K. NYAMU
FKN/mmm

When personal prejudices enter into official business. ATMO confirmed I could handle the office. And I did! ▲

MEMO

RECEIVED
5 NOV 1996
KPC

To: SPO(GA) THRO/CA
From: ATMO(C)
Cc: (b)(6)
Subject: **MR. RICHARD K. KIUNDI CONO. 2383**

The above named member of staff joined this company on 8th February, 1995 as an Accountant II (Products) and was posted to Nairobi Terminal to deputise Mr. A. Odiambo (SAM). During that time he was assigned the following duties:

1. Calculation and confirmation of product receipts from mainline.
2. Calculation and confirmation of product deliveries to Western Kenya depots.
3. Determination of product and ship tank movements.
4. Calculation of month-end tankage balances.
5. Calculation and confirmation of daily product deliveries to Shippers.
6. Preparation of Shippers invoices.
7. Authorisation of petty cash payments.
8. Authorisation of stock transfer certificate to Shippers.

From December, 1995 when SAM went on leave and was subsequently transferred to head Office Mr. Kiundi assumed the responsibility of being incharge of Product Accounts. Together with the normal day to day duties which include the co-ordination of product accounts functions in the total pipeline system, Mr. Kiundi was assigned to investigate the colossal amounts of money recovered from KPC by Shippers against the product losses for 1994. The results of this investigation have so far resulted in the recovery of approximately KShs.33 million from Shippers with the balance fully recoverable as it was established beyond reasonable doubt that the excess product losses in the KPC system in 1994 were as a result of wrong calibration of KPRL AGO tank 306.

Mr. Kiundi was also assigned the duty to consolidate Shippers' products stocks statements to provide a global loss status of the entire system since the commissioning of the WKPL. This exercise has gone on very well and is nearing completion with updates so far done upto December, 1995.

All in all, the performance of the duties assigned to Mr. Kiundi shows a very clear understanding of his job and a commendable commitment that enables him to produce accurate and timely reports.

▲ *Vote of confidence from the ATMO, my line supervisor*

-2-

It is my recommendation therefore that in order to further enhance this commitment and excellence in Mr. Kiundi's performance he should be immediately upgraded to Accountant I in charge of all product accounts matters.

F. K. NYAMU
FKN/mmm

▲ *Promotion recommendation by ATMO my line supervisor*

MEMO



To: **SAM** (10/12/95) **CONFIDENTIAL** **RE: KJUNDI**

From: **AKI**

Re: **ABSENCE FROM DUTY**

On 14.12.95 you requested the permission for to leave in the afternoon as asked by your wife's mother to attend to her mother. The understanding was that you would be back in the office by 4.30 p.m. at the same day. You were indeed on no return.

On 15.12.95 you absented yourself from duty the whole day. This matter raised the serious question as to the office of your absence. From 1984, you have been in the office of your absence as a result of the fact that you have not been in the office of the office.

It must be noted that the fact that you have been in the office of your absence from duty is a matter of concern to the management and I am sure that you will be able to explain the situation to the management. I am sure that you will be able to explain the situation to the management.

A. C. O. ODHIAMBO

▲ And the war continues full steam ahead

To: **SAM**

From: **AKI - PS 10**

Re: **ATM(O), SPO(GA), CA 18.12.95**

SUBJECT: ABSENCE FROM DUTY

I am in receipt of your memo of even date which was not totally unexpected.

On 14.12.95 I left the office at around 3pm with your permission to have my car attended and told you I will try to be back in an hour which I was not able to. While I appreciate that such things should be done during one's own time, I at least asked and was granted permission by yourself.

On 15.12.95 I woke up feeling unwell and therefore could not make it to the office and as you were not there and I also had no access to a telephone, I could not inform you.

I would like to point out that I have not absented myself from duty without your permission. This accusation is in keeping with your General bias against some of us in the office and me in particular. Ever since I joined this Company, you have maintained a very negative attitude towards me.

If I ask for permission to go to the bank, for example and I am late it becomes an issue while some members of Accounts staff (who are my juniors) are able to drift in and out the premises at will with not a reprimand from you.

I would also like to put it on record that when I felt better on Saturday I reduced the Control Room for a driver to come and pick me so I could catch up with my work but you stopped him from coming to collect me.

I would also like to point out that I believe someone at my level cannot opt to stay away from the office without reasonable cause.

In conclusion therefore I would like to point out that the purpose of your memo is to tell my memo especially as you are aware I have just finished my first six months in employment.

R. K. KJUNDI

MEMO



To: **SPONOR**

From: **SAM** **CONFIDENTIAL** **RE: KJUNDI** **18.12.95**

Re: **ABSENCE FROM DUTY - MR. KJUNDI**

My memo Ref: PS/10/12/95 of 18th December, 1995 on the above subject reads:

I have since received a reply from Mr. Kundi which I find to be misleading and full of contradictions. Rather than delve into the point at issue of absenteeism, Mr. Kundi has instead ventured into the realm of speculation and irrelevance. In point of fact he has repeatedly attempted to circumvent the issue of absenteeism which was never the subject matter. My humble submission on the whole issue is as follows:-

- The officer could have called the office since he had access to communication as evidenced by the fact that he returned the Control Room the following day to be collected for duty. Surely his spouse could have telephoned the office on his behalf.
- The officer has a vehicle on company loan. If he was feeling unwell as alleged, then the spouse could have driven him to company clinic or any other institution for medical attendance.
- In all cases where an officer is absent from duty because of illness, a medical certificate must be produced in support thereof. This is not so in the present case. In the circumstances I find Mr. Kundi to have absented himself from duty without reasonable cause.

In the light of the above, I am referring the case to you to be dealt with in accordance with Company Staff Rules and Regulations 2.8.1. Furthermore, the second SM's Circular Ref: PS/10/12/95 of 18th December 1995 on the subject of absenteeism lends support to my view.

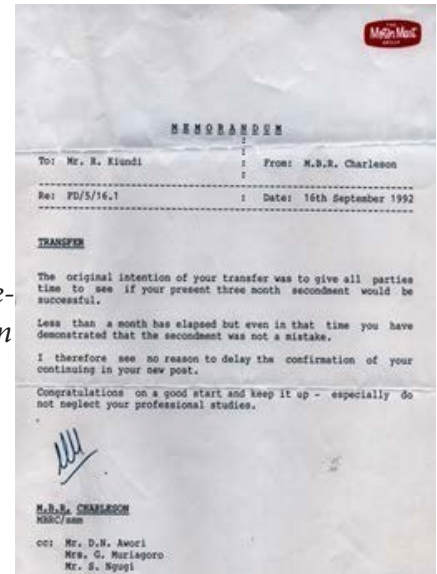
A. C. O. ODHIAMBO

▲ Seniors are getting involved in my war with SAM (Senior Accountant Management)

◀ This was the last of the missiles when our seniors stepped in and advised Odhiambo to leave me alone as they were satisfied with my performance of assigned duties



►
*Confirmation
within the first
month of a three-
month probation
period*



▲ *Accolades for a job well done*



▲ *Receiving an award from Dr Linus Cheruiyot,
KPC MD (2002)*

▲ *And the salary super scale nears
attainment*



◀
*Receiving yet
another of what
were becoming
frequent awards
from Dr Linus
Cheruiyot KPC
MD (2002)*

▶
*With
fellow KBC
Sundowner
program fans at
one of frequent
get togethers*





▲ With Justice Imaana Laibuta at the book launch at Wasanii restaurant, Kenya National Theatre and Cultural Centre (Dec 2021)



▲ Monitoring elections for the Catholic Church with my wife Margaret, Fr TK and a parishioner (1992)



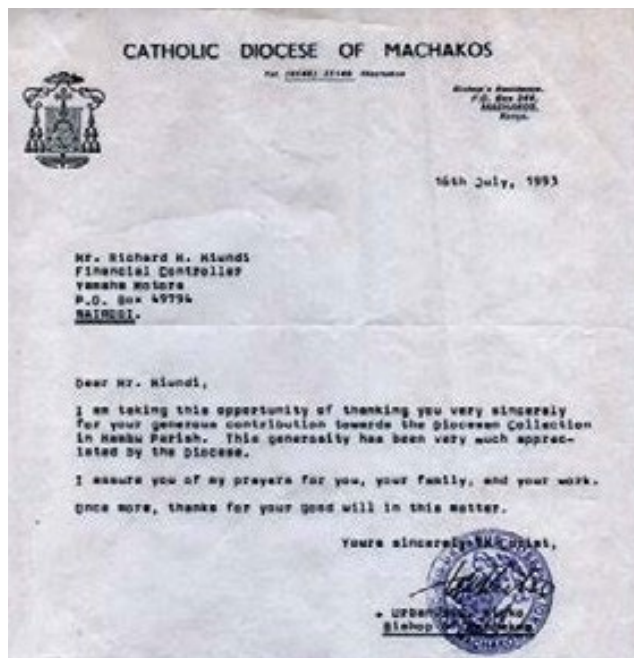
▲ Kithendu farm orchard- Avocado (2019)



▲ Leading fellow users to manually desilt the vital Yatta Canal which is the lifeline of a large part of Yatta (2013)



◀ Letters of appreciation from Bishop Urbanus J Kioko of Machakos Diocese for leading Kambu Parish in the annual Diocesan Collection to position one in 1992, 1993 and 1994. ▼





◀
Back garden taking
shape in the Nairobi
residence (2021)

►
Wide angle view of
Kithendu
farm (2019)



◀
Okra farming at Kambu
Four farm (1992)

►
Certificate
of the
Association
we formed
to have one
voice





▲ *The dam at Kithendu farm (2009)*



▲ *Kithendu farm orchard-Mango (2009)*



▲ *Wife Margaret inspecting okra crop at Kambu Four farm (1992)*



▲ *The orchard at Kithendu farm-Banana (2019)*



◀ *Registering for chemotherapy at Medanta hospital in Gurgaon India (2014)*



▲ Family photo to commemorate Grace's graduation with a Bachelor Of Science in Animal production and processing from JKUAT. Hello Dr. Grace Mumo Kiundi! (Dec 2022)



◀ My wife and I visited Mr Paul Kalei Kinyenze at his home Kwakiwu Village . He was one of the three teachers of Nduundune primary school who in 1972 persuaded me to choose Alliance high school for my post primary education. We presented him with a copy of my autobiography (2022)



▲
*Recovering from surgery in St. Edward's Female Ward
at Nairobi hospital in October(2013)*



▲ *Recovery process at Nairobi
hospital (2013)*



◀
*Radiotherapy in
Medanta hospital
in Gurgaon, India
(2014)*



▲ With fellow anti-cancer crusaders at Royal Media Services studios for sensitization on the “Movember” November movement when men are encouraged not to shave their beards as a wake-up call for them to take frequent medical checkups (2017)



◀ At the Taj Mahal with my wife Margaret after undergoing a medical evaluation at Medanta Hospital in Gurgaon, India (2013)



▲ Visiting cancer warriors and caregivers in Mombasa (2019)

With Franklin in Medanta Hospital in Gurgaon India (2013) ▼



▲ At the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi, one of the annual arrivals or departures spanning a five year period (2015)

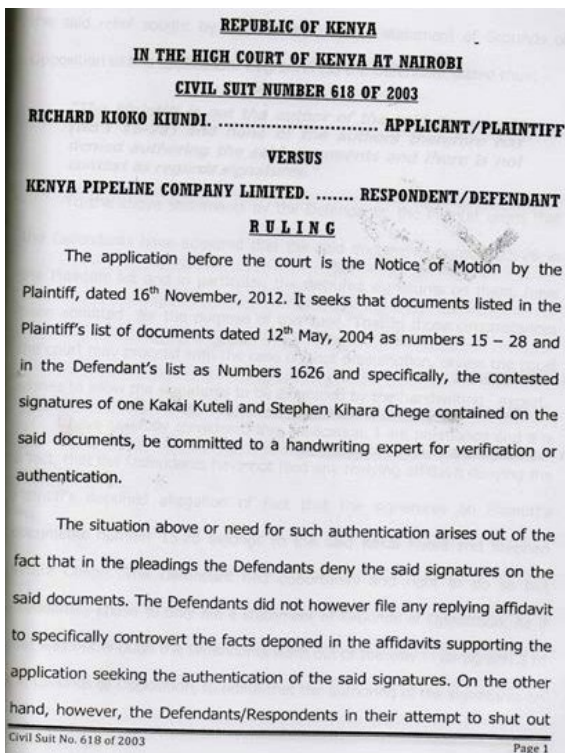


▲ With fellow Limau Cancer Connection members at Kass TV studios (solp)



▲
*With fellow Limau Cancer
Connection members at the Royal
Media studios (2019)*

◀
*All together now: My wife Margaret
and I with grandchildren (2021)*



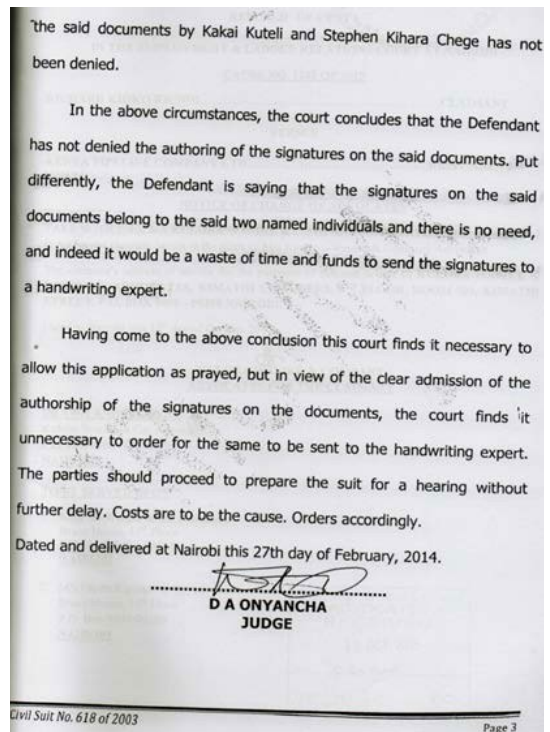
◀ *The court finds that the “forgeries” that caused my job loss at KPC were not forgeries after all(2014) ▼*

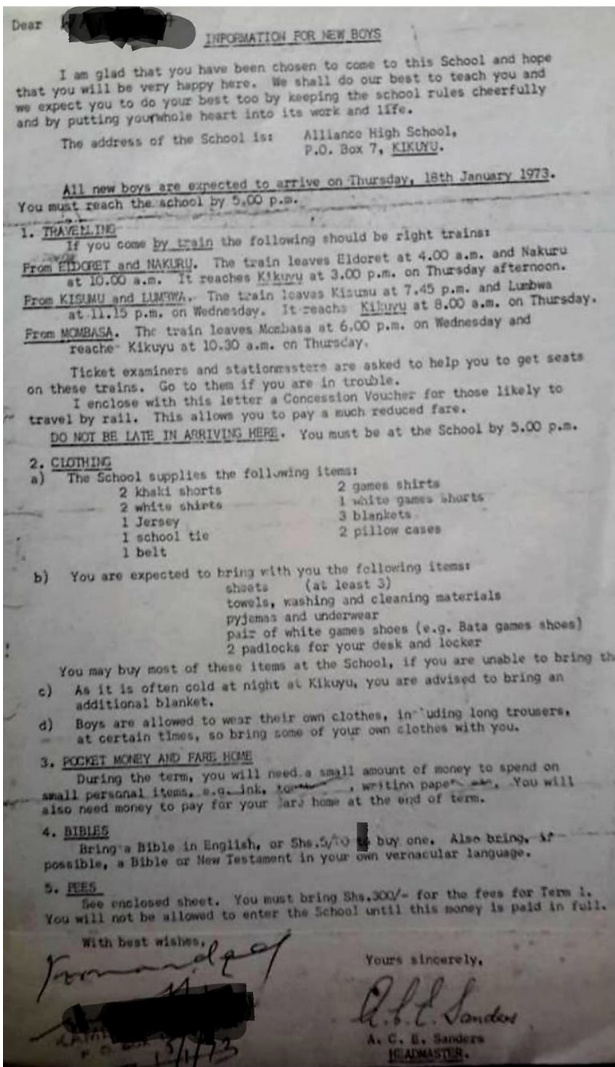
the said relief sought by the Plaintiffs, filed a statement of Grounds of Opposition to this application. In ground (3) the Defendant stated thus: -

“The Plaintiff is not the author of the said documents (No's 15-28) and none of the authors therefore has denied authoring the said documents and there is not contest as regards signatures.”

To the above statements by the Defendants, the Plaintiff urges that the Defendants have admitted that the said documents number 15-28 in the Plaintiffs list and in particular, the disputed signatures on them, have been admitted for the purpose of this case. That in those circumstances the court may proceed with the case on that presumption, unless the court wishes to allow the signatures to be examined by the handwriting expert.

