©Copyright 2024, Wambui Kori

First published 2024
Butterfly Crescendo: Embracing Life's Ripples

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, shared in or introduction into a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 978-9914-50-105-6

Cover Design & Book Layout: Vass Media
Edited by: Tracey Mbugua

Print: Multiprint Enterprises
Email: multiprint.14@gmail.com

Table Of Contents

Table Of Contents **2**

Acknowledgments 3

Dedication 3

Introduction 4

CHAPTER 1. **7**

It's all connected. 7

CHAPTER 2. **19**

Men Of Impact. 19

To the Men Facing Silent Battles, 27

CHAPTER 3. **28**

Women Forging Change. 28

Dear Younger Me, 35

CHAPTER 4. **39**

What Is Life? 39

Life is what you make of it 42

Life is the differentiation of the human experience. 45

What Does The Bible Say about Life 47

Dear Future Self, 49

Acknowledgments

Gratitude is the ink with which I pen these acknowledgments, recognizing those whose presence and support made this endeavor possible.

I would like to thank my mother Lucy Kori, my brother George Gatei and my sister Milkah Kori for being supportive of my ventures. My friends for being emotionally supportive of my journey and to the strangers that simply helped put me back on track. This is not the marking of an end but of a new beginning with new perspectives

Dedication

To *Judith Gatei*
31st Dec 1922 (est.) - 1st June 2021

To *Peter Kori G.*
22nd Nov -24th July 2020

To *Victor Njenga W.*
16th April 1997 - 6th May 2021

Introduction

Life, as we know it, is an intricate tapestry woven with threads of joy, sorrow, and the unexpected. In the wake of the unprecedented challenges unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, I found myself grappling with the fragility of life. This book is not just a narrative of my personal journey but an exploration of the profound lessons, connections, and revelations that emerged from the turbulence and from my younger years since then.

It's funny how life starts to make more sense as we age.

Preface

Welcome to "Butterfly Crescendo: Embracing Life's Ripples." The title itself captures the essence of the transformative journey you are about to embark upon—a journey marked by the delicate flutter of a butterfly, signifying change, and the resonating ripples in the water, symbolizing impact.

Unveiling the Crescendo:

In the rich tapestry of existence, our lives are akin to the graceful dance of a butterfly. Each moment, each experience, sends ripples through the fabric of our being, leaving an indelible mark on our souls. This book is an exploration of those echoes—of the profound changes that shape us, the impact that molds us, and the continuous adaptation that propels us forward.

Navigating Life's Crescendo:

Life, much like the harmonious dance of a butterfly and the rhythmic ripples in water, is dynamic and ever-changing. "Butterfly Crescendo" invites you to navigate this intricate journey, embracing the beauty of transformation. Through personal stories, reflections, and shared wisdom, we delve into the threads of resilience that weave through the tapestry of our lives.

Why "Butterfly Crescendo"?

The title speaks to the enduring echoes that follow every shift, every choice, and every moment of growth. It is a

reminder that change is not just inevitable; it is the very heartbeat of life. The butterfly, with its graceful transformation, symbolizes the impact we create, the influence we leave, and the constant evolution required to live authentically.

What to Expect:

As you turn the pages of "Butterfly Crescendo," you'll encounter narratives of impact, insights on embracing transformation, and reflections on the ever-changing nature of our existence. This is not just a memoir; it's a shared exploration of the human experience—a journey through the resonant notes of change that define us.

A Call to Embrace Transformation:

This book is an invitation to witness the delicate dance of your own life, to resonate with the changes you've experienced, and to harmonize with the evolving symphony of your existence. Through the highs and lows, the twists and turns, may you find resonance in the beauty of change and the profound impact it brings.

As you embark on this literary journey, may "Butterfly Crescendo" inspire you to not only witness the butterfly effect of your own life but to contribute your unique notes to the symphony of the world.

CHAPTER 1.

It's all connected.

Hey, if the back of this page didn't provide enough context as to who's book you're reading this chapter would. I turned 25 and realized a lot has happened in my life to the point at which I am. My 18 yr old version of me would probably be telling me how much older I have gotten and that I should have achieved so much more.I should be a millionaire by now or have had babies or better yet I should have my own house by now. Truth is I could have had these things but I am learning to accept that is not the journey I was meant to be on. I was motivated to write this because I felt it important to remember me now as I look forward to more years. To tell the story of who I am, I would need to tell you who I was. Looking back I feel like there have been different versions of myself that needed to adapt every so often because it has not always been easy. So, let's rewind the clock a bit.

My childhood pretty much revolved around being part of a small family. With my sister and brother, a loving, protective mum and dad, I felt doubly secure. My siblings, especially my older brother and younger sister, were my partners in crime through life's adventures. Our childhood was marked by a degree of reservation due to strict parenting. Our playtime was confined to home, and interactions with kids from the neighborhood were limited. My mom believed in protecting

us from external influences, a decision that had both merits and drawbacks.As an adult i can see how our naivety was protected, our innocence maintained because I was not exposed to as much as my peers were and it did leave me, left us in a sense of ignorance which truly was bliss.

Reflecting on those years, I appreciate going through it with my siblings. Their presence formed a significant part of my childhood, providing support and shared experiences. The strict upbringing influenced everything, from what we watched on TV to our social interactions, creating a unique environment.The constraints at home meant a simple life, but it also instilled values.

I was very happy going to school for the very first time because it meant I would be getting new uniforms, new shoes, new toys to play with and I get to meet new people too. My primary school days were a mix of joy and self-discovery. One of the things I enjoyed about school was getting to recite poems, participate in the spelling bee, public speaking. Occasionally participating in competitions and events at the national education fair added layers to my school experience.

I enjoyed the fact that I could discover as much about myself as I did then and participating in the traditional dances that we were required to take part in. I loved seeing how happy my folks would get knowing I was going to be on stage and that everyone else would get to see me do something. I think that was a highlight for most parents then, knowing

My leadership journey also began very early on in my life. I was made a class prefect from a young age; 7 years to be precise. Because of how involved I was in school activities at the time, I guess making me a prefect made sense at the time and that forced me to take on responsibilities very early, although it did create a sense of being left out of certain childhood experiences.

As I progressed through primary school, the lack of deep friendships became apparent. The rigid routine and limited social interactions molded me differently from my peers. Yet, I found solace in my sister and brother, who remained constants in my life. I ,however, did end up developing self esteem issues, I became even more reserved in my interaction and constantly second guessing my actions because I was so sure people would be talking behind my back. It was easier to keep quiet than to speak out. Making friends was very difficult at the time.

By the time I was turning 12, I felt like I was a walking shell of myself, I was someone I didn't want to be, especially with other people. I wanted to be someone different. At this time, I encountered a very special teacher in standard eight who played a pivotal role in shaping my perspective. His passion for teaching, emphasis on reading, and encouragement to express myself through writing left a lasting impact. Writing became a significant outlet for me, and I even dabbled in song lyrics borrowing words heavily from High School Musical the movie (all 3 trilogies) at the time. I was obsessed. The standard newspaper would print out song lyrics for the popular songs, be i Ne -Yo or Beyonce's latest single. I have, till to date, my personal collection of clip outs that were printed out then.

You would be the coolest person if you actually knew the lyrics to the songs or knew where to get them. This was definitely before the age of the internet, where we'd heavily rely on newspapers for international information because we were not invested in promoting our own content, not yet anyways. My English teacher's influence echoed through my ability to articulate thoughts and share my experiences through compositions.I am comfortably able to do these things now because I learnt how to do them then.