I have carefully considered this application. I am persuaded and it is a fact, that the Defendants have not filed any replying affidavit denying the Plaintiff's deponed allegation of fact that the signatures on Plaintiff's documents number 15.28 belongs to the said Kakai Kuteli and Stephen Kihara Chege. The Defendant had opportunity and right to do so but deliberately chose to only file a statement of Grounds of Opposition. As if that was not enough the Defendants went out of the way in paragraph 3 of the Grounds of Opposition, to admit that the authoring of the signatures on





◀ A most valued admission letter. It arrived two weeks after the opening date as it had been routed via the Provincial Education Office in Embu (1973)



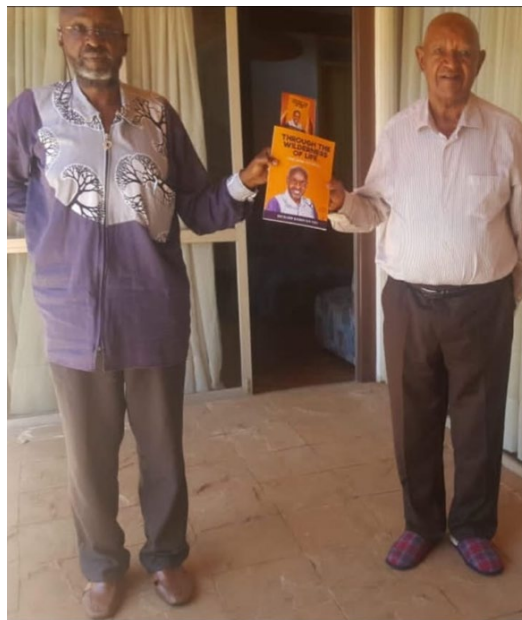
▲ Grandson Ethan and I hanging out (2016)



◀ With family, two sisters, nieces at nephew Richard Wambua's graduation party (2001)



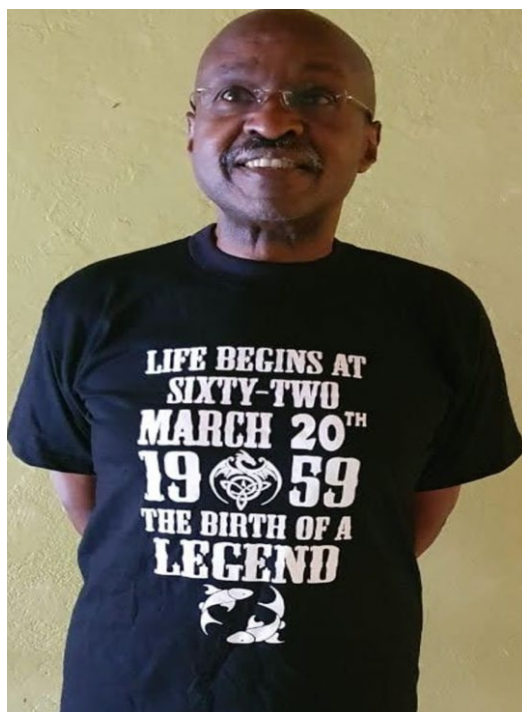
▲ *My parents on a visit to my brother Joseph at Machakos School (1961)*



▲ *I presented Arch David Muoka Mutiso, also an old boy of Alliance high school class of 1952 with the book "Through The Wilderness Of Life" (2021)*



▲ *UON BCom Year mate Maurice Kanjejo and I at the Great Court. My hat was to cover a simi cut I had received from a thug who attacked my friend and I as we walked back from Serena hotel to the halls of residence(1980)*



▲ *Then I turned 62 (2021)*



◀
 With former
 Kamukunji MP
 George Nthenge
 Nguli along Biashara
 street before Covid
 19 came calling and
 eventually brought
 the veteran politician
 down. (2020)



▲ Shooting the breeze with former Motor Mart
 Group workmate and great friend Francis Muia at
 Saika estate off Kangundo road (2021)

On a boat cruise down River Rhine in Cologne,
 Germany (2009) ▼



➤
*Hanging out with
grandson Ethan
(2015)*



◀
*Late son Mbevi
and I on holiday
in Malindi before
cancer checked
in and severely
disrupted my
family life(2013)*



▲ *Heading out to India for treatment accompanied by my late son David Mbevi (2013)*



▲ *Grandson Ethan and I (2014)*



▲
Grandson Ethan and I (2021)

Hanging out with Alliance high school old boy Maina Kanyonyo (2021)





▲ When senior counsel Wilfred Ngunjiri Nderitu passed by home to say Jambo (2021)



▲ Hanging out with fellow AHS class of 1978 wazee at Tumaini Gardens, Isinya Kajiado (2021)



◀ Sharing a cup of lemon tea with Dr Shadrack Katuu, AHS class of 1990 at Roasters, Ruaraka (2020)



▲ With Grandson Ethan (2019)



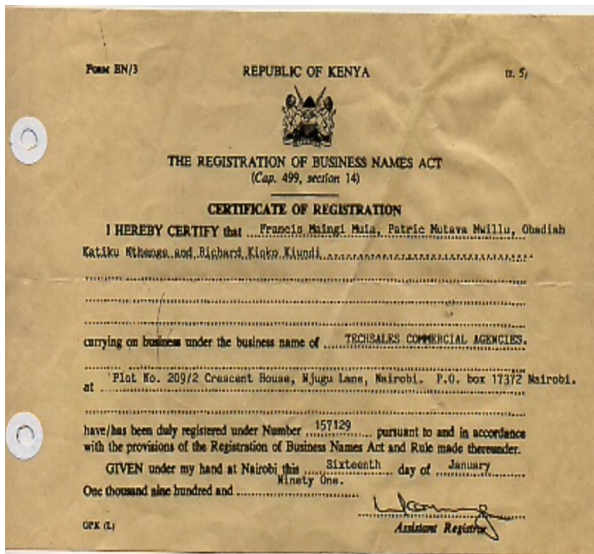
▲ Breakfast at Java Garden City with Dr Isaac Mativo, AHS class of 1993 (2017)



▲ At Nanyuki Trout farm. L to R Kyavi, Ndunge, Mumo and Mbevi (2007)



▲ The business bug had bitten hard. Together with three friends I started out to make a difference but mistrust from one of the directors brought the business crashing down. He secretly stopped payments from the bank that resulted in several suppliers' cheques being returned and we lost credibility and closed the business(1995)



Registration Certificate
of my first business
venture with three
other friends (1991)

I was presented with yet another award for excellence by Malcom Bater, Toyota Kenya MD. Looking on is Grace Muriagoro, Motor Mart Group Human Resources Manager and other members of staff(1992)



My introduction
into the digital world
by instructor Kevin
Kinyanjui.
I have never looked
back(1989)

CHAPTER 5



THE CIVIL SERVANT



After university, and the failure to get the anticipated place at Central Bank, I decided to seek for employment in the civil service and more specifically the office of the president. My brother-in-law Chris Lati encouraged me to join the civil service so he could try to get me posted to the Foreign Service which had great perks. I visited Harambee house where the office of the president is situated and completed job application forms. The wait started with regular checks in person including becoming a member of a job seekers corner around Nairobi cinema, where reliable news of available job openings was exchanged. I attended a couple of interviews, one at Ibrahim's supermarket and another one with an indigenous upcoming audit firm Muchekehu and company and apparently, I did not impress the interviewers because I did not hear from them again. I was staying with my cousin Joshua Mutisya at Nairobi West at the time. Eventually I was handed a letter of employment at Harambee house with a posting to Kilifi District Treasury but I first had to attend a residential induction

course along with other fresh recruits, most of whom were former UON BCom classmates at the Kenya Institute of Administration K.I.A. The course was on government financial systems, after which I was then given a Travel Warrant to take me to Kilifi. At K.I.A we had been introduced to the four most common expenditure accounting documents in government, Financial Orders, F.Os. F.O 20 for payments to suppliers, F.O 21 for below the line expenses like Appropriations In Aid, F.O 22 for surrender of imprest and staff expenses while on duty outside the usual work station and F.O 25 for journal voucher entries. We were introduced to Vote Books that were basically ledgers that determined and were crucial in the monitoring and control of use of public funds. We were also introduced to Authority to Incur Expenditure, A.I.E that gave the A.I.E holder the authority to commit public resources to the limits and for the purposes detailed therein. The government had introduced the district focus for rural development strategy in the country to try to solve problems of rural areas by giving the districts more autonomy to plan and implement programs and projects according to specific district priorities. We were taken through introductory lessons on the implementation of this strategy. Among various other duties, the District Treasury was mandated with the processing of payments for all government departments in the district and for Kilifi this included Malindi which was a sub district of Kilifi at the time. The District Focus for Rural Development program heralded some far reaching changes in the government development programs and accounting system. Hitherto, each ministry had a bank account with their own development programs sanctioned by the ministry headquarters and the district heads processed their own payments. All these accounts had to be closed and centralized at the District Treasury and all government payments made through the District Bank Account whose signatories were the district commissioner, district officer 1, district accountant and assistant district accountant. All development projects in the district would henceforth be approved by a district development committee, D.D.C chaired by the district commissioner with the district development officer, D.D.O as secretary. Membership was automatic for district department heads as well as local civic leaders.

The Kilifi District Treasury, in line with government regulations worked on a float that was reimbursed weekly through the Provincial Accountant at the Provincial Commissioner's office in Mombasa based on claims in a prescribed

format that would be prepared at the District Treasury. On a monthly basis, the National Treasury would send computer printouts of monthly expenses as keyed into the government central computers from the documents prepared at the District Treasury and used to process float reimbursement claims. The district accountant was required to reconcile the printouts with the records at the District Treasury and make corrective entries via the F.O 25 in the event of erroneous entries. I found these reconciliations had never been done and I formed a task force headed by an accounts assistant called Mwawasi with two clerks and within a year or so, the reconciliations were up to date. The Kilifi District Treasury was given a letter of commendation as being one of the first stations to update the reconciliation.

Kilifi town is situated about halfway between Malindi and Mombasa and is built on both sides of the Kilifi creek, which would be crossed by means of two ferries working in tandem during the day. Between about 10pm and 5am only one ferry would be in service crossing at hourly intervals. The main town which includes government establishments is on the Malindi side with the Mombasa side called Mnarani mainly for entertainment and business. During the first two or so months of working in Kilifi, I commuted from Mombasa where I lived in my brother-in-law's house HG 100 at the Buxton senior government staff quarters. I finally managed to get myself a residence within Kilifi town, a Swahili type rooming house that had no ceiling and one could hear everything going on in the adjacent rooms without trying. My utensils comprised of one *sufuria*, one plate, one bowl, one spoon, a *mwiko* for making *ugali* and another for making stew. I would make the stew first, pour it into the bowl so I could use the *sufuria* to make *ugali*. Many are the times I would keep tasting the stew as I cooked it, and there would be so little left by the time it got cooked, and I would be nearly full anyway so I would just finish it off, drink water and forget about cooking the *ugali*. Most weekday evenings were spent at the Kilifi civil servants club socializing with fellow civil servants and some local business people, where snakes slithering in from the ocean was a frequent occurrence. I would also occasionally venture to other entertainment establishments in Kilifi Town such as Top Ten, Blue Sky, Jezazhomu that belonged to councilor Ngesa who had become a good friend and a couple of others. Weekend evenings would mostly be spent at Emmanuel Baha's Mkwajuni hotel discotheque along the Malindi- Mombasa highway as resident DJ

Mansoor spun the latest releases. Local youth would show off their break-dance prowess at regular dancing competitions, the latest dancing craze at the time. The Mnarani side though with great entertainment spots was unpopular because of the ferry inconvenience of crossing at hourly intervals late at night. The other up market hotel other than Mnarani was The Sea Horse which was further up the Kilifi creek on the Malindi side and one needed a vehicle to access it especially at night. One of the friends I made in Kilifi called Nthei, a businessman had a van which I would borrow once in a while when I wanted to venture farther afield.

Upcountry people had formed an association that met once a month in members residences in turns over roast goat meat bought at the Kilifi Prison farm for a standard Kshs. 200/- and copious amounts of alcohol on a Bring Your Own Bottle basis would be downed. I found my old Alliance high school mate Edward Ndungi Laama working in the Lands and Settlement office and he helped me settle down to small town life without too much trouble. I would occasionally share a drink or two with another Alliance high school old boy the Honorable Dr. Chibule wa Tsuma at the Morris Mboja owned Blue Sky club. Tsuma was at the time one of a group of members of parliament who were sharp critics of the government, derisively referred to as the 'Seven Bearded Sisters' by the Attorney General Charles Njonjo, another Alliance high school old boy. Eventually it was whispered to me that keeping the company of a dissident was not good for my progression in the civil service. I regretfully changed my hang outs and missed the many hilarious stories Dr. Tsuma would weave in the course of an evening.

An old friend, Administration Police Inspector Fred Kyalo Mulandi was posted to head the Administration Police unit in Kilifi District and John Bosco Mulika, the district cooperative officer allocated each of us a house at the Cooperative Ministry staff quarters near Mkwajuni. This eventuality saved me from the involuntary eavesdropping on neighbors' goings on in the ceiling less residence I occupied at the time. Fred and I would sample the Kilifi night life together as he had 24 hour access to government transport. To celebrate *Jamhuri* day on December 12th 1985, we arranged for a great party at Blue Sky club with music provided by Utawala band. I rekindled my friendship with the band leader Matee Festo which had started in my UON days when I was a frequent customer at Dunia II nightclub in Dandora where the then famous Muema Brothers band, of which he was a member, had regular shows. Life was simple and very early

on most Saturday mornings, badly hungover Reuben Ikutwa who was a cooperatives officer and I would join the Kilifi district cooperative union members for some deep-sea fishing and I would get my week's supply of Takaungu Fish *Tafi* in this manner. The sea air would also somewhat clear the effects of the previous night's indulgence. Reuben Ikutwa had a motorbike which would come in handy some of the evenings when I wanted to roam and Nthei's vehicle was unavailable. Tragedy struck one weekend when he crashed on his way from Mtondia, some short distance from Kilifi town towards Malindi and his girlfriend died, while he got seriously injured and was admitted in critical condition at the Kilifi district hospital. He had to be secretly transferred from the hospital as the girlfriend's family were rumoured to be planning to kill him.

Once in a while I would venture into Malindi to visit the District Officer, Christopher Maithya who was one year ahead of me at the University of Nairobi and a good friend. I loved the lights show at the newly opened Stardust discotheque and would dance to great music all night. It is here I first heard Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing", Michael Jackson's "Human Nature" and Lionel Richie's "All Night Long". One day in 1984, the Kilifi District Hospital accounts clerk Bernard Kisavi brought a reimbursement claim of one of the nurses which had been pending for long due to some technicalities. I was able to sort them out and she eventually got paid. A few days after the payment was made, he came to my office with a most beautiful young lady and introduced her as the nurse I had assisted with the payment. Apparently, she had insisted she wanted to thank me personally and she handed me an envelope which I assumed contained some money "to go buy myself a drink". I declined the offer and told her I would only accept if she bought the drink personally, which she declined and we closed the chapter or so I thought. But I could not get her off my mind much as I tried. A week later I presented myself at the hospital for some imaginary sickness and insisted that my vitals could only be taken by her. She was off duty and I postponed my sickness to the following week. I became a regular at the hospital and one thing led to another and we developed an intense relationship that lasted just over a year and brought forth a most handsome son. Something happened and the relationship petered out. This son later became a great friend and has a family that is a great pleasure to spend time with. I made a number of visits to a good friend in Hola in Tana River District on a journey that took a whole day by

bus and had to have armed Administration Police escort on the stretch between Malindi and Hola. We would spend evenings at an establishment near the river and would be warned not to venture too near the river bank as a number of patrons had been snatched by crocodiles.

As a district accountant in the District Treasury, I was answerable to the district commissioner and was having a rough time from him as he kept complaining to all and sundry that I was too young to be a district accountant. The Provincial Administration at the time was cracking hard on traditional brews following a presidential directive. During that year's Freedom From Hunger walk, the route passed near Cabinet Minister Hon Katana Ngala's farm in Bofa and we, in a group of senior civil servants that included the district commissioner found the now illegal large scale *mnazi* wine tapping going on in his farm. I have always wondered how the DC handled the matter. Jackson Kiobi, fellow Alliance high school Old Boy and Franciscan and house captain in 1977 was posted to Kilifi district at around this time as the District Mechanical officer. It is also around this time that I got married and my wife Margaret joined me in Kilifi. I had been allocated a bigger government house near the office on a cliff overlooking the Kilifi creek across from Mnarani hotel. As a married man my social life changed significantly and the need to start investing for the family took center stage and I bought some land in a place called Vitengeni and got allocated a beach plot at another place called Bofa within Kilifi town. Bofa is the Swahili name for a Boa Constrictor snake as they were very many in the place. I had also started saving heavily with the Harambee Savings and Credit Cooperative Society.

Generally, life was smooth other than for the harassment by the district commissioner and I was sad when I was transferred and left behind many good friends, including some curio dealers who would sell me advanced electronics they acquired on barter trade with tourists as handling foreign currency was highly regulated. My trouble with the district commissioner most probably was triggered by my friendship with the district officer 1, James K Ndegwa who was also at loggerheads with him. I was advised to take up the issue with the provincial commissioner, Yusuf Haji nicknamed *Bwana Kali*. I saw him early one Monday morning and he promised to investigate the matter and take necessary action. At around the same time I was admitted to the Kenya Institute of Administration Kabete for a 6 month Certified Public Accountant CPA course. Settling to studies

became difficult as I had frequent summons via police signals to report back to Kilifi to answer some nonsensical questions. The district commissioner also declined to reimburse the cost of travel and this was a great drain on my limited financial resources. I brought this unsustainable state of affairs to the attention of the office of the president accounts controller, the no nonsense Abner A. Achoki and also informed him that I had reported the matter to the Coast provincial commissioner earlier. It was decided to transfer me from Kilifi to Taita Taveta district. In the meantime the accounts controller approved reimbursement of the expenses the Kilifi district commissioner had rejected. I later learnt that Abner A. Achoki had retired honorably and lived well into his nineties. I commented to his daughter Leah, a former workmate at Kenya Pipeline company that they did not make civil servants like him anymore.

When my newly-wed wife joined college I had requested my mother to come and live with us in Kilifi and help me take care of our little girl. As soon as the transfer letter arrived in Kilifi, the district commissioner instructed the district clerk to ensure I surrendered the government house we were living in within a month at most. I therefore had to suspend my course at K.I.A and make urgent arrangements to ship both my mother and daughter to Emali as I worked on relocation to my new station. I reported to the district headquarters of Taita Taveta district in Wundanyi on an extremely chilly Monday evening. I would have missed a place to sleep were it not for my chance bumping into the then county council clerk, Mjomba with whom we had become friends at K.I.A where he had been attending an advanced administration course when I arrived there for my CPA studies. Onyango Namenya, the Taita Taveta district officer 1 graciously offered me accommodation at his guest wing which was near the office. Two months or so after my arrival in Wundanyi, the National Housing Corporation, NHC handed over the newly constructed Mbela estate to the county council and I immediately got a house and my family joined me.

Meanwhile things were not rosy at the work front. Before my arrival, there had been a power struggle of sorts between the district commissioner and the district accountant which the DC won, and the district accountant had been interdicted and his position taken over by his assistant who had been on the DC's side. My arrival was an unwelcome intrusion into what seemed a newly set up cozy arrangement as I ranked higher than the new district accountant, but

until the arrival of a new district commissioner about two months or so after my arrival, I was allocated neither an office nor duties and spent my days reading newspapers in the District Internal auditor's office. As we were being introduced to the new DC, I mentioned that I had been idling for two months without being allocated duties or an office and within a few days I took over the district accountant's office. A short while thereafter, the DC and I together with other district departmental heads attended a District Focus for Rural Development review conference chaired by Simeon Nyachae who was then chief secretary and head of civil service at Bandari college in Mombasa. In attendance too was Mutua Kilaka, deputy PC Coast and Rift Valley PC Peter Kiilu who was in the chief secretary's entourage. Kiilu, a clansman in my *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* clan and Kilaka were my good friends and we would crack jokes during the various breaks. The DC seemed to have been impressed by my easy camaraderie with the two gentlemen who were his de facto bosses, and this resulted in an enhanced cordial working relationship between the two of us.

As I got down to work at my new station, I discovered that the reconciliations between national and District Treasury financial records had never been attempted and I set out to train staff to do it. I discovered to my horror that most of the accounts staff were focused on pushing payments for commissions and personal gain and were disinterested in work that took them from this lucre. I held a crisis meeting with the district commissioner and after identifying the ring leaders, they were transferred out of the District Treasury to other offices that were far apart to minimize the chance of their spreading the disease from their new stations. I remembered that my Kilifi accounts assistant Mwawasi had voiced the wish to be transferred to Taita Taveta which was his home district, as he had less than five years to retirement. With help from the DC, this was facilitated and he set up a reconciliation unit soon after reporting. He took matters in his capable hands and I am sure he completed the task satisfactorily, as I left the district before the exercise was completed.

As per regulations I was inducted into the D.D.C, District Development Committee and met many of the district ministry heads. District agricultural officer D.A.O one of the several with their offices in Wundanyi GK Nzuva, nicknamed governor and who was in Machakos high school with my brother Joseph became a very good friend and mentor having been in the civil service for many

years before me. Due to various factors, mainly geographical ministry headquarters were scattered between Wundanyi and Voi but all would have to occasionally visit the DC's office and I made friends with many of them. I still maintain contact with GK Nzuva, governor as I still call him, and recently surprised him at how connected I am with my Alma Mater when I was able to get his son's full name, school number, years he was at Alliance high school and phone contact soon after he informed me the son born when we worked together in Wundanyi went to Alliance high school too.