During this time, I remember getting into an incident that would have changed my life in so many ways had it gone any differently. Our family had gone out for a gathering of sorts among friends and as is typical in an African home, the parents went into the main house and the kids were told to go play outside. Let the grown ups be grown ups. We ended up veering away from the main house and I got lost at a family gathering. This served as a stark reminder of the fragility of life. I wandered for quite some time. It was getting dark. I started getting worried. Panic was settling in. I was so sure I would either end up as a homeless street kid or even worse, just not survive the night.

The streets became unfamiliar and the people became strangers. Everything became so bleak. A short staunch lady approached me, probably aware of how alone and scared I was at the time.

"Where are you from?" she asked

"Tr. Carlos, I am from Tr. Carlos' house," I managed to utter back.

Perhaps foolishly or naively I followed her back home because the other option was knowingly sleeping anywhere I could find on the street. I was in tears unaware of what she was doing, she gave me food and started making calls. What are the odds that she actually knew who I was talking about? She walked me out after having given me food and we walked

back to where the gathering was. Turns out I hadn't veered as far away as I thought I had but I most certainly wouldn't have known how to get back. I was grateful for the intervention of a familiar face and recognized the twist of fate that kept me from a different path.

As typical an African as my mom was, I was certain I was going to get home to a thorough beating. "Why would you make us worry about you?Why did you get lost? Why did you wander of?" I could already foresee the words that would ensue the beating I would receive.

I got home and somehow got off with a staredown that went on for hours in silence. I could read the look she gave me, the look both my mom and dad gave me that night.

We almost lost you today.

Navigating through the transition to high school at 13 was an unexpected challenge. Unlike some, I wasn't assertive about my destination; the pressure to conform was palpable. The desire to attend Alliance Girls High School, Kenya High, or Pangani Girls (*the creme de la creme of public schools in Kenya)* seemed enviable, but I lacked that decisive clarity.

Although I focused on maintaining good grades, my assertiveness regarding my future was lacking. Joining high school seemed like an opportunity to reinvent myself, but the familiar faces from primary school posed a hurdle. Adapting to a new environment while still figuring out my identity hindered my ability to truly experience the life I envisioned. Boarding school was a massive adjustment, and the quest to identify genuine friends became a recurring question.

Despite the challenges, a government affirmative action provided computers to national schools, opening up a new world for me.Having spent significant time in the computer lab, I would enjoy exploring Microsoft Word and PowerPoint during the era of Facebook's emergence. As technology advanced, so did my interest. Having a Gmail account and experimenting with different online platforms marked a significant chapter. My passion for computers became a

cornerstone of my high school experience, offering a refreshing alternative to traditional learning methods.

Leadership roles unexpectedly found their way to me, from dorm captain to computer lab captain. Amid rumors and gossip, I learned to navigate through the noise, realizing that not everything deserves a response.
It was only until my form 4 that I learnt of a terrible rumor that followed my all my high school years. I loved Computer since Day 1, I was lucky to end up in 4W at Kabare Girls High School. The only class that would take it as part of the alternatives we had to pick in high school. Every prep night, I would go to the computer lab to literally type out what I was reading in my book or learn how to use Microoft Word. At the time, typing really fast was such a flex and I was a master.

I am glad my passion showed. I got a clean A in my first computer exam with a shameful D in my first Business exam. None of the other subjects clicked as well as Computer did. By the time I was getting to form 4, I was the Computer Lab captain. I loved my job/work. Months in, I hear the terrible rumour that I must have been cozying up with the teacher to get good grades. I was like c'mon guys!!!! We can definitely do better.

Accepting my realities and not succumbing to every rumor became a gradual process. While not athletically inclined, my love for math and computers thrived. Volunteering for a math contest early on showcased my eagerness to immerse myself in school activities. The genuine satisfaction I found in excelling at math and the affirmation of my abilities fueled my sense of self.

In my final year, I rediscovered my passion for math, reinforcing the importance of staying true to oneself. This was following an incident in form 1 that scared my passion for numbers. My math teacher was mean, mean with her words but was a very caring lady. I am not sure if she knows or has realized how hurtful her words were when she called me stupid for failing a test. While I was in form 1, I was fortunate enough to represent my school in an inter school math competition and truth be told I freaked out. I met students from such big schools, it was impossible to not feel small. "They went to a better school than I did, of course they can do better than I would", were my thoughts when I sat for that 2 hour exam. I came back to school and everyone was disappointed. I was the *second last* to score in the test taken by over 300 students. I knew everyone was thinking it and looking back there were no words of encouragement, just disappointment that I would make the school stoop so low,

why would I tarnish the great name that is a national school.

That disappoint followed me for a big part of my high school experience. I carried it more than everyone else I guess and it was heavy, feeling less than, not as smart or not as capable. By the time we were starting to talk about Probabilty in Form 4 and Geometry I was relieved. Finally something I can relate to. I am such a huge fan of the "Back To The Future" movie franchsie. Watching it was fun and getting to class made the lessons practical. Don't get me started on the Physics classes. I can't quite place when the mindset shift happened but the many talks schools would organize for their candidate classes definitely helped.

Despite external pressures, embracing what I loved brought a sense of fulfillment and I found it when I started focusing more on the things I wanted. Leaving high school with a newfound understanding of friendship and a reaffirmed sense of self was a rewarding conclusion to my journey.

I hit the jackpot with a spot at a top-notch university in Nairobi, and suddenly, life felt like it handed me a golden ticket to freedom. No more rigid study schedules and the realization that maybe, just maybe, my kids could benefit from a switch to day school for a more diverse experience. Thinking back on my childhood, the constant interaction with schoolmates 24/7 seems to have its perks. But, you know, I can't help but wonder if a bit more diversity would have spiced things up.

And then there's the whole protecting-your-environment spiel.Comparing life in high school as someone who was living in school verse as a university student, fend for yourself, control over your time, control over your finances.Sure, it keeps you blissfully ignorant, but is it a good or bad thing? I'm not even sure. It does let you focus on your books, but does it limit your worldview?

University life hits, and suddenly, I'm all about embracing the world and soaking in the experiences. Finding like-minded friends made it easier to be myself. I was called to study public policy and administration and it became my academic journey, a decision influenced by societal expectations. I'm not even sure if it aligned with my passions, but hey, it is what it is.

The pressure to take a "marketable" course is real, but surprise, surprise, the connections you make and the networks you form become the real treasures. The uncertain path I took at the beginning? It turns out to be the scenic route, shaping my perspective and enriching my experiences.

I was fortunate enough to stumble upon AIESEC, this youth-led international organization that is all about sending people on cross- cultural exchanges, and I decided to dive in. My friend Joy, one evening, told my friend Maggie and I about them and we had to go to their offices. The minute they said they would teach me how to design posters I was sold because It meant I would still be able to do what I love. Despite studying a degree that's as unrelated to my initial interests as it gets, the extracurricular activities in this organization exposed me to practical skills and real-world experiences. Remember the pre-Canva era? I learnt graphic design using basic tools like PowerPoint, and it's a flex even now. Balancing club activities, spending time with friends, and coursework, I found more fulfillment in these pursuits than in my formal education.

Here's my advice for those entering university: Get involved! Clubs, associations, sports teams—whatever floats your

boat. They're not just about having fun; they're about networking and understanding the world beyond textbooks.

Having spent a few months in the organization, I wanted to also go on exchange. I had always wanted to go to Egypt and when the money comes in, possibly fly to Greece as well. I enjoy reading about Egyptian mythology, watching Papyrus , the animation and not to mention the famous movie, The Mummy Returns featuring Brendan Fraser, the original movie from 2001. I told my mom about the opportunity I got to travel to Egypt and volunteer for 6 weeks and she was very supportive. . Leaving the country for an extended period is daunting, but my mother's support pushes me to take the plunge. It's a departure from my comfort zone, but hey, comfort zones are overrated.

Now, Egypt. Arabic culture, a language I'm not familiar with—it's a whole different ball game. The experience turns out to be transformative, challenging my preconceptions and expanding my worldview. And that's a story worth telling.

I had never left the country before this experience let alone go anywhere for a long time so the thought of me being by myself for 2 months was certainly an experience I was looking forward to. I got to the Cairo International Airport at 10am in the morning and was fortunately picked from the airport by a fellow AIESECer from my host entity and was immediately taken to the hotel. At this time, I still couldn't believe I was in another country let alone couldn't possibly run back home even if I wanted to but who would. I finally understood what freedom felt like.

The next day I was taken to my First Day of Work. Amazing having to talk about having a Chinese, Mexican, Tunisian and a Moroccan in your squad. (I am just saying). In less than a day I had made new friends from literally all over the world. My work involved teaching kids how to make handicrafts that they would sell in order to make money that would help them in their day to day needs.

I was staying in the capital, Cairo, but in order to get to my place of work I had to take the metro, a tuk tuk (yes, they have them in Egypt as well) and a boat to get to a small poverty-stricken island on the outskirts of the capital. Cairo truly is a large city. The kids were extremely friendly especially to the Chinese folks but their living conditions

weren't as much. Gave me a different perspective to the smaller things we take for granted. The water that surrounded the island was equally dirty, not much resources were put into making sure that health standards were met in ensuring the safety and improving the livelihood of the people living on the island.

There were people who have lived on the island for over 40 years and have never known life outside that small island not bigger than our own Migingo. Life on the island was simpler and smaller and for the few that left either went to look for better education or better work and the percentage was very small. Our work was mostly engaging with the kids, teaching them basic Math and English because a proper School or learning institution was yet to be set up. They also didn't have the necessary work force to do so apart from the few volunteers who did show up. The NGO at the island also started its own initiative of building classrooms that the kids would eventually use only that these classrooms were made from bottles of sand. Recycling used bottles and filling them with sand that would be used as walls and would also help regulate heat in the rooms.

Unfortunately, after a few days, I had to be relocated to a different NGO because of a riot that broke out on the island.

Apparently, the government wanted to vacate the occupants and turn the island into a green island but that meant the displacement and relocation of the residents and they clearly didn't want that.

The new NGO was called Resala, located in Dokki. This time around I just had to take the metro and walk for a short distance before I got to my destination. Initially I had to use an average of 10 Egyptian pounds which is Equal to 60 Kenyan Shillings but now I would use 2 Egyptian Pounds equal to 12 Kenyan Shillings. Fuel alone cost 5 Egyptian Pounds per liter and that was after an increment of 2 Egyptian Pounds. I wish we had to pay 30 Kenyan Shillings for fuel, I'd buy you fuel for your car. Food, how can I forget.
I personally didn't love Egypt for the food but it was definitely friendly to an Arabic taste bud. Most famous food was Koshari and Molokhia, which sounds better when an Arab says it. Literally rolled off my tongue the first time I tried saying it but I did love the Koshari. Ended up being my favorite dish while I was there. Forgive me for being Kenyan but it was one of the cheapest foods you would buy. (30 Kenyan Shillings).

I was also able to travel during my stay in Egypt. I was able to visit Marsa- Alam, Alexandria, El-Sokhna (a small city with an

ocean view to die for) and Sharma Sheikh. I added a few more cities to my bucket list, another reason for sure to go back. Did I grow as a person? Yes, I did. I threw myself in an entirely different crowd and different environment and I wanted to be part of something bigger than myself, make an impact and I believe I did. More so, with a group of strangers who I now can call family. I did want friends I would text in the middle of the night. I most definitely wish I could go back.

By the time I was returning home, I felt like a completely different person. The multitude of experiences and rapid learning transformed me into someone more outgoing and expressive. I no longer felt reserved or hesitant to speak my mind. It was as if I had emerged from my shell.

I gained insights into interacting with people, caring for others, making friends, and embracing my authentic self. Gratitude fills me for the individuals I met in Egypt; their impact still resonates, fueling my love for travel. Placing myself in new environments allowed me to constantly explore, fostering personal growth and accumulating valuable experiences. This, beyond academics, became the highlight of my university life.I am fortunate for the close-knit community I built with university friends, creating a support system that extended beyond the classroom.

The transition to post-graduation life, however, exposed me to the reality of making decisions independently. Studying was different, my free time felt different, interacting with people was different and my environment completely changed. It's like taking fish from a pond to a lake. I had no idea what I was doing and if you were anything like my I had no fashion sense. For the better part of my adult life by then,

I spent it mostly in uniforms. I had no sense of self or how to be by myself. Is that what being young means?

Reflecting on my journey, I acknowledge that external guidance largely shaped my path until this point.if that's not university is about I don't know what is. I learnt so much about myself and actual self love and self work, started from there. What scared me the most was realizing that others could see me too, see my insecurities, see my fear sometimes and moreso see how I think. By this point my peers knew how to read people. I hope you can tell how shocked I was. I once got called out for being too PC (Politically Correct) in an interview I went for while in 2nd year and I almost jumped out of my seat. How dare you tell me what I am feeling right now? And how can you tell what I am doing?

After graduating comes the task of finding a job. I quickly realized the importance of self-reliance and entrepreneurial skills which are not explicitly taught in formal education.

My initial frustration in navigating the professional world gradually gave way to a marketing role. Aligned with my love for computers and skills honed in AIESEC, digital marketing became my niche during a transformative era for the

internet. Helping businesses navigate the evolving digital landscape brought fulfillment. Despite the challenges, I discovered a deep respect for the power of communication in marketing. My childhood struggles with communication fueled my passion to bridge gaps between brands and their audiences.

Currently, I contribute to strategic campaigns and communication strategies. The realization that, in the realm of work, one is either producing or consuming has motivated me to actively contribute to the discourse. The journey hasn't been easy, contrary to the simplistic narrative of education leading to a good life. Life unfolds in unpredictable ways, and I'm grateful for every piece that fell into place—each person, experience, and challenge.

My gratitude extends to friends who supported me, imparting valuable lessons on caring for one another, effective communication, and conflict resolution. Interacting with diverse individuals reinforced the beauty of life's variety.

As I continue to grow, I anticipate ongoing opportunities for learning, standing for something, and supporting causes. Looking ahead, my goal is to give back and create a legacy that others can follow and be proud of. I envision providing a

platform that fosters growth and integrity. In this journey, I strive to be proud of the person I am becoming.

CHAPTER 2.

Men Of Impact.

I've shared my story with you—how I arrived at this point in my life. Yet, I haven't delved into the specifics of how I ended up where I am. As I revisit key experiences and acknowledge those who played instrumental roles in shaping me, I'm overwhelmed with gratitude. Counting my blessings, I realize the fortune of meeting and knowing incredible people. It's a privilege to have had them in my life.

Now, as I turn to this part of my narrative, it seems fitting to focus on my dad. His name was Peter and was a reputable accountant for over 30 years in a public university in Nairobi. He unfortunately passed away two years ago on the 24th of July 2020, amid the challenges of the COVID era. It was my first encounter dealing with grief so close to home and quite the ordeal our family had to go through. I don't think any of us could have known what would happen in the year 2019, 2020 and 2021 because of the coronavirus.