My wife finished college and was posted to Sungululu primary school on the outskirts of Wundanyi Town, while my daughter had joined a local nursery school. We were subsequently allocated a government house near Sungululu Primary School. In 1986 I took a loan from Harambee SACCO and bought my first car, a blue Datsun 1600 SSS twin carburetor registration number KUQ 298 for the princely sum of KShs. 18,000/-. After a number of run-ins with traffic police over my driving without a driver's license and a cracked windscreen, the OCPD, one of the politest policemen I had ever met at the time called Ndara Ndiwa advised me to go for a driving exam and get myself a license as well as get the windscreen fixed, as he was getting tired of rescuing me from the traffic base commander. I complied and my road trips were henceforth devoid of unwelcome interruption. Wundanyi being a fairly small rural town at the time, entertainment spots were few and chances of meeting with junior staff were high. The senior staff would seek their entertainment at either Mwatate or Voi depending on transport availability and now that I had a car, my entertainment catchment area stretched to between Maungu and Mtito Andei. The car also enabled my family and I to visit areas of interest. There was a tame elephant called Eleanor and other wildlife in Tsavo East National Park where we would visit on some Saturdays and afterwards spend the afternoon at a superb hotel deep in the park at Aruba dam. Ndara Ndiwa and I became great friends and so on some weekends, we would visit his counterpart across the border in Tanzania and do some shopping in Moshi. Soon after I moved to Nairobi, Ndara Ndiwa was transferred to Kiambu as OCPD and he introduced me to the awesome *mutura* at Njenga Karume's Village Inn where we spent many a Saturday afternoon and evening with his new found Kiambu friends enjoying traditional Kikuyu *Mwomboko* dance shows.

Wundanyi town is situated in a depression in the Taita Hills ringed by rocky

peaks all round. The Social life in my time before I acquired a car centered mainly around Michigani's Wundanyi motel and the brother Tony and sister Beatrice managed Salama nightclub. For quieter times the County council operated CC bar and restaurant situated on the road towards Dr Aggrey high school was perfect. The Taita people are generally friendly and very welcoming making the stay very enjoyable. The cost of living too with affordable fresh farm produce available daily made Wundanyi the place to be in. Many are the times I would look up fellow Alliance high school Alumnus Crispin Mwashigadi at his Kishushe bar near Wundanyi market. When I acquired a car, I made it a point to travel all over Taita and would have a drink or two at Werugha's Miaka Kumi bar as I toured areas as far as Mghambonyi past Mghambinyi, the home of Bishop Mwangombe. Incidentally the Bishop's son Rev. Harold Mwashigadi is a great friend and wrote a review of the manuscript of this book. Other times I would visit some teachers of Mghalu high school near Mbale and we would end up at Mariwenyi via Msau. Baisanda bar and restaurant in Mwatate with a great repertoire of rhumba music was a great meeting point for upcountry people who were in the gemstone business, with king pin Francis Njoroge being a very good and generous host. Once in a while on a Friday evening, I would venture into the Teita Sisal Estate senior staff club deep in the estate where rhumba music was served in plenty. Other times the chief of Mwanda location whose name escapes me now, would invite me to *Kwa Mlegwa* for goat eating on some Saturday afternoon that would stretch late into the night. Susana Lodge at Maungu operated by Kioko wa Mululu was another favorite haunt, more so due to the colorful history of the owner. The story was that he had been a renown poacher who once in his search for ivory poisoned a whole lake in Tanzania, and became a persona non grata in that country. Much as he and I were good friends, I never got the courage to ask him the veracity or otherwise of the story.

Tsavo West National Park with its headquarters at Komboyoo a few kilometers from Mtito Andei is in Taita Taveta district and I would make occasional revenue inspection tours to the place. I made great friends with Mtito Andei heavyweights Kisivo Mulei, Mutule Nyenze, Mutua Kavila and several others who were also suppliers to the National park and their generosity knew no bounds. My processing of payments without demanding kickbacks as had been my predecessor's habit according to available information made me a darling of government suppliers

in the district. One Saturday afternoon I went for a drink at Hawaii bar in Voi and when word spread that I was in the place, do not ask me how it spread, but many of the government contractors turned up and a great party ensued. The owner of the bar, a lady nicknamed *Mama Pesa* because of her great wealth from gemstone business offered to slaughter a goat every time I went to the bar if that was the business I would bring. That not being my style I respectfully declined.

One of the headaches I had experienced while in Kilifi District Treasury was delay in float reimbursement from the provincial office. The DC accepted my request to allow me frequent visits to the Uhuru Na Kazi building, the Coast provincial headquarters and after making friends with provincial accountant Fonseca, auditor Ouko and cashier Lesilale, there were minimal delays in reimbursements. Lesilale eventually changed jobs and became chief of his home location Kitobo in Taveta division and sadly I did not get the chance to honor an invite to visit him before I left the district. In mid 1987 I received a letter transferring me to the Kisii District Treasury. The government at around the same time launched a voter registration exercise in readiness for the 1988 elections. Transfers of all civil servants were immediately suspended pending completion of the voter registration exercise. Daily registration returns would be made by police signal to the office of the supervisor of elections based at Harambee house, then manned by Alliance high school alumnus Joseph Mwangovya together with a fortnightly delivery of the physical registration documents themselves. I was mandated to deliver the documents one time and also attend to other official business at both Harambee house and Treasury. On the eve of my travel back to Wundanyi I went for a drink at Jean's bar in Nairobi West with my brother-in-law Henry Kyatha. We found his neighbor from Mbooni named Wasoi who as I found out at the time was sharing an apartment with my cousin Joshua in the area. I got into a discussion with Wasoi on expense difference between life in Nairobi and Wundanyi. He challenged me to name a salary which would make me move from Wundanyi to Nairobi and I quoted a salary four times what I was getting as the minimum I would accept to make the move. He said, "Come to my office in the morning, I just might have a job for you." I went to the office at the Motor Mart Group building on Uhuru highway opposite Nyayo stadium that following morning. Wasoi introduced me to Rajesh Mehta, financial controller of Toyota Kenya a division of the Motor Mart Group. Rajesh gave me a foolscap to write

an application letter and to send copies of my certificates to him when I got back to Wundanyi which I did without fail. The Motor Mart Group was a division of Lonrho Africa PLC that handled the motor business in Kenya. One and a half months later, to be precise on Tuesday, 1st July 1987 I reported at Toyota Kenya on Uhuru highway to begin a seven-year stint as an accountant in Motor Mart Group, referred to as MMG.

CHAPTER 6



NEW WORK ENVIRONMENT



When my wife Margaret, daughter Ndunge and I arrived in Nairobi in 1987 we were hosted briefly by James Mutua Kisongoa in Kimathi estate. We then moved to Umoja estate for a while before finally settling in Buru Buru Phase 5 along Katulo road. I reported to work at Toyota Kenya, a Division of the Motor Mart Group MMG which was part of the Lonrho PLC conglomerate. My car, a Datsun 1600 SSS caused quite a stir parked in the Toyota Kenya senior staff car park and I came under considerable pressure to change it which I eventually did. Mark Charleson, the group finance director whose office window overlooked the parking lot at one time suggested I may have to go and look for employment at D.T. Dobie the Datsun Franchise holders. I am sure D.T. Dobie would have loved to use a picture of the car in a Toyota Kenya senior staff car park on an advert if the car was not so beaten down. Eventually, I was able to negotiate for a waiver on the time one had to have been in employment with MMG to qualify for a car loan and bought a Toyota KE30, KRK 706 that had a working hand brake which the Datsun did not have. I found

great pleasure in pointing out that the registration number bore my initials. I sold the Datsun for the princely sum of Kshs. 32,000/- to a taxi driver and I would occasionally find him plying his trade outside Ngatata club in Pangani which was very popular at the time among my Akamba friends. In later years, Muthoni Kiromo Ochiel, daughter to the owner of Ngatata club though I had no idea who the owner was at the time, would become a great family friend.



Lonrho PLC was incorporated in the United Kingdom on 13th May 1909 as the London and Rhodesian Mining and Land Company Limited. Lonrho PLC grew to be one of the world's largest companies with over 800 subsidiary companies in 80 countries. The last CEO of Lonrho PLC was the maverick Tiny Rowland (born Roland Walter Fuhrhop, 1917–1998) a corporate raider who ran the firm from 1962 to 1994. Scholars have noted that while he may have been the 'unacceptable face of capitalism' in the words of British Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath, Lonrho actually worked in tandem with the British government in protecting British business interests in Africa after independence. Lonrho Africa PLC took care of the Africa businesses and it was said that Tiny Rowland had the ear of every African president. This was made possible by his appointing the sitting president's choice as board vice chairman in every country the company operated in. In Kenya it was Udi Gecaga during Jomo Kenyatta's time, and Mark Too in the Moi era.

Within the first month I learnt that all accounts clerks reporting to me earned salaries that were at least one and a half times of what I had asked for and received, while those of my level were upwards of two and a half times. When I complained to the human resources department head, I was informed that emoluments were reviewed annually and my performance in the intervening period would determine what would happen in the next review. As expected, every new work environment has its challenges and I found a computerized accounting system based on Lotus Release 1 software that was unheard of in the civil service environment that I was coming from. Wasoi who had been instrumental in my getting the job derided my lack of knowledge in this field and Mwongela Nthiwa, a workmate came to my rescue. He pointed out that new environments require new learning so he requested Wasoi to give me space to acclimatize to the new way of doing things, which he graciously did. I took his criticism as a positive challenge and

purposed to learn all there was to know in the shortest time possible. I took to sitting with Nthuli, one of the data-entry clerks to learn what he was doing and how he was doing it. Tom Onyancha the costing clerk taught me local content costing and coding while Muasya of credit control taught me debtor receipt allocation. Within a couple of months, I was a guru with an overall overview of the process and I became the go-to expert in accounts.

The end of the financial year brought new challenges and for the first time since I started working, I felt that I was utilizing some of the knowledge I garnered from my university education. After finalizing the annual accounts, there was the preparation of the proforma by hand with a pencil and eraser for individual divisions namely Toyota Kenya, Toyota Kenya Mombasa, Bruce Trucks and Equipment, Burns and Blane, Farm Machinery Distributors, Rhino Motors, Kenya Motors Nairobi, Kisumu, and Eldoret as well as the newly acquired Yamaha Motors and then all would be consolidated for the whole group for audit purposes, a process which could take up to a month. During the audit by a team from Deloitte, proposed changes would take days to adjust individual divisions before eventually giving the overall group position.

A couple of years after my entry into the Motor Mart Group, the group finance director floated a request on ideas to computerize the annual audit proforma and the Toyota Kenya financial controller, on account of the division's quick and accurate responses to audit queries was invited as one of the resource persons of an ad hoc think tank that was set up for the purpose. The financial controller then seconded me to the think tank which held brain storming sessions every Thursday in the Nairobi MMG headquarters. By this time, the Lotus software company had released its Windows Lotus 1-2-3 software which was a major upgrade from its original Release 1. I had been exposed to the new software when my then senior workmate and mentor Boniface Wasoi had recommended me for training in computer packages as he had helped recruit me from the civil service where everything was manual. This training with instructor Kevin Kinyanjui of Price Waterhouse Associates, based at Rattansi Trust building on Koinange street positively changed my professional trajectory immensely. Kevin became a good friend and would continue to informally tutor me on computer packages, mostly on Friday afternoons after which we would adjourn to Hardrock Café of Barclays Plaza on Loita street to cement the day's lesson over a drink or two. Then a computer wizard called Wambua King'ondeu joined Motor Mart Group and in

his hands, I excelled in what I had learnt. With input largely from me, King'ondeu created a Lotus Windows 1-2-3 based computer program that produced the group proforma within a few minutes and amendments during the audit time were in real time. This saved the company huge amounts in audit fees, earning me a hefty bonus and a promotion with a salary raise that finally put me at par with my peers. With a company car, an expense allowance and other enhanced benefits I felt I had finally arrived. This promotion brought about a very interesting dilemma for me. At this time there were all sorts of myths about how the new kid on the block AIDS was being spread. It was rumored one could get it from poorly washed glasses in a bar or from a mosquito bite. Others even suggested one could get it from sweat during a handshake and so on. The promotion came with enhanced insurance benefits that called for a mandatory HIV test that took two weeks for the results to be known. I actually contemplated turning down the promotion at one time but gathered courage and took the test but was generally unwell during the two weeks waiting period. In the following years, it became so routine and there was better understanding of how AIDS was spread and it was never a problem ever again.

Once every year I would fly to Mombasa to take part in the local content stock take at the Associated Vehicle Assemblers, A.V.A and the Toyota Kenya Coast Regional manager Karigithu Menja and accountant Gulam Hussein would be the perfect hosts. I would also save a lot in accommodation costs as I would set camp in my brother-in-law's home at Mtwapa. I usually had a hired car at my disposal and would sometimes find time to visit my old stamping grounds of Kilifi and Malindi before I flew back to Nairobi. On one of those trips to Kilifi, I found the now retired DC who had given me such a rough time during my tour of duty in the district at the bus stop and I offered him a lift to Mombasa. He had come to inspect some investments he had made in Kilifi. I dropped him at Mwembe Tayari where he was to catch a night bus to Nairobi. I could not resist telling him I was headed to Nairobi too but by air.

As I got used to the city, I established some favorite entertainment spots and took out membership for Dolce club of Cianda house along Koinange street where I had my place at the counter near the entrance. I recall a conversation with Steve Oluoch, former UON BCom year mate when we bumped into each other at the club. Dolce club was underground and I informed him I always

worried about a fire outbreak, hence my reason for sitting near the only exit. My regular Friday night drinking mate at the club counter was a high ranking either World bank or IMF official from some West African country who had hilarious stories of his encounters with Kenyan politicians. I also frequented Hardrock Cafe on the Mezzanine floor of Barclays Plaza on Loita street, Hilton's Jockey club and a couple of other upmarket pubs around the city. With Cousin Peter Mutisya we would occasionally pass by Hillock Inn in industrial area to dance to music by Aziz Abdi Kilambo. Other days I would join workmates Francis Muia and James Nzioka and other friends at Muingo-a-Kaiti bar in Hamza, off Jogoo road. Once in a while on a Saturday afternoon, I would head out to Kitengela for a bit of rhumba at the famous Baby Touch Me, BTM club with a number of friends and relatives including Paul Ngei Nguta, Onesmus Mwongela Nthiwa who lived in Athi River, Michael Wambua and others from Mbitini. Missing in this mix for reasons I never found out was my senior and housemate in Alliance high school variously nicknamed Sese and Crossian, corruption of the names Mobutu Sese Seko who was then the DRC president and *Acrossian* respectively, as the girls from Alliance girls' high school were referred to by the boys of their brother school across the valley. In Nairobi West in the early 90's I was invited into the YK92 outfit that was then in formation but I declined, largely because my employment contract with Motor Mart Group was explicit on non-involvement in active politics.

We had moved from Buru Buru to Kidfarmaco in Kikuyu around 1989 and for a while lived the rural life near my Alma Mater, Alliance high school until insecurity became a real issue. A guest, Fr. Thomas Kyalo of Kambu Parish was attacked at our gate and got seriously injured and his car was later found vandalized and abandoned around Wangige Township. I applied for a firearm license for family security and when I went for vetting by officer Munyiri, a very nice man of Special Branch on the 24th floor of Nyayo house, he advised me to join the Kenya Police Reserve as I would gain access to a wide variety of firearms and an unlimited opportunity for training in musketry. In the meantime we moved back to Buru Buru in Nairobi and I underwent police training at the Nairobi area police headquarters. The training included learning marching and parade routines. We also had lectures on the Kenya Police act and firearm handling at the Mathare shooting range behind Mathari Mental Hospital. I was attached to Muthaiga police station where I would man the report desk on some evenings

and weekends. I would also go on patrol in my car with two or three other police officers. Eventually certain happenings caused me to lose interest in police work and I left the force after serving for about two years. The work was strictly voluntary and had no financial benefit. The feeling of security of the possession of a firearm as I crisscrossed the city was however immeasurable.

Meanwhile at the work front, Motor Mart acquired the Yamaha franchise and Dennis Awori, hitherto the Toyota Kenya sales and marketing manager was appointed general manager. He requested management that I move with him as the Yamaha chief accountant and Rajesh Mehta, Toyota Kenya financial controller agreed to release me. But office politics were at play and before we knew it someone else was in place. Barely six months later, Mark Charleson, the Motor Mart Group finance director walked into my office one morning and told me "I want you to take over as chief accountant at Yamaha Motors right away". Apparently, the previous holder had resigned that morning and we walked across where I took up the position. By this time there was a very strong sales team in Yamaha which was inking up contracts for sale of large numbers of Yamaha motorcycles to various government ministries that had extension services mainly in the agriculture sector, as well as quasi government organizations such as KPLC and the Nairobi City Council for meter readers. Yamaha also got an order for over 1,000 motor cycles for the Uganda government. It was exhilarating to be part of an organization that was on such a roll. In addition to settling in the office I took time to visit the various Yamaha product dealers in various parts of the country including the Mount Kenya area, Lower Eastern, Coast, Rift Valley, and Western Kenya as well as around Lake Victoria. One memorable trip was in 1994 with technical salesman Michael Mutende during which we toured fish landing beaches on Lake Victoria from Port Victoria all the way to Muhuru Bay. We passed outside *Kang'o ka Jaramogi*, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga's rural home on our way to Wichlum, an area famous for gold mining in Bondo on the day Jaramogi passed on. On our way we had called in on Yamaha product dealers at Narok, Bomet, Kisii and various other places along the way. In Kisii town a Yamaha dealer called Mosigisi offered us lunch and as I was very hungry, I wandered into the kitchen to find out how the meal preparation was continuing. I was horrified to find a chicken being cooked complete with intestines, head, feet, claws etc and demanded they be removed immediately.

In 1993 the Goldenberg and YK92 money printing fueled economic meltdown

hit the country and due to the beating the Kenya shilling took, the price of everything went crazy doubling every fortnight or so. And then came in the Forex-Cs saga in which Lonrho as a whole was hit very heavily, but I think they played politics at very high levels and some mitigation was worked out. It was at this time UNOSOM was active in Somalia and the players were buying a lot of equipment from Kenya including generators and motorcycles. Yamaha Motors made a lot of sales in cash to the UNOSOM team and every evening I would deliver the US\$ in cash to the finance director and the Yamaha team got accolades. In addition there was a serious power shortage in the country at around the same time when Yamaha Motors struck a deal to distribute Massey Ferguson power stations. A contract to sell and install standby power stations to Barclays Bank branches countrywide, a number of huge plantations in certain parts of the country as well as hotels at the Coast where the power shortages were worst, lifted the overall profit contribution of Yamaha to the group profit to number three after Toyota Kenya and Bruce Trucks and equipment, distributor of Mitsubishi Fuso trucks. The sub contract for installation of the power stations had been awarded to Esese Engineering Limited owned and managed by my Alliance high school senior contemporary Aggrey Kidyavai Chabeda. Around the same time the crash in 1993 of the Kenyan economy affected Lonrho EA financial status. I had by then been promoted to Operations Manager of Rhino Motors based at the Shell petrol station in Hurlingham. In addition to the fuel station, Rhino Motors sold used vehicles and had a state-of-the-art workshop. At this time Makau, the then Rhino Motors Workshop manager and Supervisor Rashid with a friend working with CID called Mulinge established Innovative Motors Limited. We would service vehicles on weekends for clients who could not manage to bring them to Rhino Motors during weekdays. Innovative Motors Limited, IML was located behind the Kobil petrol station on Langata road opposite the turn off to the Carnivore operated by a Mr. Mutungi who was a close friend of Makau. We made brisk business and were on a growth trajectory when one of the directors sabotaged the business and it came crashing down. By 1995 targeted layoffs started and I opted to leave and negotiated a good send-off package. My last day of work at Motor Mart Group was 31st January 1995.