My dad was a remarkable man—humble, down-to-earth, and someone you could trust with anything. His calm demeanor was unwavering, even in the face of familial issues. My grandmother often spoke of his kindness and politeness, traits that persisted from his childhood in a family of seven.He would always be the last person to eat, he would let his siblings have their way and to love him was not difficult because he was very much reserved to his own space. My mum tells my siblings and I that it was very difficult to offend him or make him angry. In fact, I don't have a single memory as a child of him getting angry with us and punishing myself or my siblings.

He spent over 30 years as an accountant, dedicated to his work from the moment he finished university until his

retirement. I would like to think he loved his job or rather where he worked because he never once complained about it. His position allowed him to travel, to meet so many people and to provide for us at home as well. Reflecting on him now, I see a content man, providing for his family and finding joy in the simple routine of life.

From Monday to Friday, he followed the same schedule—work from 8 am to 5 pm. He'd come home for a meal eager to catch the 7 pm and 9 pm news after which he would retire to bed. Every single day for as long as I had known him.

As a child, because of how much I knew he loved watching the news. I would write down what was being shown during these broadcasts. If there was breaking news or a fire in Zimmerman or better yet a prominent person was visiting the country and somehow made it to prime time he would know about it and I would have the notes to back it up. He would come home later on and I would read it out for him as a news presenter would.

Evenings often ended with him dozing off in his favorite chair, a sight I fondly remember. On the weekends, however, things were slightly different. He cherished breakfast with his newspaper, a loyal reader of the Saturday Nation newspaper. His happiness was contagious, especially during those leisurely weekends.

The first thing he did would be to step out and buy breakfast together with the newspaper, probably sit in the sun and then later on proceed to read the gazette either while basking in the sun or in the house. His presence at home was a gift. Every Saturday and Sunday, we knew we'd be together unless

plans dictated otherwise. I long for that sense of belonging and presence in my own life. It's a legacy I aim to carry forward in my relationships, being there for others as he was for us.

As I miss him, I find solace in the lessons he left behind. The ability to find contentment, prioritize what truly matters, and rush home to where one feels the most at peace. In remembering my dad, I not only honor his memory but strive to embody the qualities that made him a beautiful presence in our lives.

Growing up with my dad has been a kaleidoscope of lessons that have shaped who I am today.
In his daily rhythms, I find the notes of kindness and politeness. His calm demeanor in the midst of family storms has become my guide in navigating challenges with grace and resilience.
His work ethic, spanning over three decades as an accountant, has etched dedication and hard work into my core. The steady beat of his routine, from Monday to Friday, instills in me the importance of consistency and structure in my own life.

Yet, beyond the professional, it's the melody of contentment that resonates the loudest. My dad, a man of simple joys, finds happiness in the mundane, teaching me to appreciate life's subtle melodies. Weekends become a sacred hymn of togetherness. The pages of his Saturday Nation newspaper, cherished companions during breakfast, teach me the significance of prioritizing family time. It's not just a routine; it's a deliberate choice to weave the fabric of our family bonds.

In the ebb and flow of his presence, I discover the art of being there—sometimes fully awake, sometimes half-asleep, yet always present. His three-word advice becomes my mantra, a reminder that sometimes, in simplicity, lies profound wisdom. Our house, a sanctuary he loves, transforms into a haven of love and warmth. It's more than a physical space; it's a testament to the art of creating a home—an abode where hearts find solace.

Amidst the humdrum of life, I uncover the melody of joy in simple moments. His ability to savor a newspaper, a meal, and the fleeting minutes before sleep becomes my lesson in mindfulness.And then there's the echo of his listening heart. Even in the briefest exchanges, he offers support, teaching me the power of a listening ear, a comforting presence. These lessons, woven into the fabric of my upbringing, become the mosaic of my character. They form the foundation upon which I navigate life, armed with the wisdom of resilience, gratitude, and an enduring love for the symphony of family and simple joys.

In the heart of anonymity, there lies a story waiting to be shared—a narrative woven around a soul named Victor. Unnoticed by many, he was a force of life, an embodiment of intentionality, love, and authenticity. While it's regrettable that we must now speak of him in the past tense, let's embark on the journey of his tale.

I know Victor to be an exceptionally bright individual. He attended a prestigious school and excelled academically. Books posed no challenge for him; in fact, he relished the prospect of acquiring new knowledge and understanding himself better.

Despite his intellectual prowess, he grappled with self-esteem issues—a curious quirk of how childhood tribulations often weave into our adult lives. There were moments from his past that brought him to tears, shaping his perception of life. His struggle with maintaining a consistent weight played a role, with fluctuations between slim periods and times of added weight. The societal label of 'fat' from his peers weighed heavily on him.

Victor was inherently social, much like myself, yet he harbored doubts about the authenticity of his friendships—an integral part of the human experience. I often find myself pondering whether intervention could have altered the course of his life earlier, but life has a peculiar way of guiding us through shared experiences, leading to diverse outcomes and perspectives.

His passion for physics and love for mathematics showcased his diverse talents. He immersed himself in the world of

reading and embraced his geek side through games like Dungeons and Dragons, part of an underground niche community. Family held a special place in his heart; he cherished his siblings and spent quality time with them. His evenings often involved playful interactions with his brother or heartfelt conversations with his sister, mirroring the affection he held for his family.

It's rare to encounter young men with such a profound understanding of their identity and aspirations. Victor stood out—he knew he wanted to be a doctor. The prospect of contributing to others' well-being fueled his ambition. He envisioned a future where he could make a difference where he felt it was needed. Thank you.

Victor, a name known to few but cherished by those fortunate enough to have crossed paths with him. We met during my university days, and from the moment we started texting, our conversations never seemed to cease. He was one of those rare souls that seamlessly attached their essence to your own. Generous in nature, vibrantly alive, deliberate in action, tender in speech, and authentic in relationships, he was a beacon of friendship. Everyone who knew him got to experience this from him. Being emotionally aware of himself was a gift, as he not only managed his own emotions but also taught me how to do the same. To be deemed Victor's friend was a testament to its truth, for he cultivated and nurtured bonds with unwavering sincerity.

He became my guide to living boldly, loving generously, and listening attentively. Unfortunately, he battled with clinical depression, a fact not easily noticeable unless he chose to share it. Depression, a silent monster, can alienate you from

friends and family, making it even harder to ask for help. Victor confided in me that asking for help was a challenge for him, and I wish I knew how to create an environment that encouraged people, especially guys, to open up.

From Victor's life, I glean secrets that should become our own. Sprinkle joy and happiness, and watch them return to you. Own up to your actions; don't cast blame on others. Strive to be the best version of yourself daily, resisting the influence of external thoughts. Like life and water, be inseparable from your authenticity. Embrace your uniqueness, as there is no concept of normalcy.

Values, Victor emphasized, should be guarded fiercely. Cherish and protect what you hold dear. Kindness, a currency of its own, should be extended to all you encounter. Liberate yourself from constraints, forging a path that aligns with your true self. The gift that was his experience was that he knew how little time he had (I apologize if this makes it seem like a good thing to go through) and therefore showed up as himself every single day. I struggle to do this now, to always represent your true feelings and act accordingly. Victor's struggle was not against others but within himself—an endeavor to be a better man, to love, care, protect, and stand by those who mattered. It was a fight that he conquered, becoming a victor in the hearts of those he touched.

“Today, we mourn the physical departure of this great man, but tomorrow, we celebrate the legacy he leaves behind,” were the words I spoke during his funeral. Victor, in teaching us how to live and love unconditionally, has already won.

In a world where societal expectations cast shadows on the paths of men, Victor's story unfolds as a poignant reminder of the nuanced struggles many face. I can not begin to unweave the load that is placed on men because I am still unweaving that which is displaced on women. The weight of conforming to stereotypes hovered over him, influencing not only his self-esteem but also his perceptions of success and acceptance. I have plenty of guy friends who are deemed failures because they might not have a typical office job or feel terrible about keeping a girl because the expectation on them is to be able to afford the very best of things so as to be seen as a capable provider.

As I reflect on the societal expectations imposed on men, it becomes evident that these standards permeate the lives of those close to me as well. Friends and family have grappled with the pressure to embody traditional notions of masculinity, often at the expense of their mental and emotional well-being. Victor's journey, marked by the stigma of body image and the weight of societal judgments, mirrors the silent battles fought by many.

In navigating these challenges, empathy and open-mindedness emerge as beacons of understanding. By acknowledging the diverse experiences of men, we create a space where vulnerabilities are not weaknesses but threads that weave the rich tapestry of human existence. It is through genuine empathy that we can dismantle the rigid expectations that limit men, allowing them to embrace their authenticity without fear of judgment.

I, more than anyone, know it's easier said than done and the change that probably needs to happen I can not effect

because i am limited but I want to be part of that change. I am fortunate enough to enjoy the benefits that I do now because someone changed it for me. Women are able to get formal education, can have rights in society and possibly equal treatment when it comes to job opportunities but not at the expense of the boy child. We shouldn't have to step on one in order to uplift the other.

To make the experiences of men easier, fostering a culture of empathy becomes paramount. It involves actively listening to their stories, recognizing that vulnerability is a strength, not a flaw. Encouraging open conversations around mental health, body image, and societal pressures creates a supportive environment where men feel seen and heard.

Furthermore, dismantling stereotypes requires a collective effort. Educating ourselves and others on the diverse ways masculinity can be expressed fosters a more inclusive society. Let us challenge toxic masculinity and redefine what it means to be a man, paving the way for individuals like Victor to navigate their journeys with authenticity and resilience.

Ultimately, creating a world where the experiences of men are eased involves breaking down the walls of expectation with understanding, empathy, and a commitment to embracing the beautifully diverse spectrum of masculinity.

The narratives shared here are not isolated tales but fragments of a collective journey. The intersectionality of experiences, the mental health struggles, and the transformative moments of breaking free from stereotypes

collectively contribute to a narrative that is rich, diverse, and ever-evolving.

To the Men Facing Silent Battles,

I want to speak directly to you, not as an expert or someone who fully understands your journey, but as a girl who witnessed the strength and vulnerability intertwined in the soul of a remarkable man named Victor.

In a world that often expects you to be stoic and unwavering, Victor showed me the power of acknowledging the struggles within. He battled his own demons, wrestling with the weight of clinical depression, yet he navigated it with a courage that left me in awe.

I can't claim to comprehend the depth of your experiences, but I empathize with the silent battles you may be fighting. Victor, too, found it difficult to articulate the pain he carried, and I witnessed how the silent struggles can alienate and isolate.

So, to you, the silent warriors, I extend my understanding and compassion. It's okay not to have it all figured out. It's okay to struggle. Victor taught me that strength isn't always about conquering your demons but acknowledging them and fighting the battles, no matter how arduous.

If you're finding it challenging to voice your struggles, I implore you to seek help. Victor confided in me about the difficulty he faced in asking for help. It's a courageous act to reach out, to let someone in, and it doesn't diminish your strength.

In Victor's memory, I encourage you to be kind to yourselves. Embrace the journey of healing, however messy it may be. You are not alone, and your struggles do not define your

worth. There is strength in vulnerability, and there is power in seeking support.

May you find the courage to speak your truth, just as Victor did in his own way. You matter, and your well-being is essential.

With heartfelt empathy,
W.K.

CHAPTER 3.

Women Forging Change.

One of the very first women instrumental in my upbringing would be my mother. She's a resilient and persistent woman who has taught me valuable lessons. Both my parents had careers and businesses, and my mom, in particular, is a powerhouse. She's a servant leader, unafraid of hard work, and she instilled the same values in us from a young age.

As a young woman, I appreciate the systems and values she passed down, guiding me to be a woman of value both at home and in the workplace. She's been my mentor for a long time, providing certainty about my sense of self when I was unsure. I admire her faith, her studious nature, and her commitment to serving in church.

My mom started her business early, and I've learned about business and working with people from her. She helped me gain insight into who I am, setting standards that I won't settle for less. She's strict, ensuring we were disciplined and matured quickly through responsibilities at home and in school.

During tough times, like losing my friend and later my dad, my mom was my pillar of support. She knew how to navigate through the darkness, keeping us moving forward. I'm grateful for her continuous presence, guidance, and friendship.

Her ability to handle such situations with grace and care is something I'll always remember.Like that time when I got lost, and my mom, despite being angry, didn't punish me. The three hours I was lost felt like an eternity, and it made me appreciate the safety and security she provided.

Another vivid memory is when we traveled as a family, and I boarded my first plane as a toddler. The excitement and wonder of that experience are etched in my mind. It was a testament to her spirit of adventure, and she passed on that love for exploration to her children. Her love for travel has influenced me positively, and she supported my desire to explore and experience new things, including my travels to different places. I cherish the stable and loving upbringing she provided, and I hope to emulate that in my own life.

Thank you, Mom, for shaping us into the individuals we are today, for being our constant support, and for the countless stories and lessons that have enriched our lives.

I think sometimes as women we have such a burden, I don't want to call it a burden but we have heavy responsibilities, even societal ones. Being the more emotional type, I feel like we carry so much and feel so much, but it's not to say that men don't.When things are tough, it's hard to separate actions in that sense and to tell one thing apart from the other. It's generally very hard for me.

I think it weighs on us. And I say this because even when you talk about patience, a happy marriage, fulfilling relationships, even amongst women, we are our biggest enemies because we constantly keep fighting each other.
We have such a constant need to compete with each other rather than truly supporting each other, and I don't know why.

There are times I feel like there are things that could have broken us, but her patience, her understanding, and her love for family have been the glue that kept us together. And I want to be that person even for the family I want to build and hopefully have one day. But I'm grateful to the extent I'm able to learn from my mom because she's done such a good job of keeping our family together.

The other woman in my life I would like to talk about is my grandmother. My grandmother was very generous. Knowing her growing up as a child, she died at the age of 98 years, almost a hundred. Her name was also Judy; I got my name from her. And I lost her quite recently, but in my mind, she's always been my grandmother.I dont remember her the same way my mom would or how my dad would tell us about her. She got to raise seven kids, all of them with their families well established in their systems right now and succeeding in their endeavors.

I'm thinking that's a legacy my grandmother and my parents have left. That's what I have to go by. That's what I will remember moving forward, and it's amazing to get that and know that your kids are taken care of.

She had so much life to her. Every time we came home, she'd always have a bag packed for us to take home. She always had food for us to carry, and she always had tea for us to have. In an African home, having a cup of tea is very instrumental in welcoming guests. You don't even ask your guests if they want tea. You place it anyway and hope that they actually have it and enjoy it.

So I used to look forward to going home every Christmas, every other holiday. My mum actually enjoyed going home more than my dad did. She had a farm where she kept goats. She had her own cows as well as sheep. And looking at her life, I'm thinking I want my retirement to look just like that.

It's very peaceful being in the countryside, having your animals to farm,having food you can easily go take from the farm, having people around you, people who love you, people who come to check up on you. I like it enough to want it for myself.