A couple of days later I passed by Hamza's Muingo-a-Kaiti bar in the early afternoon and found Francis Nyamu, assistant technical manager operations ATMO of Kenya Pipeline company, KPC having a late lunch. I joined him and

ordered for a drink. I mentioned to him that I was taking a break from work and would be in the job market by March. "KPC is looking for an accountant," he said. "If you are interested, I can talk to the chief accountant who is leaving on a two week business trip to Britain day after tomorrow. The salary may not be much but there are good benefits," he added. The following day after this conversation Francis brought me a letter of temporary appointment as a product accountant II in job group 7. On 5th February 1995, I reported to work at KPC pump station No. 10, also known as the National Control Center NCC on Sekondi road industrial area. Two weeks later when Godfrey Ngondi the chief accountant returned from Britain, I was instructed to report to him at the head office on the 12th floor of the National Bank building on Harambee Avenue. He informed me that he had been asked to explain how I had an appointment letter albeit temporary, yet my file did not have an application letter and arrangements were made to correct this anomaly without further delay.

Unfortunately, I spent the next few months fending off accusation after accusation from Albert Odhiambo the head of product accounts. I had arrived at KPC in a spanking new Toyota Corolla EE 97 Station Wagon and I was given a parking space next to Odhiambo's old Peugeot 405. This really seemed to irk him and he spent an inordinate time trying to convince the security manager that I should park my car in the parking lot reserved for junior staff. As a senior member of staff I resisted this attempt successfully to his extreme chagrin. Eventually matters came to a head and he was reassigned duties at the HQ and I breathed a sigh of relief. I had assured both the chief accountant and Francis Nyamu Assistant Technical Manager Operations ATMO the head of operations at NCC that I could handle product accounts without any trouble. Odhiambo was of a different opinion and wrote a recommendation that Douglas Ruwah based at the coast at the time was more suited for the position. This recommendation was declined and Ruwah himself indicated that he was nearing retirement and had no wish to be uprooted from Mombasa which was near his rural home. I was made to understand that Odhiambo had expected to be retained on contract upon his then imminent retirement. My arrival made his being retained a remote probability and he made it his business to discredit me at every turn.

KPC operates a multi-product pipeline in which oil products are pumped in a strict sequence of Diesel-Kerosene-Jet Fuel-Kerosene-Diesel-Super- Regular-Diesel-Kerosene. Over time Regular petrol was discontinued. The different grades

would mix in what is referred to as interface that is directed to specific tanks to settle and is then re-injected back into the system in a strictly quality controlled process. As was the norm, I was taken on a familiarization tour of the various pumping stations from pump station No 1, No 12 and 14 in Mombasa to pump station No 28 in Kisumu intermittently over the next three months or so. Of the total 28 pumping stations, number 9 at Embakasi, number 10 at Nairobi's Industrial area, number 12 at Moi International airport in Mombasa, number 25 at Nakuru, number 27 at Eldoret and number 28 in Kisumu were all oil delivery points onto road trucks, aircraft or to shippers' depots, as the oil companies were referred to. Pump station number 14 at the Kipevu Oil Storage Facility, KOSF was for receipt of refined white oil imports as well as backloading of the same for re-export. Pump station number 1 received product from the Kenya Petroleum Refineries. Pump stations numbers 2, 4, 6, 8 and 24 were designated as future stations. Pump station number 26 at Sinendet is a bifurcation point where line 2 to Eldoret and line 3 to Kisumu separate.

Product accounts entailed preparing monthly statements of oil movements and stock entitlement for shippers and invoices for deliveries and white oil imports and exports at KOSF. In the process of my learning the ropes, I came across two issues that puzzled me, one of which was a continuing drain on KPC revenues for quite a while. The other one had been a one-off hefty raid on the revenues. The shippers, there were only seven of them at the time namely: Agip, Caltex, Total, Shell/BP, Kenol, Kobil and Mobil (who had just bought out Esso) had recovered from KPC invoices approximately Kshs. 100,000,000/- on account of petroleum products apparently lost in the KPC system. Each year the shippers recovered another approximately Kshs. 100,000,000/- for 'interest on product advanced for commissioning' of the Western Kenya Pipeline extension WKPE in 1994. I dug into these two issues and discovered that in the first instance, the loss resulted from a wrongly calibrated tank at Kenya Petroleum Refineries Limited, KPRL. KPRL would report more than the actual product being delivered into the KPC system resulting in an apparent loss upon measurement in the KPC tanks. The KPRL tank was eventually recalibrated. In the second instance, there was an agreement as is the accepted norm in oil pipeline operations worldwide that obliged shippers to contribute line fill or carrier stocks based on their throughput to facilitate pipeline operations, thus the interest should have been at most, if at all a one-off charge but had continued every year. I approached the ATMO with

these findings and he told me the management was aware but did not wish to upset the powerful shippers and had let it ride.

This went against everything I believed in and when I brought it up in a subsequent accounts department meeting, Odhiambo my predecessor in product accounts sneeringly asked who I thought I was to tackle something that everyone else had decided to let lie. Francis Nyamu was due to retire and John Begisen, a man of faith and in my view, courageous to a fault was set to take over as the new Technical Manager TM as the position had since been renamed. He was an old hand in KPC having been in charge of the three Western Kenya Depots namely Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisumu for quite a number of years. All external correspondences from NCC were signed off by the ATMO. The matter of shippers keeping KPC's money, with an annual deduction was really bothering me and I mulled waiting to discuss it with the TM when he would eventually report to his new station. Having been in the system for quite a while, he probably knew the management position and might veto the idea. I bit the bullet and went against protocol and wrote to the seven oil companies directly and demanded refund of the moneys they had withheld on account of the apparent product losses attaching corrected statements for the period in dispute. The letter indicated that in the event of non-compliance KPC would invoke the provisions of the Transportation and Storage Agreement TSA that governed the relationships between the parties. The agreement provided that in the event of non-payment, KPC was at liberty to hold lien over the oil products in the pipeline system as well as withhold services until payment was received in full. The uproar it caused was instant fanned by my predecessor in product accounts, Albert Odhiambo who fired off an immediate accusatory internal memo but in a pleasant turn of events, Francis Nyamu, outgoing ATMO supported the position I had taken.

KPC being an integral part of the fuel supply system in Kenya, the ATMO and I were its representatives at the monthly Supply Coordinating Meeting SCM hosted on the last Friday of every month in turns by the various shippers, KPRL and KPC. KPRL would host the meeting in Mombasa while the rest would be in Nairobi. In one of these meetings held at Safari Park hotel hosted by Mobil who had just bought out Esso, attended by John Begisen who had taken over as the Technical Manager and myself a few weeks after the demand for refund, I requested KPRL to issue amended statements for the period their tank had erroneous deliveries. The KPRL representatives declared that the accounts of that

period had been audited and closed and could therefore not be reopened. I then turned to the oil company representatives and advised them to seek compensation from KPRL and that KPC expected a refund of the unpaid money. I further informed them that KPC would invoke the provisions of the TSA as advised in the earlier letter against those who will not have paid in the stated time frame. The meeting ended abruptly and Begisen and I were requested to leave the meeting venue to allow them confer and decide a way forward but as we left, I advised them the only way forward was to refund the money. I then advised Henry Mwangi of Mobil that they had up to close of business the following Monday to pay up. Normally the meeting was followed by lunch and on this day, Begisen and I took a solitary lunch with the KPRL and National Oil Company of Kenya NOCK representatives as the rest of the meeting attendees rushed off to their offices to deliver the ultimatum. On arrival at my office I found a message to call Henry Mwangi of Mobil and at his request, I passed by their office and collected the refund cheque that afternoon.

Begisen had managed to get approval from Ezekiel Komen, the KPC managing director to give the two of us the authority to follow through with the recovery. Next in line was Caltex and the managing director, Dana Flanders called for a meeting with the KPC managing director who requested Begisen and I to attend. The Caltex MD arrived with supply manager Dorothy Marami on the following Monday, and though he ignored Begisen and I, Komen was clear to Flanders that he would only act based on the advice we gave him. After the meeting I requested Dorothy to have the cheque delivered before lunch time and it was not. I then called the Western Kenya area manager Peter Mecha and passed on the instructions to pull out all the Caltex trucks from the fuel depot queues in Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisumu. When I got back to the office at 3pm I was told that the Caltex cheque had been received. I was also informed that the other oil companies were anxious to confirm the outstanding amounts so as to make the refunds. By Wednesday of that week, all the cheques except that from Kenol-Kobil, which to the best of my knowledge has never paid had been received. Kenol-Kobil had very heavy political clout and KPC was unable to enforce collection. Next, I set my sight on the annual interest payment and though I wanted to enforce recovery, it was agreed that we only stop future payments which was done without further ado. I became a hero and got a hefty bonus at the end of that year. This also assured my promotion through several ranks in fairly quick

succession, a feat that had never happened before in KPC, and I doubt if it has recurred ever since. I had joined KPC as a product accountant II job group 7 in early 1995 and was chief accountant in job group 3 by 1999.

Invoices for local deliveries were invoiced and paid in local currency while those for exports and white oil imports were invoiced in US\$ but paid in local currency at an exchange rate specified in the TSA. I had made a habit of visiting the head office a couple of times a month other than when called for a meeting to catch up on the ebb and flow of the company's lifeblood. One day while on one such unscheduled visit, I overheard a couple of my bosses complaining that the management was coming up with unplanned projects to 'mop up' bank balances after the major expenses, essentially salaries and electricity bills had been paid. This alarmed me as I was aware of a couple of other parastatals that had started that way and were unable to meet their operating obligations at the time. I really felt proud working for Kenya Pipeline Company and would not have liked to see it go down. In the back of my mind was a report I had seen in 1995 when I joined the company that had placed the optimum staff establishment at 750 and in fact there had been an ongoing voluntary retirement scheme, *Golden Handshake* as they were known at the time targeting junior staff such as drivers, security guards and other subordinate staff. By the year 1998, the total staff establishment had instead ballooned to around 1,300 with most increases in the junior cadre.

I embarked on a plan to minimize the available 'loose' bank balance but it would need the cooperation of both the KPC chief accountant and a number of the shippers' representatives. KPC had foreign loan obligations and would report exchange losses every year. I proposed to the chief accountant that he informs the board that the only way to eliminate these exchange losses was to collect some of the payments from the shippers in US\$ and apply them strictly for the foreign loans payment and he agreed with my proposal. Having only recently bloodied the shippers' noses over the unreasonable payments they had been collecting from KPC, I had to be strategic in my attempt to get them to pay the invoices in US\$ and even though it would be advantageous to them too, the relationship was strained and they may want to exact some kind of revenge. I approached the four most influential members of the SCM, namely Henry Mwangi of Mobil a fellow old boy of Alliance high school and we therefore had that special bond, Ben Obura of Shell and BP, Daniel Kinyua of Total and Peter Muli of Caltex and they readily agreed to help me 'save' KPC, in a manner of speaking. At the following

SCM, my request for shippers to pay the foreign currency denominated in the same currency was approved unanimously, reducing the loose available Kenya shillings bank balance significantly. It appeared the instructions to keep the US\$ for loans repayments was strictly followed because a few years down the line, as I enjoyed *Mugithi* and a chilled Tusker Malt beer on a Friday evening at Impala club in Parklands, a senior executive of Citi Bank took me to task to explain why KPC was taking a US\$ 12 million loan from an Indian Bank for a project, but could not use an equivalent deposit at Citi bank. The deposit was instead being used as the collateral for the foreign loan that Citibank was willing to provide at a lower interest rate but the offer had been rejected. If he ever gets to read this book, I hope he will understand why I could not answer his question satisfactorily.

A few years down the line from around 2001, KPC got into a projects frenzy with additional floors being added to every office block from Mombasa all the way to Kisumu and Eldoret. By this time, I had been transferred to the head office in National bank building on Harambee avenue from Industrial area and was able to access some of the project documents and after consultations with professionals in the construction industry, it was clear the contracts were greatly exaggerated. KPC in my view faced a double jeopardy, putting up unnecessary offices at greatly inflated costs. I then shared this information with some members of the parliamentary public investments committee PIC with a request to step in and save the company from being vandalized. I was to be disappointed later to learn that some of the PIC members had used the information to demand for bribes from KPC management. There was a general warning against leaking company information, but I got a specific verbal one and I assumed the bribe takers had also revealed the source of their information. It appears I then got marked and would lose my job a while later on trumped up accusations.

At around this time, we had used soft power to get emoluments for staff enhanced and a staff mortgage scheme had been introduced. I took advantage of it and was able to vary mine to a construction loan on a plot I had bought in one of the leafy upmarket areas in Nairobi. The iron work and burglar proofing were being fabricated at a workshop in Bahati Estate in Eastlands. One Friday on my way from an SCM at the Norfolk hotel, I diverted to Standard Chartered Bank on Funzi road in Industrial area to pick and deliver to the workshop owner a required payment of Kshs. 70,000/-. As I left the parking lot of the bank a white car also pulled out and remained behind me consistently, but I did not take any

particular interest. As I turned off from Jogoo road on to Eastleigh First Avenue, the car overtook me on the wrong side of the road with two guys on the back seat pointing AK 47 rifles at me. The guy at the front passenger seat was pointing a hand gun and waving me to stop. They got out and one blocked the vehicles coming from Eastleigh and another those coming from Bahati. The third one came to me and demanded to know where I had kept the money. When I told him it was in my coat pocket, he ordered me to hand over the coat. He also took my wallet and car keys and left me stranded in the middle of the road. In my coat taken by the gunmen was an Ericson T29 cell phone bought for me in Turkey by my wife which was one of the very few in the country at the time. Bystanders helped me push the car off the road then I walked to the workshop and called a friend who took me home where I collected the car's spare keys before I made my report at the Jogoo Road police station. From then onwards, I am always very conscious of my surroundings.



One Friday a number of us from the oil industry boarded the 7am Kenya Airways flight headed for the monthly SCM in Mombasa hosted by KPRL, and as the plane made its steep climb the oxygen masks fell out. Not one single passenger or cabin crew member reached out for them as advised in the safety drill a few minutes earlier. We landed back safely but shaken by the experience. I made a lot of noise about how I would be late for the meeting and saw no need to go, and insisted that my ticket be cancelled. This was fueled by my age-old fear of flying. A supervisor called me over and told me that the next flight leaving in a few minutes had one seat, and if I had no luggage, I could get on to it. With at least five oil industry colleagues, including two ladies watching I had no choice but to swallow my fear and take up the offer. Those left behind did not manage to get another flight until late afternoon and the meeting did not start until around 4pm.

Godfrey Ngondi the Finance Manager retired, and my UON BCom year mate Hellen Njue succeeded him. In the finance team was also Joyce Mutungi Owuor, not only a BCom year mate but had also been in the sister school, Alliance girls high school since we were in form one, as well as Cyrus Gitonga who had been a couple of years ahead of me at Alliance high school. As stated elsewhere by 1999 I had been promoted to Chief Accountant Job Group 3 and was subsequently

transferred from NCC to HQ exchanging places with Joyce Mutungi Owuor. I was then assigned payroll and statutory matters administration as my main duties in addition to other duties that would be delegated from time to time. As stated earlier, from the middle of 2001 KPC management had initiated numerous projects that appeared to have been purely for funding KANU campaigns. Towards the end of January 2003, I was tasked to prepare a report on the financial status of KPC. At this time the top management had been replaced and we had acting departmental heads in almost all departments. On a Friday early in February 2003, the acting finance manager instructed me to ensure I finalized the report and hand it to him before leaving for the weekend. I finished and handed it in at around 9pm, he had been waiting for it and it showed KPC was in debt of about Kshs. 3 billion as I looked forward to catching a chilled Tusker Malt beer at Hooters pub before heading home, the acting FM then handed me a letter of suspension from office! I was eventually summoned to the office a week or two later and was in an unprocedural process unfairly convicted of gross misconduct and dismissed from employment.

To keep the oil flowing smoothly, the pumps in the various pump stations had strict maintenance schedules undertaken by teams of specified engineers and technicians. The teams would be ferried to the site in company vehicles and would be paid subsistence allowance popularly called *mbuzi* while working out of the normal duty station. The teams would include Mechanical, Electrical and Telecommunication and Instrumentation departments' personnel. For the Mechanical Engineering department, the Chief Mechanical Engineer based at the KPC NCC would write a memo to the Engineering Manager based at the KPC headquarters in National Bank building on Harambee avenue for approval to put together a departmental maintenance team. The Engineering Manager at the time was my 1978 Alliance high school year-mate Geoffrey Leting. The memo would detail the number of staff, designation, and job group of the members of staff that would comprise the service team. The Senior Mechanical Engineer would then get the actual team together and prepare subsistence allowance applications signed by each applicant. He would then certify the applications and forward to the Chief Mechanical Engineer for approval. The application forms accompanied by a copy of the approval memo would be forwarded to accounts for final authorization and payment. Sometime in October 2002, some subsistence allowance applications for a service on one of the pumping stations approved by Chief Mechanical Engineer

Kakai Kuteli and certified by his immediate assistant John Kihara Chege with all the necessary attachments landed on my desk and I gave the required authorization. A few months later it turned out that the service that had been paid for was nonexistent and the applicants' signatures and attachments were forged. A search revealed that this racket had been going on for a while all signed off by both Kuteli and Chege. Kuteli and Chege immediately disclaimed their signatures on the subsistence allowance claims and in a hastily convened Kangaroo court, I was accused of being responsible for the forgery and loss of company money. The chairman of the Kangaroo court declined my request to have the two signatures subjected to examination by professional document examiners. It was mandatory that upon employment a new member of staff reads and understands and also confirms in writing the staff rules and regulations that governed the relationship between employer and employee which I dutifully did at the time of joining the company. This manual had elaborate processes of resolving a plethora of issues that could come up from time to time. In this particular case, and in a hurry to get me out of KPC in the shortest possible time for reasons alluded to earlier, all these provisions of the staff rules and regulations manual were overlooked and within a short while I found myself out of work. My attempts to get intervention by the Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority and the Criminal Investigation Department of Kenya Police were unsuccessful. I then filed a case in the High Court in 2003 which would eventually be determined against me in 2018 after fifteen years of court appearances. In the meantime in 2012 during the currency of the court case I made an application to have Kakai Kuteli's and John Kihara Chege's signatures subjected to professional verification. The application was opposed by KPC on the grounds that the signatures had not been contested at all. In 2014 the court ruled that the signatures that my two erstwhile colleagues had denied were indeed genuinely theirs. With this revelation I attempted to get KPC to then correct the injustice that had been done to me without success.

The next time I sought formal employment was in 2018 when I was engaged as a Business Development Executive for BimaNet Kenya. This company had an innovative way of life insurance distribution with a revolutionary product called Linda Fanaka and I immersed myself fully as the Alliance high school Endowment Fund received a donation for every policy I sold. David Owiti of Alliance high school class of 1996 then working for Eco bank and I visited finance institutions where he had contacts. We were looking for institutions that were willing to

partner with BimaNet to finance the product. This potential game changer initiative however did not materialize for various reasons, chief being the Kenyan financial sector aversion to new ways of doing business. The advent of Covid 19 and the forecasts of massive deaths made the Linda Fanaka package supposedly too risky for the underwriters and BimaNet Kenya closed its doors early in 2020.

CHAPTER 7



TENTATIVE ENTREPRENEUR



One early Sunday morning in the early eighties, on a weekend when we had received *boom*, as the UON student allowance was fondly referred to, I staggered out of Afro Unity bar opposite Jevanjee Gardens headed back to the halls of residence. Outside was an Asian guy loading gunny bags on to a pickup truck of what I realized were shilling coins from the jukebox in the bar. There were quite a number of the bags in the truck, obviously from other bars and it struck me as the most awesome business model ever. This man had invested in the jukeboxes and as he went about his other concerns including sound sleep, we were busy feeding him cash which he would collect at his time and convenience. I decided that one day I would put up such a business model and I am nearly there! In the meantime over the years I have dabbled in various business ventures some that would involve importation of diverse products for sale into the country. Around 1990 a friend, Peter Maundu Kyalo and I started importing reconditioned cars, the famous Toyota DX from

Dubai and this was a lucrative business that lasted for a number of years, until Kenyans discovered it and the business was flooded. I moved on and left Peter who I believe still imports vehicles for sale to date.