She was very resilient. Even in her old years, my grandmother would always wake up at five. Even if it meant her waking up at five and sitting on her bed until someone came to help her get up, she was always up at five and would never sleep past nine. Even if she was falling asleep on the couch like my dad would. Nothing would actually change about that.

She had a heart for guests, always welcoming people to her house.Her kindness to her people transcended to my dad and she welcomed my mum so graciously.

I'd like to say thank you so much to my grandmother for that opportunity because we would not be as close as we are now without her in our life. I am left to question what I want from life because I have these very strong women who've lived here before me, have raised such successful families, have good kids, and are building their legacy.

I used to think life had to be so fast, but it's like I have to conquer the world, I have to conquer everything in one breath to get things moving, but I'm also slowly realizing that might not have to be the case. I'm grateful for the opportunity I have to have the women I do in my life and to be the person I am.

I'd like to acknowledge two incredible women who have been incredibly kind to me. Finding such warmth, especially from strangers, is a rare gift.

During my trip to Egypt, I formed a deep connection with a Kenyan friend. It took us traveling all the way to Egypt to become friends, and I also forged a friendship with someone from India. Those initial weeks were incredibly lonely, with limited time to connect with friends and family.

Traveling to a distant place, the passage of time for everyone else and the isolation you feel can be disheartening. Life goes on, and you realize how fast-paced and seemingly indifferent it can be.

Even the daily routine of going to work, while satisfying in some ways, can become lonesome without someone to share it with. Fortunately, a few weeks into my internship, Susan, a vibrant girl from Kenya, entered my life. Her presence transformed my experience—she was a constant beam of light, spreading warmth to everyone around her.

I was initially self-conscious about my actions, worried about how I might be perceived. Susan's openness and carefree spirit taught me the freedom of being true to oneself. It made me realize the challenge of always showing up as ourselves, free from the shackles of negative thoughts.

Pranjali, an Indian friend I made, also played a significant role. She extended warm invitations to various activities, breaking down the barriers that sometimes exist between people of different backgrounds. In a place like Egypt, where

physical differences are stark, Pranjali's unbiased friendship meant a lot.

Being with these ladies for eight weeks was an unforgettable experience. They made me feel seen and appreciated, turning my time in Egypt into cherished memories. Susan and Pranjali, with their kindness and inclusivity, shaped my perspective and transformed my journey into something truly special. I learnt how to be myself really, How to enjoy other's space and to be respected in my own.

Lastly, I am such a huge fan of “Parks and Recreation", a delightful mockumentary sitcom that revolves around the eccentric and determined Leslie Knope, played by Amy Poehler. I love, love Amy in this series. It kinda reminds me of me and my good attitude and all the other important things I want to do with my life. My friend has likened me to her before and to be honest, I can see the resemblance in character.

Here’s a little more insight into what the show is about,

The set happens to be in the town of Pawnee, Indiana. The series follows Leslie's journey as the deputy director of the Parks and Recreation Department. She has an unwavering passion for public service and community improvement, She then navigates the quirky world of local government with boundless ambition. The show explores the challenges and triumphs of Leslie's efforts to enhance Pawnee's parks, tackle bureaucratic hurdles, and make a positive impact on the lives of its residents. Leslie is trying to assemble a unique team, including the deadpan Ron Swanson (another amazing character) and the spirited April Ludgate(Audrey Plaza). The series masterfully blends humor, heart, and satire to offer a witty commentary on politics, friendship, and the pursuit of one's dreams.

I love Leslie because she is;

Ambitious:
Whether it's improving Pawnee's parks or advancing her own career, she sets high goals and pursues them with unwavering determination.

Passionate:
Her enthusiasm for public service, local government, and making a positive impact on her community is infectious.

Optimistic:
She is an eternal optimist, always seeing the silver lining in even the most challenging situations. Her positivity is a driving force that influences those around her.

Hardworking:
Her work ethic is undeniably unparalleled. She is consistently portrayed as a dedicated and industrious public servant, going above and beyond to achieve her goals.

Caring and Empathetic:
Her genuine care for others and empathy shine through in her interactions. Whether it's supporting her friends or championing a cause, she approaches relationships with warmth and understanding.

Leader:
Throughout the series, she emerges as a natural leader. Her ability to inspire and motivate her team is a defining aspect of her character.

Funny and Witty:
Leslie's humor is a blend of intelligence and wit. Her quick comebacks and comedic timing contribute to the show's lighthearted tone.

Feminist and Advocate:
Leslie is a strong advocate for women's rights and equality. Her feminist principles are evident in her actions, from

mentoring female colleagues to actively working towards gender inclusivity.

Environmental Steward:
Leslie's commitment to preserving Pawnee's natural spaces reflects her role as an environmental steward. This aspect of her character showcases a broader concern for sustainability and community well-being.

Loyal Friend:
Leslie's friendships are deep and meaningful. Her loyalty to her friends, especially her bond with Ann Perkins, underscores the importance of support networks in navigating life's challenges.

Resilient:
Leslie faces numerous setbacks and challenges, but her resilience is unwavering. She bounces back from adversity with determination and grace.

Community-Minded:
Her dedication to community improvement is at the core of her character. Her passion for Pawnee drives her to work tirelessly for the betterment of the town

I obviously don't want to ruin the show for you but if you enjoy a feel good show, this is it. Her strengths, quirks, and values contribute to the enduring appeal of "Parks and Recreation".

Dear Younger Me,

As I pen down these words, I hope they find you in the tender embrace of youthful curiosity, unburdened by the weight of the years that will shape you. There's a wisdom I've gained along the winding path of life, and I want to share it with you, my dear counterpart in the tapestry of time.

Firstly, embrace the beauty of imperfection. Life is not a flawless masterpiece but a canvas of experiences, each stroke adding depth to the masterpiece that is your journey. In those moments of self-doubt, remember that growth often sprouts from the fertile soil of mistakes.

Cultivate resilience as you would a rare flower. The storms will come, sometimes fierce and unrelenting, but within you lies the strength to weather them. Let adversity be the sculptor of your character, shaping you into a person of substance and grace.

Cherish relationships like precious gems. They are the threads that weave the fabric of a rich and meaningful life. Invest time in those who lift you higher, and reciprocate the warmth that love brings. Be discerning, for not everyone will appreciate the rarity of your heart.

Do not fear change; instead, dance with it. Life is a dynamic symphony, and your ability to adapt will be your greatest ally. Embrace the unknown, for it often conceals the most beautiful surprises.

Listen more than you speak, for in the echoes of others' stories, you'll discover the resonance of shared humanity. Empathy will be your compass, guiding you through the labyrinth of diverse experiences.

Dream big but savor the small victories. Life's tapestry is woven with both grand accomplishments and humble joys. Celebrate each step forward, and let gratitude be the melody that accompanies your journey.

Above all, be kind to yourself. You are a work in progress, a masterpiece unfolding. Embrace the quirks and idiosyncrasies that make you uniquely you. Your worth is not determined by the applause of others but by the love and compassion you extend to yourself.

As you navigate the labyrinth of time, remember that the journey is as significant as the destination. May these words serve as lanterns, illuminating the path ahead.

With unwavering affection,
W.K.

I've recounted the stories of those who played pivotal roles in my life, both women and men, some of whom are no longer as present as I'd like them to be. Grief's influence, in particular, took a toll on me, shaping my understanding in profound ways.

Numerous sleepless nights were spent grappling with memories that surfaced unexpectedly. The weight of emotions led to moments of tearful breakdowns. People, with their capacity to evoke feelings and inspire actions, leave an indelible mark—one that is unforgettable.