At Toyota Kenya, I would occasionally overhear my bosses complaining about delays in vehicle assembly at Associated Vehicle Assemblers A.V.A in Mombasa. The delays in clearing the Completely knocked Down or CKD kits from Japan would throw new vehicle sales off target due to unavailability of the units. I eventually found out that this was due to delays in imports quality inspection which was then the sole preserve of SGS, Société Générale de Surveillance. I got together with my workmate Francis Muia and with two other friends both technicians Patrick Mutava and Obadiah Nthenge, we mooted the idea of forming a company to take up the huge slack in this sector and Techsales Commercial Agencies was registered on 16th January 1991. The operating license could only be issued upon approval by the president of the Republic and Francis Muia approached the then Ukambani kingpin and Wamunyu village mate Joseph Mulu Mutisya to facilitate this. He gave us a condition that we had to make him a shareholder which we did and gave him a request letter for the president's signature. Francis had also managed to secure a meeting with Harris Mule through workmate Boniface Wasoi, a very senior official in the ministry of finance at the time, who promised support without any preconditions once the license was issued and we were set to break into the Big Boys club. Unfortunately, it seems our application letter to the president is still in Joseph Mulu Mutisya's coat pocket.

In 1997, my wife Margaret then a teacher at St. Austin's Academy in Lavington took school children to Johannesburg South Africa during the long mid-year holiday. She bought for me a couple of suits, a Pierre Cardin and a Vincenzo for a total of Kshs. 7,000/-. They each cost about Kshs. 40,000/- in the local shops in Nairobi. We seized the business opportunity and with three months' salary advance the equivalent of approximately US\$3,000 and an air ticket on a two-week credit, my wife headed back to South Africa and was back in a few days with a stock of about fifty suits. We marketed them among lawyers and media people and at an average Kshs. 20,000/- each, they were gone in about two weeks. I also offered them to a couple of staff from Sir Henry's, a high-end shop for suits who were able to sell them to their regular clients at these greatly reduced prices. This became a regular business until Kenyans discovered cheaper suits from Turkey

and exhibition halls and once more, we moved on.

Petroleum business had been deregulated in 1994 and one no longer needed the president's approval signature, typically with a green pen to set up a petrol station. This was delegated to local authorities and petrol stations sprung up all over. The most reliable fuel dispenser brand was Tokheim distributed by a company called Unicorn Sales and Services Ltd that was based in Baba Dogo in Nairobi. As I was having a drink with Captain Peter Kinyanzui of Kenya Airways sometime in 1998, he mentioned that a prominent businessman from Makueni was looking for ways to import Tokheim dispensers directly from South Africa, possibly at a lower cost and with a shorter waiting period than when buying through Unicorn. Kinyanzui eventually introduced me to businessman Kamweli Mwangangi who wondered aloud if I was related to a Joseph Kiundi of Standard Chartered bank. It turned out that my elder brother Joseph had been his trusted banker for many years, and on the basis of this fact Kamweli was willing to trust me to do business with him. Armed with a quote from Unicorn I emailed Tokheim in Johannesburg and found that the price differential was unbelievably huge and the die for my travel to South Africa was cast.

In KPC being an accountant my departmental head was the chief accountant but being in product accounts, I had a dotted reporting line to the ATMO, the head of operations. I applied for a ten day leave with the intention of traveling to South Africa to procure the fuel dispensers for Kamweli which the chief accountant approved, and I immediately booked a Monday afternoon South African Airways flight bound for Oliver Tambo international airport in Johannesburg. I then handed over the office during the week to the usually Mombasa-based Douglas Ruwah who was relieving me during the ten-day leave. I had kept the acting ATMO fully abreast of the developments and the fact that I was booked on a Monday afternoon flight to Johannesburg. Early in the morning of the Monday I was to travel, a driver arrived at my house with a letter from the acting ATMO calling me for a meeting at 2.30pm that afternoon. I consulted the chief accountant on phone and he told me he would take care of the matter and that I should continue with my travel plans.

Armed with the equivalent of Kshs. 1,000,000/- in Standard Chartered bank traveler's cheques financed by Kamweli Mwangangi, I boarded the flight for Johannesburg as scheduled. I was met at the airport by Peter Gakunga, a Kenyan

from Nakuru living and doing business in South Africa who had been introduced to me by Godfrey Ngondi. I booked a room in Formula One hotel in Berea from where Peter assured me I could walk to the Tokheim offices which I did the following morning. The Tokheim sales manager told me they had an exclusive contract with Unicorn Sales and Services Ltd of Baba Dogo in Nairobi Kenya and I could therefore not buy directly from them. The only customer they were allowed to sell directly to in Kenya was Kenol-Kobil Petroleum Company which bought the dispensers in huge numbers. My heart sank, fearing that I had travelled to South Africa on a wild goose chase.

As the saying goes, whatever will be will be and as I nursed my disappointment over a bottle of beer at the bar in Formula One hotel later that evening, the Tokheim sales manager I had met earlier walked in and joined me as soon as he recognized me. In the course of the evening, and after breaking the ice over a few beers, I asked him which countries he was allowed to sell to in Africa and he mentioned Rwanda among others. In the morning I placed an order for Tokheim fuel dispensers for my business in Kigali, Rwanda. I realized that they neither had the interest nor the means to confirm where the merchandise ended up, as long as it was recorded as leaving their premises headed to an approved destination. While I waited for the dispensers to be assembled, I changed residence from the Formula One hotel in Berea to a more affordable furnished apartment in the crime infested Hill Brow area. The apartment had been vacated by another Kenyan and his family from Nakuru as they headed back to Kenya. I was assured I would be safe as long as I got indoors before sundown. Gunfire would sometime rent the air all night long, but my stay was trouble free. As I waited for my merchandise, Peter Gakunga requested me to go and pick some money from a business associate of his in Blantyre Malawi, and I boarded an Air Malawi flight on Tuesday morning to come back the following day as I was to take delivery of the dispensers and ship them on Thursday in time for my flight home on the Friday. The KPC chief accountant had left a message for me with Peter that I must not be late in reporting to work. The acting ATMO who had tried to stop me from traveling by calling a meeting at the time of my flight had reported to KPC management that I had absconded from duty. There was also the matter of my having travelled out of the country without seeking clearance as was required of public servants. Peter's friend picked me from Chilekha international airport,

about eight kilometers outside Blantyre and dropped me at a hotel after giving me Peter's US\$ 4,000 and left me to my own designs with the information that I would have to find my way to the airport the following day. After dinner, I sat at the bar having a drink and watching TV. In Malawi very few people speak Swahili and when I asked for another beer in Swahili, I attracted the attention of one of the other bar patrons who immediately joined me. He turned out to be a Tanzanian from Moshi who knew a couple of cross border businessmen from Emali my hometown. He worked in a farm in a town called Limbe not too far from Blantyre and he offered to show me interesting night spots in the town. We proceeded to paint the town very red. He dropped me back at the hotel in the wee hours of the morning and in my drunken slumber, all attempts by the hotel staff to wake me up at the agreed time were unsuccessful and I missed my flight back to Johannesburg. There were only two international flights daily, a South African and Malawi Airways both heading in opposite directions. I had to change my flight to the South African Airways one for the following afternoon. I stayed politely indoors that night, notwithstanding a mighty rain storm and caught a *matatu* to the airport by 11am and was glad to be back in Johannesburg, even though I was a day behind schedule.

After arranging for shipment of the merchandise, Peter had introduced me to a clearing agent, a fellow Kenyan in whose hands I left the shipment responsibility I headed out to the airport to catch my morning flight back home. At the Johannesburg Oliver Tambo International airport, the ground crew had gone on strike that morning and had blocked all the runways with tractors and other work tools. The negotiations took most of the day during which the airline management placed us at one of the airport lounges and proceeded to ply us with drinks of our choice, and it was a fairly tipsy lot that boarded the flight later that afternoon. Among the passengers was a fairly large group that was coming to Nairobi for a Castle Brewing Company convention at Safari Park hotel and I promised to show them Nairobi night life in their free time. After takeoff, I proceeded to teach them how to dance *Mugithi* until we were ordered to settle down as we were destabilizing the aircraft! The captain also complained he could not hear radio communications over the din we were making.

I arrived in time back in office at the end of my ten-day leave. Over the next one year, Kamweli and I sold a lot of these dispensers to various businessmen

from both Machakos and Kitui districts. I had no need to travel to South Africa again as all I needed was to fire off an email to my new found friend titled *Fuel Dispensers for Rwanda*, get an invoice, make the necessary bank transfers and the clearing agent would collect and ship them to 'Kigali, Rwanda via Nairobi'. Although Kamweli Mwangangi, God rest his kind soul in eternal peace, put up all the money we shared the profits of the venture equally. As happens with all lucrative businesses, it attracted other investors who flooded the market with cheap reconditioned dispensers from India and the United States of America. Kamweli and I eventually bowed out of the fuel dispenser importation sector. It was at this time that it became mandatory for me to be found at any time with quick turn-around times for business purposes and land line telephones could not pass muster. I purchased an Ericsson GH 388 cell phone during my sojourn in Johannesburg and proceeded to buy a Safaricom line 072516548 for Kshs. 250,000/- and got connected after a handset 'type approval' fee of Kshs. 10,000/- to the Communications Commission of Kenya. Calls were charged at a flat rate of Kshs. 28/- per minute regardless of the call duration for both outgoing and incoming calls, with airtime being loaded via cheque payments at Safaricom offices in Extelcom Building along Haile Selassie avenue for Nairobi subscribers. As cellular telephony developed and spread from covering only Nairobi and Mombasa to other parts of the country starting with areas along the main highways, Celtel entered the market to challenge the monopoly by Safaricom partly owned by the Kenya Posts and Telecommunications Corporation. Phone numbers then changed to 10 digits from the original 9 and my number became 0722516548 which I retain to date. Connection and calling charges also fell to manageable levels and scratch cards for airtime were introduced.

CHAPTER 8



FULL TIME BUSINESS



Two months after my abrupt and unceremonious departure from KPC in 2003, April to be precise Roma Modelling and Talent Management Agency Limited opened its doors for business on the fourth floor of Bruce House on Kaunda Street. My wife Margaret though a teacher had appeared in various TV commercials shot both locally and internationally with influential contacts in the industry. Roma therefore took advantage of the contacts and started off as a Modelling and Talent Management Agency and became a leading model recruitment agency in the country. It was initially owned by Roseline and Margaret hence the name RoMa. Over time Roseline opted out and I bought her shares and registered some of them in my name and the rest in my daughter Ndunge's name. Roma widened its business scope and morphed into Roma Agency Limited. Roma established contacts with local schools as sources of models. What I found interesting was these had to be classified depending on location. The product to be advertised would be represented by models of

the social segment it was aimed at. We became adept at providing models that fit the description on first attempt and the main advertising agencies had us on speed dial. With time we graduated to casting for movie actors in many of the major international movies shot in the region including as far afield as Malawi and Sudan. We also took to recruiting In-Store promotions push personnel and managed the countrywide search for the national dress promoted by the newly installed NARC government in 2004, among many other promotions. By this time, we had moved to a larger office at Elgon Court on Ralph Bunche road in Upper Hill.

In 2008 my wife and I visited some friends in Southern Austria, in a town called Liebnitz and traveled by bus and train from Vienna in which were adverts running on TV screens that had sound. On arrival back in Kenya I made an online search and found similar screens and imported a few units for a pilot run on KBS buses which was hugely successful. We subsequently established Roma Media with the tagline *The Greatest Advantage* and installed sixty of the screens in public service vehicles in Nairobi and its environs. Roma Media got traction among organizations being served by advertising agencies such as SCANAD, O&M, DDB-CCL, MCL and with direct business from Safaricom, Unilever and a good number of SMEs. We also recruited a digital team and acquired equipment for production of animated adverts for clients that became a hit with the SMEs.

Within a few months as the business grew in leaps and bounds, the police traffic commandant declared fitting screens in Public Service Vehicles illegal and Roma Media came crashing down. We filed and won a court case against the police but clients had pulled down their adverts and the Public Service Vehicle operators were unwilling to fit the screens again as they feared police harassment. It was also the time my health started to deteriorate. We had fitted the screens financed by a business loan from Equity bank. With these developments, servicing the loan became an uphill task and we eventually had to sell some property to pay off the debt. Around the same time I hooked up with Melvin Yimbo, one of the best creatives in the advertising space at the time and registered Spectrum Media Services Ltd. Housing Finance Company of Kenya, HFCK was in the market for a partner to brand a new project in Komarock of middle income houses on a revolutionary model. Spectrum Media was awarded the branding contract at a fee of Kshs. 5,000,000/- for phase one of the project. We made an impressive

presentation to the board with the brand name MAKAO and our proposal was accepted with suggested minor amendments. We were paid the initial deposit of Kshs. 1,500,000/-. Melvin drew some of the funds and disappeared and we were unable to present the amended project. He appeared nearly a week later and claimed to have been arrested by city council *askaris* as he smoked on the street and that he had been in custody all the time. HFCK had already awarded the contract to another firm and I shared the balance of the money in the account with Melvin and Spectrum Media Services Limited came to an abrupt end.

By the year 2005 many Kenyan companies had taken to outsourcing their labor requirements in cost saving measures. Roma Agency Limited established a unit to take advantage of this new opportunity, headed by Judas Nguli and Nthenya Nguta, human resource officers we recruited at different times for this particular task. In the course of time we were managing the labor resource that operated the beer bottling plant at East Africa Breweries Limited as well as warehouse loaders and off loaders of both beer for dispatch and returned empty bottles. At Central Glass Industries which was a subsidiary of EABL, we managed the labor resource that operated the beer bottle making plant. We also offloaded and bagged malt extract at East Africa Maltings Limited. In Kenya Shell Limited we were contracted to manage depot operations staff that included loading of oil products onto road trucks, railway wagons as well as depot facilities management throughout the Republic and necessitated regular visits to the various towns where Kenya Shell operated. We also had other labor management contracts with smaller organizations such as MEA limited and other less known organizations.

In 2005 we had registered Roma Micro Finance limited and started business giving out small loans. After a while we felt confident enough to scale it up and with an overdraft from Jamii Bora Bank and investments from a few friends and family, we advertised for loans against cars. We established safeguards such as retaining logbooks after verifying them at NTSA, joint comprehensive insurance, fitting car tracking devices etc. At one time, we had lent just under Kshs. 3,000,000/- against five cars and I was able to track them on my cellphone and could immobilize them should the need arise. Early one morning, I noticed all five cars had remained in the same positions for over twelve hours and I alerted the tracking company. I was quite alarmed when they said that they were the unable to trace them. We discovered that the tracking devices had been removed,

and I rushed to Times Tower to register the cars in the Roma Micro Finance's name only to find that I was carrying fake logbooks. The insurance sticker covers were fake too. I reported to the police and eventually we were able to trace some of the vehicles by registration numbers, but they were of different makes and different ownerships. With this loss, we were unable to service the bank facility so the three cars put up as security for the bank overdraft were repossessed and auctioned in short order. We had again moved office to Williamson Court on Ngong road as we expanded operations.

I was Chairman and Business Development Director for the Roma Group. Ndunge, my daughter was taking care of Administration while my wife Margaret and son Mbevi, when he was not at the flying school were mostly in the field handling production and casting for movies and TV commercials which work would occasionally take them to neighboring countries. Kyavi my other son had struck out on his own while Grace the last born was pursuing her veterinary studies at the university. As Roma Media gained prominence, it occurred to me that the future lay in digital business and we set out to be part of that growth.

In 2012, Roma Agency Limited, RAL applied and became an Airtel Money agent from the office in Williamson Court on Ngong road but dropped it a couple of months later in favor of Safaricom's MPESA due to lack of business traction for Airtel Money. I stumbled upon a digital platform called EssentialPesa for the distribution of airtime and various utilities, effectively making the user a commission agent. The country promoters were Pauline Kaunda and Lawrence Muheki and they presented an enhanced system via their Company Denver (MK) Limited and renamed it VirtualPessa. For a fee of Kshs. 500,000/- Roma Agency Limited was allocated the former Eastern Province for digital distribution of airtime of the three providers namely Safaricom, Airtel and Orange as well as electricity tokens and postpaid bill payment services. There was a great and dazzling launch at Heron Court Milimani after which we went out to trade. The digital distribution system started having serious downtimes shortly thereafter and we went to the Denver (MK) Ltd office along Kabarnet drive to find out the problem. The office was empty and the security people informed us the company directors had moved out in the night. Efforts to trace them through the police proved futile, and we cut our losses and moved on.

In February 2013, ill health started to manifest itself and stomach cancer

walked in through the firmly closed door in October of that year. By the third quarter of 2014 my ill health and the capital lost had adversely affected the Roma Group operations and we closed shop as I concentrated on getting my health back.

CHAPTER 9



THE FARMER



I grew up in a subsistence farming community and was either weeding some *shamba* or planting something, depending on the season. I got to appreciate the importance of the ability to grow food whether for self and family or for trade, and its importance to human existence. From 1975, I would spend most school holidays at my brother-in-law Robert Zakayo Mulli's home in Mombasa. They had a farm near Mtwapa that had a fantastic orchard with *ngowe*, apple and indigenous mangoes, oranges and coconut as well as maize and other food crops. I would spend most of the school holiday supervising the workers tending the farm as well as helping grade and weigh produce destined for the market. At the end of the holidays as I headed back to school, my brother-in-law would pay me an allowance for working at the farm.

The farming bug bit me hard, and within a few years of my working life, I bought a five-acre *shamba* from my cousin Joshua Mutisya at Mitamboni village along Kambu river near Darajani and named it Kambu Four Farm. This was after

my son Kyavi asked if our phone number at the farm would be Kambu Four when he was told by Fr Thomas Kyalo of the Kambu Catholic church their phone number was Kambu Three. I bought a water pump and got into serious farming of okra, chilies and aubergines for export and tomatoes and green maize for the local market. To allow for irrigation, we planted in burrows on the farm. I was working in Nairobi and would be home over the weekend to keep my hand in and plan for the following week. I would buy fuel for the water pump in bulk to last the following week. I was barely breaking even and changed the mode of irrigation by installing a Ndume turbo prop pump that used flowing water as the sole driving force. A number of hitherto thriving small scale irrigation *shambas* in the vicinity went belly up and I found out they had been accessing cheap fuel from my farm. With the huge cut in fuel cost I was still barely breaking even. I took a three week leave to supervise the project and made in those three weeks what I would normally make in three months! The workers had clearly been robbing me blind and I tried a few other mitigating factors including firing all the workers, getting new ones and asking my brother and his wife who lived nearby to keep an eye on things with minimal improvement.

My cousin Col (Rtd.) Thomas Kyengo Mwololo had introduced me to fellow *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* clansman and Catholic priest in charge of Kambu Parish Fr Thomas Kyalo Kibathi. I had found them on a Friday evening at the Total petrol station bar in Mtito Andei as I arrived from Voi where I had been a witness in a case at the magistrate's court. Fr Kyalo tickled my funny bone when he told me that he used the opportunity while mingling with the public at the bar to collect material for his church sermons. We hit it off famously and became great friends. Though I had put up a structure at Kambu Four Farm, it was hardly habitable and Fr TK as he was commonly referred to welcomed me to stay at the parish whenever I was around. As I was at the farm practically every weekend, I became a familiar figure around the parish. The other priests Frs Muange, Kavulya and Kyambu were equally as welcoming. Being along the Mombasa highway, it was popular with other priests and I got to know and befriend many a Catholic priest and got used to hanging around with them. My first-born daughter is called Ndunge and as is the custom I am called Baba Ndunge, father of Ndunge and the priests jokingly referred to me as Fr Ndunge. The parishioners mistook me for a priest and many are the times I was called upon to bless children. Not

being even a catholic, I took to beating a hasty retreat every time the request was made. Fr TK then taught me a couple of blessing prayer routines and convinced me that the Lord would bless those that I prayed for with a sincere heart and it's possible many went on to great heights from blessings showered on them through efforts by Fr Ndunge.