Though one can develop new connections and feelings for others, the assurance that someone once had that effect on you is a comforting reminder of their enduring presence. Losing close ones—friends, my dad, and my grandmother—took a considerable toll on my mental health, plunging me into a prolonged state of depression.

Navigating the practicalities of mourning—funeral arrangements, consoling others—provided a temporary distraction. However, once the initial flurry subsided, a lingering emptiness set in. The familiar had to adapt to a new normal, a process that proved both exhausting and painful.

The challenge intensifies as we grow older, knowing people for longer and continually encountering new connections. It's a facet of life I anticipated but never fully grasped until I experienced it firsthand.

For a considerable period, it felt as if a dark cloud hovered over me. The world seemed shrouded in darkness, a heavy

burden settling into my being. Each subsequent loss only added to the weight, making the journey more arduous.

Yet, amidst the struggle, I found solace in friends who provided support. The simple act of reaching out, of sharing my feelings, became a lifeline. It helped me confront the hopelessness and redefine the purpose of my existence.

The transformative experience shifted my perspective on life. I discarded the luxury of taking things for granted. It made me appreciate the value of showing up, not just for myself but for others too—acknowledging the debt I owed to those who had shown up for me.

This profound shift in outlook prompted me to pen these thoughts, to convey that life may not get easier, but it unquestionably improves when shared with those you love. Despite the inherent challenges and occasional cruelty of people, the moments when they do show up are monumental.

In reflecting on the beauty and darkness of every situation, the key lies in embracing both—acknowledging the complexities of life's tapestry. Importantly, we need not face these intricacies alone; the journey becomes richer when undertaken with others who care, love, and understand.

CHAPTER 4.

What Is Life?

I feel like, at this point, you already know so much about me. By the time I was starting to ask myself this question, "What is life?" I had probably gone through so much pain, so much internal battle in trying to understand what this question meant for me. At some point, everything lost meaning—the effort I was putting into my work, my reason for existing in the first place, especially if it's so easy to lose... To easily lose something that was truly hard to give.

When I lost my dad, my best friend, my grandmother, and my cousin almost in the same breath it really made me question a lot because all these events happened within months of each other. I was wondering, what had this year become? What is really happening? And I began to question what was the point of it al? Why does it seem like everyone else is leaving, and I'm left looking at it?

Losing these people brought me to my knees, casting a shadow over every aspect of my life. In the wake of their departure, I found myself adrift in a sea of uncertainty, grappling with emotions I couldn't comprehend and questions I couldn't answer. The pain of loss penetrated deeply, shaking the very foundation of my existence and leaving me to confront the harsh reality of mortality. Suddenly, life seemed fleeting, fragile, and precious, prompting me to reevaluate my priorities and contemplate the brevity of my own existence.

I haven't done anything extraordinary to be left behind. I went on a search internally, even on the internet. I sought after the Bible, as well as seeking your understanding. I also asked my friends what they thought. And I learned so much about other people, as well as what they experienced and what they

think. As well as gaining an understanding of what it would be for me.

I was forced to confront my deepest fears and insecurities, questioning the meaning of life itself and my place within it. The loss stripped away the veneer of certainty, leaving me to ponder the profound existential mysteries that had long lingered in the shadows. Each wave of grief brought with it a new wave of emotions—sadness, anger, guilt, and regret—forcing me to confront the depths of my own humanity. Through introspection, I attempted to make sense of these emotions, to understand their underlying causes, and to find a path forward in the midst of chaos.

I had a well-being job at that time. I felt like I was on track. I got a job even before I graduated, which for me felt like a flex because yes, I'm able to work. I'm on track for where I need to be. I'm not certain that was a job I needed to take, but I was doing something about it. I was moving as it felt at that time.

So when this ordeal happened, everything seemed pointless. I dropped some of the clients I had. I ended up dropping all the other projects I was pursuing at the site. And by the end of that year, I also left my 8-5 job because it seemed pointless. I was making good money. I was in a stable job, had a good employer, but it didn't fulfill me in any way. I was unhappy.

I was not happy with the work I was doing. I was not happy having to give so much of my time in exchange for money. That didn't feel like a fair exchange. Am I existing just to make it? Am I existing just to be another cog in the wheel?

And I started asking questions. Hopefully the right questions, and I remember asking my boss at the time what he thought life was. (If I am being honest, I am shocked that he responded in the first place). He seemed very well put together. He seemed to understand what life was and was very supportive and encouraging during my ordeal, which really did make me wonder. Why do you seem so sure about your life? So I asked him, and as a family man, he said he exists to satisfy the needs of his family.

His children were the center stage. His wife gave him joy. And such a joy it must be to exist for, to find purpose in others' work because if he's not there, then who's going to fend for his children? If he's not there, then who's going to take care of his wife? Who is going to be there for his children in the manner they would need a dad?

His children gave him a purpose in life in that he now has someone calling him dad, has someone calling him father, he has someone depending on his life. She gave him the capacity of a husband as well. And it somehow supersedes every other challenge he would face because for him, it's, "I need to be there for my family, I need to be there, I need to do my part, otherwise, no one else could."

He became a very good pillar at home, was present for his family members, and I think he's a joy to them, being able to find joy in others being happy. I also asked my best friend's parents this question months after the incident had happened, and they seemed to find the energy to move forward. I was thinking, the victor is gone now, how? How do you want to move forward? What does life look like to you now?

And the response was, life for them does not go back to how it was before because there's always going to be that gap, there's always going to be that empty. There's a corner in their heart where they do know someone existed but is not, a part of them exists, just not with them at the present time.

And they still had other children because my friend had siblings, and they still depended on them. They still depend on them to show up and continue doing as they've been needing to. And I thought I wasn't. It was good. Then looking at my life, I didn't have that. I didn't have children. I don't have kids. I didn't have anyone depending on the outside for my cut at that time. I was merely present, but not connected.

Not in the way my boss was, not in the way my friends' parents were. And I was thinking, is this what I need to do to now find a purpose in my life? Do I now need to have children to get that joyful life back? Is that what I needed? To know that someone else would care if I stayed, someone else would care if I went, to have someone care for me. Is that enough to exist? Is that my new purpose in life?

Life is what you make of it

I sought the opinions of my peers. Asked a couple of friends about the nature of my question. What is it all about? Why do any of us exist? Their responses were mostly along the lines of not knowing or never having considered it before.

Someone even questioned if I was going through a midlife crisis. It felt like that, honestly. Who am I, and why? Why am I still here while others have gone? Life's fragility struck me—just stepping out could lead to an unexpected accident.

In the end, I felt like I exist because of someone else's grief, a notion that still rings true. Life, they say, is whatever you make it. It's a common refrain—life is life. Describing it is challenging because people know only the reality in which they exist.

For some, life feels like a box, and what you make of that box defines your life. Punch a hole, and that's your life; step outside, and you live beyond it. It wasn't a question for them because they were living it.

It dawned on me that I was observing life from a detached, almost bad perspective. As if I had removed myself from a negative state to something else.

Cut to my friends—life for them means securing a good job in these challenging times, especially as we struggle for stable incomes in our mid-twenties. Embracing adulthood, free from someone else's guidance, they make of life what they will.

Achievement becomes a central theme—whether it's pursuing a childhood dream of being a doctor or an engineer, life gains purpose through these pursuits. It's not just about careers; it's about the journey.

Time becomes a significant factor. Life is about being present, having time for friends, the money to travel, and the ability to afford things once out of reach. Maintaining a lifestyle and, for some, starting a family. Providing for parents who've supported them is another facet of life.

Living in simplicity is considered a blessing. Life is what you make it, a product of the cards you've been dealt. But questions arise—is everyone's life the same? Are our experiences meant to be identical? Is there a definitive answer to what life is?