During the years 1992, 1993 and 1994 I was the chief guest at the Parish for the Machakos Catholic Church Diocesan collections. Every year Kambu parish collected the most funds in the diocese prompting Bishop Urbanus Kioko to invite me as a special guest at a Mass in the Machakos Cathedral. Two things happened, one, I changed employers in 1995 and did not have as much free time and resources as I had in my previous work place and two, the train wagons from the Ngai Ndethya derailment on their way downstream had uprooted the Ndume pump which I had set up in the middle of the river. It was then washed downstream and we were unable to recover it. My farm had by then expanded to 70 acres on both sides of Kambu river after I acquired another 65 acres from the neighbors. With these developments my farming activities at Kambu Four farm deteriorated greatly. We had a private joke with Chief Kyule of Mtito Andei that the size of my farm called for a dedicated assistant chief.

The Kenya Railways team dispatched to repair the Ngai Ndethya bridge was headed by Engineer Stanley *Snyidho* Otieno, a man with whom I had gotten into all sorts of mischief during our six years together at Alliance high school. There was one man in the site office with the most boring job in the world. Those days, mobile phones were unheard of except in James Bond movies and there was no Kenya Posts and Telecommunication connection to the site. To keep in touch the Kenya Railways telecommunications technicians had pulled an office extension with call out facilities from their Nairobi headquarters switch board to the site. Due to the long distance, the pulse signal was too weak to ring the handset bell, so the technicians had rigged a tiny LED bulb that flashed to signal an incoming call. This fellow sat staring at the little light all day long so that no call would be missed.

Although my farm was barely five kilometers from the Mombasa-Nairobi highway, I was forced to make an approximately 20 kilometers detour to the nearest railway line crossing either at Kathekani or Darajani. Attempts to have a crossing nearer had failed as we had been given an unaffordable quote of

some Kshs. 170,000/- as the cost of putting it up. Being the true Kenyan I am, I requested Eng *Snyidho* to divert some of the bridge construction resources to put up the crossing but it was not possible because of level crossing approval protocols. He mentioned that there was a board chairman's fund that was used at the chairman's discretion to finance deserving cases like ours as there was a dispensary, a primary school and a church that would be served by the crossing. As fate would have it, the then executive chairman of Kenya Railways Prof J.K Musuva was to visit the bridge construction site the following week to inspect progress and also meet the local leaders.

Eng *Snyidho* and I coached Mtito Andei chief Kyule on how to request the executive chairman for assistance with the crossing and voila! the request was granted. All I needed to do was to provide transport and accommodation for an engineer from Nairobi to supervise the work and labor on the agreed day. I traveled with him one Friday afternoon and I had arranged with Fr TK for an announcement in the nearby church that there would be food for work at the proposed site and he donated 6 bags of maize for the purpose. A Railway Level crossing is called *Sekeleni* in Kikamba and by noon that Saturday, I made a ceremonial crossing to declare the *Sekeleni Kwa Kioko* railway level crossing officially open for public use. After lunch at Mtito Andei, I put the Kenya Railways engineer on a Nairobi bound bus with adequate allowance for a job well done. That evening there was a major celebration by the users of the newly installed *Sekeleni Kwa Kioko* with Engineer *Snyidho* as the chief guest.

Around 1997, due to the changed circumstances alluded to earlier, it became untenable for me to continue my farming activities in the area, mainly as a result of the distance from Nairobi and changed working circumstances and so I sold the farm. But the farming bug was still very much part of my psyche and within a short space of time I roped in my good friends Francis Muia, Jackson Mbithi, Muendo Selee, Francis Mutiso, Katiki Nthenge and several others and was scouring parts of Mwala, Masii, Mbiuni, Kithimani and surrounding areas looking for a farm to purchase. It is during these tours that I came across a place in Mwala with the interesting name of Mumbuni wa Mundu near Catholic Archbishop Raphael Ndingi mwana wa Nzeki's rural home. It was densely populated by my *Eombe Nthoka Katemi* clansmen, the Archbishop being one himself. In 1999 I landed on a beautiful 12-acre piece in Kithendu village approximately two

kilometers from Sofia town, off the Thika-Garissa highway fed with irrigation water by gravity from the nearby Yatta furrow. Still smarting from the Kambu Four Farm fiasco, I was reluctant to get into commercial farming and kept it at subsistence level with a few goats and chicken, planted a few traditional crops and would visit the farm at most twice a month, sometimes with a few friends for a goat eating occasion.

Sometime around 2007 I finally succumbed to the farming bug. The Yatta furrow was seriously mismanaged at the time and water supply was erratic. In 2013, with a few friends we registered and recruited members for the Yatta Furrow Water Users Association, YWFUA that tried to rehabilitate the canal manually. We lobbied for an annual maintenance allocation from the Constituency Development Fund without success. At around the same time, internal division among the local farmers meant to benefit from the association reared its ugly head and the project came a cropper. In the meantime I rehabilitated and expanded a dam that the previous owner had established on the farm. I also did a joint project with a neighbor to pipe water from the canal as opposed to dependence on the communal pipes to our respective farms. I planted various vegetables including French beans for export with onions, tomatoes and *sukuma wiki* for the local market. Over time, differences with the neighbor over the use of the water crept in and we went our separate ways and I laid my own pipework. I also planted mango and bananas as well as maize and beans. Other than the fluctuation in prices, things went on well and I made Thursdays my farm day and I would leave Nairobi at 6am and stay at the farm until 8pm, and drive the 80 or so kilometers back. I also increased the flock of *kienyeji* chicken and goats and depended on that for supply of meat for my Nairobi home.

KALRO, the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization is a corporate body created under the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Act of 2013 to establish suitable legal and institutional framework for coordination of agricultural research in Kenya. KALRO mooted a project to encourage the growing of cassava in the largely rain deficient area with my farm being chosen for propagation of the cuttings. Initially the project went on well with the formation of a cassava growers farmers group. The group received a solar powered drier and grinder from KALRO to grind dried cassava and mix the flour with other cereal flour like maize, millet and so on for consumption by the local population

as well as for sale. The project was then handed over to an elected committee of local farmers and soon whispers of partiality in receipt of produce started, and payment delays began to be experienced. Within a few months the project collapsed and my farm was the main source of cassava for the surrounding markets for quite a while thereafter as I disposed of the cassava I had planted to supply cuttings to the local farmers. While I made a good return in the venture, I would have preferred the continuity of the KALRO initiated project with its long-term widespread benefits.

Next was a USAID sponsored project for the propagation of fast maturing sweet potatoes fortified with vitamin A meant to eliminate malnutrition in the area. They partnered with Christian Impact Mission and Keitt Exporters and set up a demonstration as well as a sweet potatoes multiplication unit on my farm. The unit was also to demonstrate the difference between furrow and drip irrigation on various types of vegetables. USAID also donated a solar drier, a grinder and bakery equipment. The sweet potato flour mixed with other cereal flour was used for baking bread and making highly nutritious *ugali* and porridge flour. The project period ended and locals took over, and within a short period there was little or nothing to show for it. In the following months my French beans production was purely for account of Keitt Exporters until the cost of production went up unsustainably and I discontinued the project and concentrated on local vegetables. This is also the time towards the end of 2013, I came down with cancer and after a while I did not have the energy to keep the pace and I let the project die. In 2018 I was back to farming and planted avocado and passion fruit. Unfortunately, the passion seedlings had a viral infection that resisted all known cures and I had to uproot them and let the ground lie fallow for a long while. The avocado trees are doing well and have started giving fruit. I am currently in the process of arranging for long term sustainable markets.

CHAPTER 10



BATTLE WITH ILL HEALTH



I had been diagnosed borderline hypertensive and pre-diabetic in mid 2001 and was eventually put on medication by Dr Eva Njenga in 2005, in addition to being advised on change of diet and a general lifestyle change to take in regular exercise. I did all this half-heartedly although I had cut out alcohol consumption in 2003 and joined the Windsor Golf Hotel & Country Club gym and would go for long walks along the picturesque jogging trails. In February 2013, as I went about my business in CBD, I developed a sharp pain in my chest and presented myself at Meridian Clinic on the 11th floor of Nation Media House. And just like that, my *annus horribilis* kicked in.

The doctor on duty did an ECG test on my evidently overweight body, I averaged about 95 kgs at the time, and after checking out the readings she asked me, “Do you have a personal doctor?”

“Dr Eva Njenga” I replied.

“Check yourself into a big hospital and call her,” she instructed.

Dr Njenga referred me to cardiologist Dr Martin Wanyoike who diagnosed a mild heart attack caused by a blood clot and I spent two days admitted, my very first hospital admission in the High Dependency Unit HDU and three days in the regular ward. I was then added a blood thinner to my already expensive daily cocktail of drugs. I was to be back in hospital again the following month with Dr Wanyoike having to perform an angiogram after another mild heart attack, but this time with three days in HDU and five in the regular ward. I had a medical cover of Kshs. 5,000,000/- that took care of all the medical bills and the mere fact that I did not have to worry about them was a great relief.

From around July the same year, I started having incessant stomach upsets which would come back within a few weeks of finishing the prescribed medication. In early October, my wife and I agreed that I consult a gastroenterologist, and of the three that came highly recommended only Dr Betty Musau was available to see me at short notice. One week later she did a colonoscopy and endoscopy and sent me for an MRI scan. The results took about four days to come through and be interpreted, and I presented myself on the appointed day at Dr Musau's clinic at the Nairobi hospital doctor's plaza. When I was announced by the receptionist, the doctor indicated that she wished to see me with my wife and that set off some system alarms. I called my wife and as she was running some errands in town, she was able to come join me within a fairly short while. "You have cancer of the stomach stage 1B," said Dr Musau, passing along various documents for our attention. "And we can manage it," she concluded. "Manage or cure?" asked my wife. The doctor said that cancer is never quite cured but goes into remission and could recur at any time. The tumor had attached itself onto the pyloric sphincter muscle at the lower opening of the stomach joining the small intestines. The doctor informed us that I was extremely lucky as stomach cancer under normal circumstances did not present any symptoms, and was rarely caught in its early stages as in my case and that it could be managed into remission with a reasonable degree of success. Many people including family members and friends have asked me how exactly I felt as the doctor pronounced what was possibly a death sentence. The sudden realization of my mortality was devastating and no words can adequately capture the feeling that my days here on earth may be over soon in the real sense of the word. Possibly these words I came across on LinkedIn are the closest that capture the moment, to wit:

Imagine you're going about your day, minding your own business, when someone sneaks up behind you...

You feel something press up against the back of your head, as someone whispers in your ear.

"Sssshhhhh.... don't turn around. Just listen. I am holding a gun against the back of your head. I'm going to keep it there. I'm going to follow you around like this every day, for the rest of your life."

"I'm going to press a bit harder, every so often, just to remind you I'm here, but you need to try your best to ignore me, to move on with your life. Act like I'm not here, but don't you ever forget... one day I may just pull the trigger... or maybe I won't. Isn't this going to be a fun game?"

This is what it is like to be diagnosed with cancer. Any STAGE of cancer. Any KIND of cancer. Remission does not change the constant fear. It never truly goes away. It's always in the back of your mind.

Please, if you have a loved one who has ever been diagnosed with cancer, remember this. They may never talk about it or they may talk about it often. Listen to them.

They aren't asking you to make it better. They want you to sit with them in their fear... their sadness... their anger... just for the moment. That's it.

Don't try to talk them out of how they are feeling. That doesn't help. It will only make them feel like what they are going through is being minimized. Don't remind them of all the good things they still have in their life. They know. They are grateful.

But some days they are more aware of that gun pressing into the back of their head and they need to talk about it. Offer them an ear.

♥Sherry McAllister♥

The doctor recommended immediate surgery and of the three surgeons she proposed, I was acquainted with Prof Khan and so we went to his clinic, one floor above Dr Musau's. Prof Khan was ready to do the surgery the following morning and during a preliminary check, on learning that I was both diabetic and hypertensive, sent me to my regular cardiologist Dr Martin Wanyoike who after examining me announced that I was as fit as can be for surgery. On Thursday 17th October 2013 at around 4pm, I was put on a wheel chair and pushed to the ward from Dr Wanyoike's Primecare heart clinic in the same hospital compound

despite my protestations that I could walk. Prof Khan passed by in the evening with the hospital matron to ensure I was prepared both in body, mind and spirit for the surgery and I assured him I was. He told me I would need three pints of blood and should therefore start calling relatives and friends to come and donate the required blood. The matron then said it would not be necessary as the country was figuratively swimming in blood due to the post West Gate mall terrorist attack blood donations by the Kenyan public.

The following morning Friday 18th at 10am or thereabouts, I was wheeled into the Nairobi hospital operating theatre as my family watched for Prof Khan to remove the cancerous tumor that was growing in my stomach. Prof Khan had assured my family I would be out of theatre by 4pm but it took much longer and by the time they left at around 6pm I had not come out. I later learnt that the surgeon had assured them the surgery had gone on well, and they would be able to see me the following day. I woke up in the middle of the night in a very dark room with lots of constraints that included a catheter, and as I struggled to remove very tight stockings the nurse heard the commotion. He came and found that I had already removed one of the stockings and he advised me that they were for prevention of possible blood clotting and I must put it back on. We came to a compromise that he could put back the stocking if he removed the catheter, and he did. In the morning I discovered I had been returned into the general ward after the surgery, but my insurance cover was for a private room and I insisted I be moved immediately. The male ward was under renovation and the only private room available at the time and to which I was moved was in St. Edward, a female ward and so certain protocols had to be observed during my nine days stay there, like my being given an exclusive twenty minutes of bathroom time. In the one day at the general ward I had been given a sponge bath by a male nurse and I waited with apprehension for the next one as all nurses in my new ward were female. However, I was provided with the necessary tools and was left on my own to cope as well as I could. I was able to use a normal shower after a few days.

As I recovered from the surgery, during sleepless nights, and there were many, I would wonder if the surgeon might have made a mistake stitching me back together, perhaps reconnected a vein to an artery thus certain parts were not receiving oxygenated blood and my body was slowly poisoning itself. Or he forgot to fully reconnect the intestines and once I started eating solids, the

food would end up under my skin. One night a few minutes past 11pm, James Wagama Ruitha, a neighbor in Garden Estate sauntered into my room and for a long time, as we shot the breeze those dark thoughts were pushed into the background. It took the concerted effort of several nurses to convince me to eventually let him go, and I was grateful to realize it was not just my immediate family that was concerned about my recovery. I made a mental vow to get well and leave the hospital as soon as possible. One morning as I came out of the shower, I bumped into Prof Omondi Ogutu who was my wife's gynecologist and he exclaimed, "Richard, why have I not been informed that you have become a woman?" to the merriment of everyone within earshot.

I had tubes draining fluids from various parts of my body and Prof Khan was able to read a lot in the discharges and declared that I was making amazing progress, a feat he said he had seen in very few of his patients. Five days after the surgery, he ordered a test normally done on day seven which involved the drinking of a dye as a scan of the stomach is screened to evaluate the healing and even after two tries, it was confirmed that the surgical wound had closed up and there was no leakage at all. He remarked that I was truly in a hurry to get out of hospital and on Saturday 26th of the same month I was discharged, by which time I had run up a bill of about Kshs.1,500,000/-. I was not unduly worried as I had adequate cover, or so I thought. An insurance representative delivered a letter to me on the Saturday I was leaving hospital indicating that for chronic and pre-existing conditions, they only paid 10% of the cover. Cancer being classified as chronic; they were only going to pay Kshs. 500,000/-. I had to foot the rest of the bill at very short notice. Fortunately, between my sister Esther Mulli and my immediate family, we were able to raise the balance of Kshs. 1,000,000/- and I left for home later that afternoon.

Getting back home under my own motion was a most exhilarating achievement. At this time, I had been leading the survey and subdivision of grandfather Yambu's ancestral land among his six sons. A small minority of my cousins were unhappy with the process but I carried on nevertheless. As I was recovering in Nairobi hospital, the leader of the dissenting minority of cousins would call every evening to find out how I was doing. I later learnt that he would put me on speaker phone for his group so they could follow my progress as I 'headed to the grave' as he had assured them and I promptly blocked him. He claimed to

have cast *kithitu* on me and would tell his team that I would not come out of the hospital alive. When I left for further treatment in India, he told all and sundry I would come back in a coffin. I have no idea what he tells them now that I am on year ten since he predicted, nay assured his followers of my certain departure from worldly cares.

The following Wednesday, Prof Khan reviewed my progress at his clinic at the Nairobi Hospital Doctor's Plaza and he was pleased with my healing progress. He then referred me to an Oncologist, a specialist I had never in my wildest dreams ever thought I would consult. My wife and I found our way to Dr Gladwell Kiarie's clinic at the cancer center on the other side of Nairobi hospital. We heard for the first time of a machine called a PET CT scan which was available at the time only in South Africa and Egypt in Africa, with India being the most affordable option. It maps out accurately the spread of cancer cells in the body and enables better management of the disease and after a while towards the end of November 2013, my wife and I boarded an afternoon Qatar Airways flight bound for Gurgaon, Haryana India just a few kilometers from New Delhi along the Jaipur highway. As we prepared to go to India the oncologist had informed us that the yellow fever vaccination, mandatory for visitors to India could not be administered on someone either recovering from cancer, undergoing or about to undergo chemo. She then wrote a letter explaining why I would not be carrying the yellow fever certificate. It was easy to go through JKIA but it took more than three hours at the Indira Gandhi International airport in New Delhi to get someone who understood enough English to decipher the letter and authorize my entry, and I nearly fainted from exhaustion as we waited in the seatless arrivals hall since I was still weak from the surgery.

We were picked up from the massive Indira Gandhi International airport and delivered to the equally massive Medanta hospital international office from where we were quickly processed by Franklin Austin. We were taken to a self-contained private room with a sofa seat that turned into a second bed in the oncology ward on the 14th floor of the hospital. I then started the rounds of tests which lasted about three days before the initial results which resulted in further tests. I was already uneasy as I seemed to be segregated from 'normal' people by being placed in a ward specifically for cancer patients as if I was not fit to mix with other normal patients and people. Did the doctors sense that I was on a slippery slope to the

great unknown hereafter from which there was no return? As all these tests went on, and though we did not voice it, I am sure my wife was as anxious as I was and she too wished the machines could speak and say what they could see at once.

Before we had left for India, a couple had visited us at our Nairobi home to encourage us. The lady had been diagnosed with stage four cancer a couple of years before and had been given six months to live by doctors in the USA. She then sought treatment in India and here she was two years down the line still hale and hearty. Back in India on the final day morning, the doctor in charge of my case came and announced that final results would be ready that afternoon and warned me to expect trouble if they were brought by a team of doctors. He brought them alone! And the results indicated I was clear of cancer and generally had a body that was functioning fairly well, but to be on the safe side needed some six chemotherapy cycles of four days each with a three week break between the cycles and concurrent twenty-five radiotherapy sessions. Interestingly I found the word 'concurrent' sinister when used in this context.

The treatment was recommended to start after 29th December 2013 to give the surgical wound adequate time to heal. Before we left India, we took advantage and visited the Taj Mahal in Agra and the Lotus Temple in New Delhi. Back in Nairobi, I delivered the report back to Dr Kiarie and the treatment protocol was laid out. It would require close to Kshs. 4,000,000/- in local Kenyan hospitals, money I did not have and my insurer had indicated they were done with paying for the cancer treatment, but would cover any other eventuality. There was of course all the talk about affordability and expertise in Indian hospitals and I emailed Medanta hospital and got a quote of approximately Kshs. 1,200,000/- for the treatment and another Kshs. 300,000/- for flight and living expenses for an attendant and myself for the estimated three months of the treatment.

Family and friends with a significant part played by Alliance high school Old Boys, University of Nairobi 1983 Bachelor of Commerce year mates and my neighbors in Nairobi's Garden Estate put the required funds together in short order, and on 29th December 2013, my son Mbevi and I boarded an Etihad flight bound for Gurgaon, India. Preparations for the treatment started immediately and included the fabrication of a fiberglass cassock to hold my torso in place during radiotherapy and a host of other tests to ensure my body was ready for the extreme torture ahead. I was slated for a 15-minute radiotherapy session from

10.05 am Monday to Friday and a two-hour chemotherapy session before that for four days after every 21 days. We had booked ourselves into a bed and breakfast self-contained hostel near the hospital and the first one week was a breeze. We did most of our travels around Gurgaon for any of the various purposes by *tuk tuk* taxis which were invariably driven by mad men. As I was all over FaceBook about my new life in Gurgaon India, one FB friend gave me the contact of a relative working at the Kenyan High Commission in New Delhi and another one gave me the contact of a family from near Machakos town working and living in Gurgaon. We were able to trace them and for the rest of our stay my son and I were assured of regular *muthokoi* and other Akamba delicacies.

Chemo and radio therapy treatment is meant to destroy the malignant cancerous cells but unfortunately also destroys healthy ones as well. A weekly blood count to determine ability to continue the treatment is mandatory and in week two, I had to get off treatment and get a white blood cell booster shot before I could get back on treatment again. This became more frequent as time went on and I became weaker. The queue for radiotherapy was pretty fixed and every time I got there, I would find the same people and all nations of the world appeared to have sent a representative and sometimes one would be missing but be back in the next couple of days or so, but once in a while I would notice a particularly frail person not turn up ever again and, in my mind, would be the thought that a date with the grim reaper had been fulfilled. The radiotherapy room is like the usual hospital X-ray room and I would lie on my back on the treatment couch for the attendants to bolt down the cassock on my torso and after closing up all the openings in the room, they would leave for the overhead beam projector to make its 15-minute journey overhead from right to left and back again. There was very nice piped instrumental music which I really enjoyed. I was now averaging three radiotherapy sessions a week and fewer when concurrent with chemo as I needed more time for my body to rebuild the white blood cells. With hindsight I sometimes think I could feel myself slowly slipping away, but at the same time I was determined to beat this treatment and get back home. One day I heard a voice in the piped music asking "What makes you think you are going to get through this treatment alive?" and that really shook me. I discussed it with my son that evening and he tried to convince me that it was all my imagination. But that voice had been so clear. And so confident. I then reminded him of my

instructions in a family meeting the previous year for cremation within seventy two hours of my death. I advised him to get help from the friends we had made in India, get me cremated and travel home with the ashes. It made no sense to go through the inconvenience and expense of arranging to ship my body home for cremation. I also shared my bank account pin with him in the event of an untimely departure to the hereafter.

I once again failed the blood count and got the booster shot. At around 3am the following morning, I woke up with pulsating pain in every part of my body that was in tandem with my heartbeat and I was sure I could not stand the pain for long as even my heart was beating painfully. Mbevi called a cab driver we occasionally used when it was too cold to use a *tuk tuk* but he was totally drunk and could only mumble that he would come at 9am. The hostel though near the fence of the huge hospital compound was nearly one kilometer from the nearest hospital entrance which happened to be the emergency entrance as well. We decided to walk there, or at least die trying. Do you sometimes feel your day has come? Well, I did that early morning as we could not find the caretaker on duty to let us out of the hostel! I called Mr. Sharma the manager and fortunately he was awake and sober and managed to get the caretaker, who apparently changed work posts in the hostel regularly for security reasons to let us out. During that long walk to the hospital, I prepared a speech for what I felt was my imminent meeting with my maker though I intended to have a fairly robust debate with St Peter the gate keeper as to why I could not be granted more time on earth. We made it to the hospital and handed in the file that every patient carried around and within very few minutes, I was on a drip and the pain melted away miraculously. Apparently, I had reacted to the booster shot and the doctor told me chances were I would not survive the next one! The option I was advised on for white blood cells count boost was dietary and fish was the recommendation. Unfortunately, Indian rivers are so heavily polluted that the fish are most probably poisonous and hence not a good option. After an online search we settled on sweet potatoes, *ngwaci* and they became my staple diet for breakfast, lunch and dinner and I do not recall missing any other radio or chemo therapy session after that. The sweet potatoes however had their own challenge as they spiked my blood sugar and I now added the diabetic clinic to my schedule.

One Monday morning I did the last of radiotherapy sessions and bid everyone

at the Nuclear Medicine clinic goodbye. The chemotherapy sessions had ended the previous Friday. The doctor said I had to wait for six days for the after-effects of the treatment to clear before we could fly back home. She said the after effects would start on day three after the last radiotherapy session as they behaved much like a drug addict's withdrawal symptoms. I was so tired of India and despite my son's contrary advise I managed to convince the doctor we would be home long before the after effects started, and that there were good doctors and hospitals in Kenya too. She agreed and prepared a fit to fly letter and we managed to get seats on the following day's flight and landed in Nairobi on a Wednesday afternoon. I had developed an acute lack of appetite from the day I had completed the treatment and this persisted for a while. I was even unable to eat the *ugali* and *mala* I had requested for my first meal on arrival. I was eventually diagnosed with severe food poisoning and spent some five days in Nairobi hospital. I had done three of the chemotherapy cycles in India and had bought drugs for the last three cycles which I took at MP Shah, as it was the only local hospital that allowed a patient to bring their own medicines. The last of the chemotherapy cycles was at the end of June 2014 during which a girl and a boy came to my hospital room at MP Shah to pray for me. I am afraid I was very harsh on them and chased them away after they could not explain why they did not come to pray earlier for me for God to keep the disease away from me.

I had kept my family, the Alliance high school Alumni Club, My UON BCom class of 1983, my neighbors in Garden estate, my FaceBook audience as well as the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation *Sundowner* fraternity, of which I have been a member for the longest time updated on my progress in the walk with this dreadful disease. I recorded a two-part series of my walk with cancer for KBC's Cancer Dairies https://youtu.be/qY6HxPN_PrE and <https://youtu.be/cb62Ty2Xg2Q> which opened various requests and I appeared in various other TV stations as well as doing interviews for newspaper articles talking about my journey with cancer. I joined Limau Cancer Connection organization that champions the upgrade of the fight against cancer, and I was horrified to discover how widely it has affected society and how ill equipped the country is to fight the scourge despite the nauseating lip service from government officials on commitment to fight it. We held demonstrations and delivered written petitions to various government offices and demanded that cancer be declared a national disaster to no

avail. We visited cancer patients in the informal settlements who could hardly afford food let alone treatment and I felt so helpless as all we could offer were empty rhetoric and prayer. I also visited some Limau members in Kisumu and Mombasa where I met my first male breast cancer patient and I could feel myself slipping into depression due to the hopelessness and suffering I witnessed and I quietly withdrew from the group.

The Christian God is largely unknown in most parts of India, and it took us a while to find a church in which we could attend Sunday service and the first one we discovered was a Māori one. The preacher struggled to use both the Māori and English languages so we could follow the service. We then decided we were disrupting their communication with the Lord and did not return to that particular church again. After we traced the Kenyan family in Gurgaon, we would often go to their church which was for the international community. We would also spend some weekends at the residence of the relative working at the Kenyan High Commission in New Delhi and in addition to eating Kenyan food would attend Mass at a nearby Catholic church. On our first trip to New Delhi when we visited the Indian National Museum, we took a cab that cost about 1,200/- Indian rupees INR for the return journey and took two hours each way. We subsequently discovered the Metro that cost INR 32/- for both of us and took half an hour to New Delhi. These were happening towards the end of the first month when I was beginning to weaken from the chemo and radiation therapy and we were spending increasingly more time indoors because my immunity was being weakened by the treatment.

As I left India after the treatment, I was advised to get an annual checkup for five years after the treatment and I did this faithfully and every July or August I would board an Ethiopian Airlines flight in the evening of a Sunday heading to Gurgaon, New Delhi via Addis Ababa's Bole International Airport for a five day stay during which I would take a thorough medical exam, and invariably get a clean bill of health. In 2016, I had developed a bad case of flux and very painful acidity and I was advised to undergo surgery to correct it. During my annual review by Dr Paritosh Gupta of Artemis Hospital in India, I mentioned this and asked him what the surgery would entail. He replied that surgery should be a last resort and advised me to avoid liquids one hour before and two hours after meals and see him for a review three days later. Suffice to say since that day in July 2016

by following that simple advice, I have been free of flux and acidity. I have also helped a number of people with the same advice and it has worked well. It was during this visit that I underwent an endoscopy as well as a colonoscopy as part of the diagnostic investigation. In a previous checkup I had found it interesting to see my upper alimentary canal beamed on a screen during an endoscopy. I therefore declined anesthesia during the colonoscopy hoping to view the lower parts of the canal as well. The only other time I had experienced as much pain as I did during the procedure was when I had a gout attack on both my knees and big toes and I swore to never try again.

Early in 2017 I started having some strange swellings on my tummy along the old surgical scar. Alliance high school year mate Ken *Obish* Obimbo and I had been exploring the possibility of getting into organic farming on various parcels of land that we owned individually in various places around the country. One day I mentioned to him about the swellings and he said “You must get that resolved; I have to be sure you are in good health before we start the business”. Within a couple of weeks I was in India and the doctors found I had developed hernias in three places that needed immediate repair. Ken rallied my 1978 Alliance high school class mates and within a few days, with input from family, friends and former University of Nairobi BCom 1983 year mates, I had enough funds for the operation and spent an additional five weeks recuperating before I was fit to fly back. The fifth checkup was in 2018 and again I was given a clean bill of health, both for the cancer and hernia repair and I was then told I need not go for any further checkups unless an issue arose.

I settled down to a medicine routine of two pills before and three after breakfast with one at bedtime for what Dr Wanyoike had said an indefinite time for hypertension, blood clotting and diabetes. These were very expensive medicines although I had found a source from India that cost approximately a third of the local price. In the meantime I had begun serious research on the effect of long-term medication on one's health, and in particular the medicines I was taking. Having just come out of a grueling bout with cancer that was in remission at the time, I was horrified to learn that Statin or Lipitor or Atorvastatin which I was taking for cholesterol was suspected to be carcinogenic or to put it in other words of causing cancer. My search for alternative ways of managing my condition took on an urgent tenor and was the subject of frequent conversation at home.

My wife recommended that I read a book, *The Obesity Code* by Dr Jason Fung, a Canadian nephrologist and it was an eye opener and it led me into research about insulin resistance and benefits of intermittent fasting, I.F. Diabetes type 2 is basically too much sugar floating in the blood caused by inability of insulin to change it either to energy for immediate use or glycogen for storage. This is referred to as insulin resistance when cells do not respond well to insulin and cannot take up glucose from the blood as their storage is full. As a result more insulin is produced in a futile effort to force glucose to enter the cells and the insulin floats in the blood as well. The standard type 2 diabetes treatment is to give additional insulin making a bad situation worse and that is why it is referred to as a progressive disease as the patient's health deteriorates as increasing amounts of insulin are pumped into the body.

Food triggers insulin production by the pancreas while fasting allows excess insulin in the blood to process excess sugar. Sustained fasting then means that eventually all the sugar in the blood would get used up, the insulin would then start processing the stored glycogen and fat leading to a process called Ketosis. Ketosis happens when the body does not have enough carbohydrates to burn for energy and instead burns fat and makes ketones which it then uses for fuel. Turning of stored fat into energy leads to weight loss and increased efficiency in body organs and without excess sugar and insulin floating in the blood an automatic reversal of type 2 diabetes occurs. Without excess fat lining blood vessels and covering kidneys, liver and the heart among other vital organs the risk of organ failure is greatly reduced.

In my research I also came across reference to a process called autophagy which allows the body to break down and reuse old and damaged cell parts resulting in increased efficiency. It's a natural cleaning out process that begins when cells are deprived of the usual nutrients in a fasted state. Researchers have linked autophagy to several health benefits including prevention of certain types of cancers, Alzheimer's as well as other auto immune diseases . In February 2020 after lengthy consultations with my doctor, I started intermittent fasting and over time and with strict monitoring of my blood pressure and sugar levels, I gradually reduced the medication and by July 2020, I got off the medication completely. I maintain the 16:8 Intermittent Fasting regime that is fasting for a minimum 16 hours and eating in an 8 hour window. For the first time in many years, I have

achieved a perfect Body Mass Index at sixty-six kilograms down from the average eighty to ninety five kilograms I had lived with for many years and effectively managed to reverse diabetes type 2 and manage hypertension without medication. For exercise I walk a minimum ten kilometers every two days with a light workout regime using an app downloaded from the internet. I also keep myself properly hydrated by drinking black tea or coffee and copious amounts of water during the fasting period and indeed throughout the day.

In 2018 Aga Khan hospital acquired a PET CT scan machine that, though with a lengthy waiting list provided a local alternative to travel to India. I took advantage of its availability and under care of my regular oncologist Dr Gladwell Kiarie, did my check up in 2022 and was once again given a clean bill of health.

CHAPTER 11



COURT PROCESSES



My first time to appear in court was as a witness in a Voi magistrate's court in 1988 in a forgery case involving ministry of water clerks who had presented fraudulent claims at the Taita Taveta District Treasury when I was the district accountant. The next one was in Nairobi when I gave evidence in 1990 in another forgery case. Some of my clerks in Toyota Kenya had been implicated in a forgery case. A scheme had been hatched in which one man had forged a national ID in the name of ToyotaO KenyaTTA. He opened a bank account at Standard Bank Harambee Avenue, where coincidentally my elder brother Joseph was working and he would bank Toyota Kenya cheques, mostly for vehicle service at the workshop handed over to him by his accomplices in Toyota Kenya accounts department altered neatly to read his name ToyotaO KenyaTTA. The scheme unraveled when on my instructions the workshop detained vehicles with overdue debts. Many of the affected clients were able to provide evidence of payment. We then applied to the bank for copies of the cashed cheques and

the existence of the Toyota Kenyatta account was found out. The police laid a trap that led to the eventual arrest of the account owner and his co-conspirators.

In 2003, upon false claims of forged signatures by Kakai Kuteli and John Kihara Chege, I lost my job at Kenya Pipeline Company. After unsuccessful attempts to have the issue relooked at afresh, I contacted Ndambiri and Co Advocates of Waumini house Westlands and they filed in the High Court HCC 618 of 2003. KPC was represented by Okoth and Kiplagat of 12th Floor Bruce House. Alfred Ndambiri relocated to the US of A and Kingoo Wanjau & Co of 10th floor Bruce House took over the matter. Roma Agency Limited, my family business was on the 4th floor on the same building. The long journey of adjournments, always at the request of the KPC advocates started and with a really crowded calendar at the High Court we could only get a hearing date with a six-month waiting period which eventually turned to a year. My advocates accepted my proposal to make an application in court to have the Kuteli and Chege signatures subjected to expert verification. KPC through their advocates opposed the application by declaring that the two signatures had never been denied by the authors and were uncontested. The court agreed and on 27th February 2014 Justice D.A Onyancha made a ruling that indeed the signatures were not forgeries as earlier claimed. Armed with this ruling, I attempted to get an out of court settlement from KPC by pointing out the reason I had lost my job had turned out to be false to no avail. The company secretary told me to get a court order instructing them to negotiate some form of settlement with me. The case dragged on and occasionally I would be tempted to give up but I still hung on. Another change of advocates to Kuloba Wasike and Co Advocates became necessary and the matter was transferred from the High Court to the newly established Employment and Labor Relations Court now referenced ELRC 1282/15 and after a number of adjournments initiated by the KPC advocates as usual, we were finally heard in 2017 and on 17th January 2018, nearly fifteen years after the initial filing Justice Monica Mbaru found that KPC was justified in the decision to terminate my employment. Dissatisfied with the ruling I instructed my advocate to file an appeal and after many drawbacks mainly due to financial constraints and with yet a different firm of advocates of Nderitu and Partners Advocates the matter has finally been filed at the court of appeal and we await directions.

When I joined Product accounting at the Kenya Pipeline Company, the

oil industry was dominated by foreign owned companies with only Kenol-Kobil claiming local ownership by reportedly certain powerful people. In 1999 Mohammed Motha, already famous for his battles with the government over the Halal Meat factory in Ngong signed the standard Transportation and Storage Agreement TSA, that allowed companies to use the Kenya Pipeline Company distribution system for his family company called Mafuta Products Limited. I had just completed leading an exercise to update the TSA which had been in use since 1978 when Kenya Pipeline Company had started commercial operations. Upon his request I was a frequent visitor in their office in View Park towers on many Saturday mornings as I assisted them set up accounting systems for their business mostly with two of his sons Nasser and Ali who were in the forefront of running the business. It had an unintended disruption of my usual Friday evening members' day party activities as it would have been disrespectful to turn up hungover and smelling of alcohol in a devout Muslim's office. We created an enduring friendship that outlived my departure from Kenya Pipeline Company and I would occasionally check in on Ali who had relocated to Kampala Uganda on my monthly visits to see my son Mbevi, nicknamed "Muthokoi" by fellow students, studying at Kabojja secondary school in the Ugandan capital city at the time.

One day towards the end of 2012 as I came out of one of the increasingly frequent checkups at Nairobi hospital, I met Nasser and he requested me to consult for Mafuta in a long running dispute they were having with my former employer, Kenya Pipeline Company. Mafuta had ceased trading in or around 2005 and efforts to either restart or wind up the business had proved elusive as there was a dispute on amount of oil product left in the Kenya Pipeline Company system as well as on the actual amount of debt owed to KPC by Mafuta Products Limited. Armed with documents from my client Mafuta showing their stock of fuel and outstanding invoices I set up a meeting early in 2013 with Charles Tanui who was then Finance Manager and who chaired the meeting attended by a number of his assistants. I had a simple message from my client as they did not have the funds to clear the outstanding debt of about Kshs. 21,000,000/-, KPC was to allow them to sell the oil then with an estimated value of more than Kshs. 150,000,000/- with the proceeds going into a joint KPC/Mafuta account, from which KPC would recover the debt and Mafuta would be at liberty to do

whatever they wanted with the balance. Tanui and team did not only decline the proposal but tabled documents showing the oil stock at about one third of the volume in the Mafuta product books and the debt had ballooned to over Kshs. 50,000,000/- and that KPC had obtained judgement against my client of which they had no idea. I was provided with copies of the documents that on scrutiny showed the judgement had been obtained fraudulently and an application for the court to set it aside was allowed. The documents also showed that KPC had disregarded the provisions of the TSA in calculating interest on the outstanding debt. Mafuta products then filed a counterclaim in 2013 that was eventually heard in 2018 the main import of which was that KPC had failed to account for 1,000,000 liters of diesel oil valued at Kshs. 100,000,000/-, and had miscalculated the outstanding debt too. I appeared as an expert witness for my client at the High Court at Milimani in front of Justice Maureen Odero following the filing of detailed written submissions. What I found interesting is that instead of KPC filing an account showing how the disputed oil had been accounted for, the submission was primarily disparaging my person intimating that having lost my job at KPC, I was not fit to consult for Mafuta Products Limited. Judgement was delivered in April 2020 and the court ordered KPC to not only recalculate the debt as set out in the original TSA but to also allow Mafuta to draw their over 1,000,000 liters of oil after netting off the correctly recalculated debt.

CHAPTER 12



BRAND DUKE OF EMALI



During my time at Alliance high school that stretched between 1973 and 1978, we studied English Literature in the lower classes that was mostly about royalty in Britain with Lords and Dukes filling the pages. The name Duke of Emali was coined by class mate Edwin *Kinyash* Kinyanjui. Apparently, I was always talking about ‘my people of Emali’ and I appeared really proud of them. This and the books we were reading for literature in English must have led *Kinyash* to label me Duke and defender of the people of Emali. That name has stuck. When I got into business and particularly when I was running the Roma Media business, the nickname morphed into ‘Brand Duke’ and it became easy for the market to pick up. It has remained so.

Who is The Duke of Emali also known as Richard Kioko Kiundi? He is a 63-year-old Kenyan who has lived through many storms, moral, emotional, health, financial, you name it. In the process he has chalked up quite some experiences and acquired a fair number of scars. He is that person who will freely share these personal experiences with the hope that the target audience will take away

some useful lesson. The Duke will give a listening ear to those that wish to be heard and lend a hand whenever possible. Through personal experience he has learnt that not all that glitters is gold. The words of the song by The Undisputed Truth 'Smiling Faces Sometimes' have acquired a deeply personal meaning from experience.

Smiling Faces Sometimes

The Undisputed Truth

Smiling faces sometimes
Pretend to be your friend
Smiling faces show no traces
Of the evil that lurks within (can you dig it?)
Smiling faces, smiling faces, sometimes
They don't tell the truth
Smiling faces, smiling faces tell lies and I got proof
Oh, oh, yeah
Let me tell you
The truth is in the eyes 'cause the eyes don't lie, amen
Remember, a smile is just a frown turned upside down my friend
So, hear me when I'm saying
Smiling faces, smiling faces, sometimes, yeah
They don't tell the truth
Smiling faces, smiling faces tell lies and I got proof
(Beware) beware of the handshake
That hides the snake (can you dig it, can you dig it?)

I'm a-tellin' you beware of the pat on the back
It just might hold you back
Jealousy, (jealousy) misery (misery) envy (envy)

I tell you you can't see behind
Smiling faces, smiling faces, sometimes
Hey, they don't tell the truth
Smiling faces, smiling faces tell lies and I got proof
Hey, your enemy won't do you no harm
(Rap on) 'cause you'll know where he's comin' from
Don't let the handshake and the smile fool ya
Take my advice, I'm only tryin' to school ya
Smiling faces, smiling faces, sometimes
They don't tell the truth
Smiling faces, smiling faces tell lies and I got proof
Smiling faces, smiling faces sometimes



EPILOGUE



Now approaching 64 years of age, I have done and will continue to do that which I believe is my purpose in life. I have made business decisions that have lost me huge resources both my own and of friends and family that I convinced to invest with me. I have also invested in hugely successful business ventures. When I was young, I believe I hurt a lot of people as I did not suffer fools gladly and was rather abrupt with those I considered less intellectually endowed than myself. With the loss of a dearly beloved son to the grim reaper by suicide, I have learnt that a happy face can hide a tormented, though gentle soul. While writing this book, I have had a great opportunity for introspection as I recalled the many people that I have interacted with, the influence they have had on my life and in shaping who I am today and will continue to be. I have come across people I helped both with advice and materially without expecting anything in return and their sincere gratitude has been greatly rewarding. I have been hurt too by people I trusted with all my heart, but then is living without scars, in a fairy bubble so to speak to show for life's experiences a life? I try to live a life that balances out the giving and taking from society. I continue to be accommodating putting forth my position gently but firmly and with absolute decorum.



REFLECTIONS



Given another start in life, what would I do differently? What influence did my six years at Alliance high school have on my outlook in life? Being **Strong To Serve** is a calling that many aspire to but what does it really mean? The aim by the Founders of Alliance high school was to prepare students to make a positive contribution to the development of the society, acquire the values of national patriotism, self-respect, self-reliance, self-discipline, a sense of purpose, cooperation and adaptability. How well have I internalized these attributes? My origin in a simple rural Christian setting must have had a major influence in the person I have become. I grew up in a loving family that was devoid of the gushing show of love evident in *modern* families. You can say I grew up under *tough love*. My turning point as mentioned in the book was admission to Alliance high school in which my experiences therein overrode everything else.

All told I have lived a fairly even life with a number of roller coaster upheavals. I have made great friendships that have stood the test of time. The events that have adversely affected me have been out of my control, or have they? Do I have unrealistic trust in the inherent goodness of humanity? While working at Kenya Pipeline Company as my wife and I drove home one day, a colleague, Joyce Mutungi Owuor called me about some investigations going on at KPC in regards to financial transactions that bore my signature. After the conversation my wife commented that I was taking the matter too casually. I replied that the truth would be established and bear witness to my innocence. It was not, and a

supposedly born-again Christian lied through his teeth and was believed in spite of my protestations and I lost my job. As an upcoming young man, I did not suffer those I considered fools gladly not necessarily having judged them correctly, and in the process rubbed many people the wrong way. Is that not conceit, to hold others to one's standards? But then what other standards can one apply? Though more tolerant and less judgmental nowadays, I state my stand gently but firmly. Does that make me a better person? You be the judge. When I opted for self-employment, the inherent trust in humanity reared its ugly head again and I lost vast sums of money, most of which was not mine and I am still to recover from that blow. Have I overestimated my capabilities? Throughout my schooling days I would excel with minimum effort. In the three offices I worked as an employee, accolades and rewards for exemplary performance would follow me all the time. During my entrepreneurship days did I overestimate my capabilities and spread myself too thin? I got into many ventures all in a short period of time. Did I trip myself by trying to run faster than my frail human legs could carry me, figuratively speaking? Like the fabled Phoenix, I have been rising from the ashes of my past failures albeit very slowly and deliberately. I intentionally interrogate my next move thoroughly and now carry the mantra Better Late Than Never with religious zeal. Doing it My Way however is still my style.

During the three or so months I spent undergoing treatment in Medanta hospital in Gurgaon, Haryana India accompanied by my son David Mbevi, our conversations would veer towards the suffering we were witnessing in the hospital and in Gurgaon and New Delhi during our fairly frequent trips there. There was a huge number of families living in the filthy streets going about their life, cooking, sleeping, defecating and presumably making and having babies in the open. We arrived in Gurgaon on 29th December 2013 just as winter settled in and outside temperatures of 9 degrees centigrade were frequent, and yet the street families including newly born babies braved it out in the open. India was said to have roughly 300 million gods at the time with a steady annual increase and Mbevi and I would debate on what benefit these gods bestowed on their followers. We debated why people fall sick and especially one child of approximately seven years who was attending chemo at the same time with me and was breathing through a pipe in his throat and had a tumor that made him appear like he had two heads. We would joke about my affliction being probably penance for the many poor lasses whose hearts I may have broken in my youth and sins committed along

the way but could not figure out what sin that poor child could be paying for.

I have lived a life that has been considerate for others and would lend a helping hand when able. From around 2004 I joined an organization called *Mutui Museo* Trust chaired by Dr Isaac Kalua. It was made up of professionals and political leaders from the Akamba community with the goal of *uplifting* the community both socially and economically. I coordinated the sponsorship of poor children who did well in standard eight and could not afford the secondary school fees. It is also around the same time I got deeply engaged in the affairs of my Alma Mater, Alliance high school. As vice chairman of the Old Boys Club I played a crucial role in the actualization of the Endowment Fund Trust that had been registered a number of years before but had remained largely moribund. The Fund's goal was the award of scholarships to needy students admitted to The School as defined by the Trust Deed. I also recruited old boys to take advantage of a system started earlier at Alliance high school referred to as three-ring. It put together three Old Boys to sponsor a poor student for the four years at The School. It was in 2012 that I joined a Nyambura Maina led Book Club initiative of collecting books from willing donors for schools and we did several successful ones including one for Alliance high school in 2014. The need for scholarships had ballooned when the children that took advantage of the free primary school education, introduced by the NARC government in 2003 graduated from primary school.

By 2012 I was coordinating four children sponsored by *Mutui Museo* Trust in various schools including one in Mangu and one in Alliance high school, with quite a number having graduated through high school in previous years. I had also been a player in Kithendu in the Kithimani area of Yatta subcounty, my adopted home in various initiatives to uplift the farmer in the generally drought hit area from exploitation by allowing my farm to be used as a propagation, training and demonstration center for drought resistant fast maturing cassava and sweet potatoes. Between 1992 and 1994 I was chief guest at the Kambu Catholic Parish fundraising led by the indefatigable Fr Thomas Kyalo, for the annual Machakos Diocesan collection and the Parish led in collections in the three years. There were countless other social responsibility activities too numerous to enumerate, that were making a real difference in the lives of many down trodden people that I was either the initiator or an ardent supporter. While I do not want to sound like the mythical pharisee, I reckoned that this was a good record but my charitable work came to a halt due to the illness and the community that was depending

on me were suddenly left high and dry. Why would a loving God make a whole community suffer for the supposed unacknowledged sins of their benefactor? My son Mbevi then told me “You need to evaluate your expectations of God”.

Out of the 7 billion inhabitants of planet earth, only about 2 billion have been exposed to Christianity. Does that mean 5 billion of them are automatically destined for hell without being given a chance for redemption? As mentioned earlier a classmate at Alliance high school had introduced me to writings by one Tuesday Lobsang Rampa that opened new horizons in religious and spiritual possibilities. At the time, reading material availability on other religions and beliefs other than Christianity was limited, perhaps by design but with the advent of the Internet the availability of vast amounts of information is a now a reality. I have read widely about Buddhism and Hinduism and have practiced meditation albeit for a brief period. I have dug into the origins of Christianity and the genocide in the name of a loving God during the Crusades in the middle ages. I have found writings that suggest Christianity was introduced in the early years of the Common Era as a means of control and to amass wealth and political power for church leaders. The inconsistencies that are evident very clearly point to writings by individuals limited by their circumstances and goals at the time of writing, that are no longer tenable in the present world order, and would not have escaped the attention of an omniscient God were they truly His words. Why does a loving God allow charlatans to exploit the ignorant poor as they amass wealth living in self-made heaven here on earth as they promise their hapless followers golden mansions after they die and ascent to heaven without not so much as a slap on the wrist?

I was raised in a strict Christian family where the Bible and Salvation was all one needed for life here on earth and in the hereafter. Questions started to pop up that threw doubt about the person God had been presented to me and Christianity in general. Where did Cain find a wife? Why did an all-knowing God create Satan and hell knowing what havoc they would pour on His creation? Why did God plant a forbidden tree, forbidden by Himself and to make matters worse point it out, in the middle of the garden when He ought to have known Eve would be misled by a talking serpent, another of His creations? My son Mbevi and I agreed that it was a set up *ab initio*, much like being handed a fully loaded gun to play Russian roulette with. While I marvel at the random nature of life, the shackles have been intentionally and unequivocally broken and cast off and I am no longer bound by dogma. I have however opted to keep myself

open to new ideas and have learnt to listen to those who wish to be heard in a respectful and courteous manner, and agree to agree or disagree with decorum. I have also learnt that there is no absolute truth and not one entity holds the key to knowledge. All in all however, I have learnt to live and let live expecting reciprocal treatment as well. In the end, I follow my conscience and do to others what I would expect to be done to me under the same circumstances. I can say with absolute confidence that I have been set free to live my life in the best way I know how, without looking over my shoulder.

If I follow my mind, I'll never go wrong. ~Jimmy Cliff

So, if I got another start in life, what would I do differently?

NOTHING



REVIEWS



“**R**ichard Kiundi aka The Duke of Emali, asked me to review his biography. Truthfully, I may not be the right person to do so, I am not even an expert on such matters, and however I will attempt to give a comment on one particular issue that caught my attention as I read this script. The subject of LEADERSHIP...

I have known Richard for less than five years as a member of a group of old fogies called THE WAZEE GROUP. This group comprises of who is who in society and the wretched of the earth. However that's a story for another day.

Richard was kind enough to attend my retirement service as I bowed out of active service as a clergyman. What Richard has written reflects what has been seen as a revival in work that takes the role of individual leaders and elites seriously. Whether socializing, education or in ascriptive traits, as in gender, race or ethnicity.

Thomas Carlyle's maxim says, "the history of the world is but the biography of great men". In international relations, influential scholars such as Henry Kissinger and Hans Morgenthau placed great weight on the role of leaders when explaining international conflict and cooperation.

In comparative politics, the profiling of political elites, particularly in communist nations, was popular among behavioralists. From an early age the Duke has portrayed this... he has portrayed a level of discretion. In this book he has shown pathways connecting personal to leader behavior. These factors have affected his core beliefs and values learnt from The Alliance high school, to reflect values, competence and skills as well as material and personal skills in his dealings at work and business.

Secondly, he comments on the challenge on his Spirituality or is it Religiosity... many of us still struggle with these conflicts, on matters God/Higher power within oneself, and with other people. This is the journey of life...

~ Reverend H. Mwashigadi Wa-Mwangombe

Besides the fact that it reads like the best of adventure stories, running thread through this book evokes profound reflections - innate good, spirituality, pursuit for excellence, Rumi-meet-Haemin Sunim-in-discourse-with-Khalil-Gibran. It is a tale encapsulating humanitarianism, meritocracy and intellectualism over dogma, creed and bigotry. It is an autobiography that is candidly narrated and expertly crafted to read like a scintillating folklore. It summarizes a life 'lived with light heartedness and a big spoon'; one that leaves the reader yearning for more at each turn, but consciously satisfied to be left with deep and pithy nuggets for reflection. A fabulous book from end to end.

~ Jervas Musau, Refugee and Statelessness Law
Expert and Practitioner

The author gives the reader a racy account of his life's story. I found the story very interesting, informative and encouraging. Although Richard has had many setbacks of all types in his life, he always bounces back to "eat life with a

big spoon.” This is one man who has lived his life with gusto. For me, that is the most amazing thing about his autobiography. He always expects tomorrow to be better than today. If that was all that we his readers learnt and tried to emulate from this excellent book, we would all be in a better place in life! In my younger days, I hoped that someday I would write a book about life. I don’t believe I could have done it this well.

Bravo Duke!

~ Esther Ndunge Mulli, High school teacher of
English (Rtd.)



The Duke’s autobiography is a literary gem and I have enjoyed reading it immensely. In fact, it is the kind of book that can be described as unputdownable. I recommend it unreservedly. The Duke has given us an honest, hilarious account of his childhood, his adventures as an adolescent and his successes as well as challenges in adulthood. The reader feels like exclaiming: What a life!

What comes out very clearly is that the Duke is brutally honest. He does not gloss over the blunders he may have made. His perspective is that all the experiences he has encountered, both good and bad, have molded him. They have made him more patient, more empathetic, more sensitive, and more resilient.

He has led a rich life: a life full of rewarding experiences but also disappointments. He has touched many lives but he has also been betrayed by false friends. He has faced life threatening health issues but he has triumphed over fear and despair. He lives one day at a time and makes the best of each moment. The Duke is very versatile. His experiences in the civil service reveal the rot therein. But he exercised a high degree of integrity to the consternation of his colleagues. He has had stints in various private companies where he has also faced unjust treatment. He has ventured into several personal enterprises with varying degrees of success. But he never gives up. He does not nurse grudges. He makes

allowances for human frailties and seeks ways of making the world a little better. I promise that you will be enriched and inspired as you read this captivating story.

~ **Charles Gecaga, Senior Lecturer - Department of Literature, Kenyatta University**



Comments at the book signing and launch on December 21st 2021 at Wasanii Restaurant at The Kenya Cultural Centre and Theatre



When Richard arrived at AHS two weeks late, he had a major problem understanding English accents by the non-African teachers and for at least the first week he would occasionally ask his desk mate Steve Makimei to translate! The cheeky classmate would tease and laugh at him. This is probably the reason he became fluent in both French and Lingala to show he was no dummy because everyone started from zero on these new languages.

Richard, *Kinyash* and *Shaft* made a formidable cheering team whenever either the football or rugby teams played and this prowess extended even to away games. Many are the times they outcheered Mangu, Thika, Nairobi, Lenana and many other schools on their home ground. During a rugby game at RVA however, there were strangely quiet as they were awed by the cheering troupe of scantily dressed nubile young mostly white girls and for a while the team too lost concentration on the game to gape at this mesmerizing sight. No wonder we lost the game.

That name Duke was coined by class mate *Kinyash*. Richard was

always talking about “my people of Emali” and was really proud of them. This among other reasons must have led *Kinyash* to label him Duke and defender of the people of Emali

Duke easily makes intense friendships across the age and social divide. The connections he creates this way make him the go to person if you want to trace a long lost friend. He also seems to have an elephantine memory and remembers the tiniest of long forgotten details.

When he was in charge of the French room which was actually the languages room as it included Swahili too, the department gramophone earned him entry into many social gatherings of all levels in the school as the resident deejay. He created an easy camaraderie with fellow students as well as the visiting girls from the various schools. This may have led to his as yet unverified claim to being the all-time *sinker* between 1975 and 1978.

This fellow who was heading to Alliance high school, Kikuyu near Nyeri became the man who could direct you to any spot around including in the city of Nairobi. A most accomplished “tour guide” of sorts.

In later life his fighting spirit and never say die constitution came to the fore as he battled various setbacks including ill health, loss of a son and unfair loss of employment from Kenyan Pipeline Company. He clearly made lemonade with the lemons life handed him. And relished the lemonade without adding sweeteners!

~ Ken Obimbo -AHS Class of 1978



I am exceedingly glad and honored to have been asked to speak at this launch this book of Richard Kioko Kiundi, or The Duke as he is popularly known. Benjamin Franklin once famously said:

**If you would not be forgotten,
As soon as you are dead and rotten
Either write things worth reading
Or do things worth writing about.**

I have known The Duke since we met as 1st year BCom students at the University of Nairobi in 1979, and I can attest that he has done many things worth writing about and being part of that insufferable “I went to Alliance” brigade I am sure his command of the language is such that he also writes things worth reading! I must confess at the onset that I have not had the opportunity to read the book and I am looking forward to it mainly for 2 reasons.

Firstly, the period that constitutes the Duke life so far is a fascinating time in which many events that shaped the trajectory of our Nation took place. Our University years were very eventful and placed us at the center of the socio political change. From Mwakenya, to the 1982 coup attempt, to the advent of multipartyism. The eighties brought Structural adjustment programs, AIDS, the internet, Globalization, the rise of China and much, much more.

Secondly, the man himself. Richard is what you can refer to as a social connector. The social equivalent of a computer network hub. Connectors know people across an array of social, cultural, professional and economic circles and make a habit of introducing people who work or live in different cycles. It is a unique gift and the Duke has it. In University, the Duke was equally at home hanging out with the Guys in the Christian Union and the guys who worshipped at the Pub at the 680 Hotel. The Swots, The Blots, the lecturers all fell under his spell. A few years ago, he set about building a WhatsApp group for the BCom Class of 82/3. It started small but rapidly grew to include almost all surviving members of the class. This in itself, might be not so remarkable, but unlike many such groups this group has amazing cohesion despite the diversity of thought and opinion and the intense debate often generated around sensitive topics.

For the above reasons, I can't wait to travel through the wilderness through the pages of your book Duke. Accept my heartiest congratulations for having the courage to get it published.

~ Joe Onsando -UON BCom class of 1983