Comparisons arise—Is my life different from yours based on my job, responsibilities, or placement? Is our experience of life similar, or are we meant to learn the same things? The uncertainty persists, leaving me with more questions about life than answers. Are we all the same?

In the quiet corridors of contemplation, I find myself wrestling with the enigma of what follows the curtain call of life. It's a pondering that leads me through the diverse realms of human belief, each offering a unique narrative to the mystery that shrouds existence beyond the mortal coil.

As I delve into religious teachings, the prospect of an afterlife takes shape—an ethereal landscape painted by faith. Could it be a celestial abode where the virtuous reap eternal rewards, or a realm of reckoning for deeds done in the mortal realm? The doctrines speak of divine justice and eternal destinies, inviting me to explore the tapestry of existence beyond the veil.

Yet, there are other threads woven into this cosmic fabric. In the tapestry of Eastern philosophies, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth emerges—an intricate dance of souls navigating the karmic currents. It's a perspective that beckons me to consider life as a continuous journey, an ever-evolving story of self-discovery and spiritual growth.

And then, there's the canvas painted by more secular hands, where the brushstrokes of skepticism sketch a different narrative. Is death merely a plunge into eternal oblivion, where consciousness dissolves into the void, leaving behind only the memories etched in the minds of the living? The prospect of nothingness challenges my understanding, urging me to grapple with the notion of an end without continuation.

In the kaleidoscope of mystical and New Age beliefs, the afterlife unfolds as a cosmic exploration. Could it be a journey into dimensions beyond our sensory grasp, where

the essence of self transcends the limitations of the physical form? It's an invitation to consider realities beyond the mundane, where the soul dances in realms unseen.

And then, in the quiet whispers of existential contemplation, the question echoes: Does life after death find its dwelling in the imprints left on the world? Perhaps, it's a timeless existence, not in the unfolding of personal experiences, but in the stories told, the lessons learned, and the echoes of influence that ripple through the lives of those who carry forward the torch.

As I stand on the precipice of understanding—or perhaps, the acknowledgment of perpetual uncertainty—each perspective paints a fragment of the canvas that stretches beyond the horizon of my comprehension. The quest for what lies beyond is not a journey into certainty but a voyage into the boundless realms of possibility.

Life is the differentiation of the human experience.

I find myself grappling with life's meaning, a question that persists despite numerous discussions. Recently, I connected with a friend, a stranger really, someone I encountered for the first time. My experience with grief has made me an open book, leaving little room for small talk.

In the midst of catching up and getting to know this new acquaintance over lunch at my friend's house, I felt a sense of openness. It led me to ask a profound question: What is life? The response came from a young man of 19, whose words carried depth and wisdom beyond his years. He had faced challenges that forced him to mature early, dealing with life's unpredictability.

Life, he expressed, is a spectrum of human experiences, a variety not meant to follow a single, uniform path. The beauty lies in the diversity of our encounters, the myriad emotions we navigate. Happiness, he contended, isn't the ultimate goal; it's transient. Life, he suggested, is about embracing the variance in human experiences.

Reflecting on this, I considered the complexities of being human. Amid the challenges, we are granted the gift of breath and existence. Life, I've come to believe, revolves around the people we meet along the way—guides who teach us various facets of ourselves. I learned about comfort from a friend named Victor, perseverance from my mother, gentleness from my father, assertiveness from my brother, and generosity from my grandparents.

The analogy of a tree stuck in the same place without experiencing different weather conditions resonated with me. Life's essence lies in the mix of good and bad, bitter and sweet. Some people enter our lives briefly, while others find a lasting home within us.

I am not afraid of death because I find strength, relief, and happiness in being alive. The gift of life is unparalleled; it cannot be replicated or transferred. It is uniquely ours until our time comes.

So, what will we do with this gift of life? As my friend suggested, it's a blank canvas, and we decide what goes on it. Adulting brings the joy of choosing our path and being responsible for our decisions. The balance between freedom and responsibility shapes our journey, making it an exciting and fulfilling adventure.

Looking ahead, I anticipate meeting my older self in my fifties. I'll share stories about the challenges I perceived in my youth, like the difficulty of going to work at 8 am, perhaps a routine I now find oddly familiar.

Gratitude fills me for the person I am today and the life I am yet to experience. Writing this book is not merely an expression of thoughts; it's a sharing of insights into my life's journey. My hope is that it resonates with others, offering assurance that it gets better—it's not a bleak journey. Life's path unfolds in varied ways, and our choices determine our truth.

I got to exploring what the Bible says about life, about really understanding why we are. Why we exist?. Here is what I found and hopefully provides solace for someone still searching. I know I still am.

What Does The Bible Say about Life

The Biblical Tapestry of Life

In the sacred pages of the Bible, the concept of life unfolds as a rich tapestry woven with profound insights, moral guidance, and a divine perspective on our earthly existence.

Genesis 1:27 - The Imprint of the Divine

The Bible begins with a resounding affirmation of the sanctity of human life. Genesis 1:27 declares
that every individual is created in the image of God, emphasizing the inherent value and uniqueness of each person.
The opening verse asserts that every individual is a reflection of the divine, created in the image of God. This foundational truth underscores the inherent value and dignity of every person, providing a basis for the reverence and respect owed to all human life.

Jeremiah 29:11 - Divine Plans and Purpose

Throughout the Bible, a theme emerges — the intricate plans and purpose that God has for our lives. Jeremiah 29:11 assures believers that God's plans are for welfare, providing a future filled with hope and purpose.

In the intricate tapestry of God's design, Jeremiah 29:11 assures believers of a purposeful path. God's plans, filled with welfare and hope, become a source of comfort, encouraging trust in the divine blueprint even when life's journey seems uncertain.

John 3:16 - Eternal Life

Christianity introduces the concept of eternal life, transcending the boundaries of our temporal existence. John 3:16 encapsulates this belief, expressing the profound love of God and the promise of eternal life through faith.
The gospel of John introduces the concept of eternal life, transcending the boundaries of earthly existence. John 3:16 speaks of divine love and the promise of an enduring connection with God, offering believers a profound perspective that extends beyond the temporal.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - Guided Paths

Guidance for living is a recurrent theme in the Bible. Proverbs 3:5-6 implores believers to trust in the Lord, acknowledging His wisdom in navigating life's journey and surrendering personal understanding for divine guidance.
Proverbs implores believers to trust in the Lord with all their hearts, leaning not on their own understanding. This verse serves as a compass, urging reliance on divine wisdom and guidance in navigating the complexities of life's journey.

Love, Compassion, and Reflection

Love and compassion are foundational principles in the Bible. Matthew 22:39 encapsulates this essence, urging believers to love their neighbors as themselves, fostering a spirit of kindness and empathy.

Matthew 22:39 - The Essence of Love

Matthew 22:39 encapsulates the essence of Christian living - to love one's neighbor as oneself. This principle extends beyond mere affection, promoting a spirit of empathy, kindness, and communal care, reflecting the divine love that believers have received

Exodus 20:13 - Respecting Life

The Ten Commandments, a moral compass in the Bible, includes the commandment "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). This unequivocal directive underscores the sanctity of life and the imperative to respect and preserve it.
Embedded within the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:13 is a stark command against murder. This commandment reinforces the sanctity of life and the moral obligation to safeguard and uphold the dignity of every individual.

Psalm 90:12 - Reflection on Life's Transience
The Bible invites reflection on the transient nature of human life. Psalm 90:12 encourages believers to gain wisdom by acknowledging the brevity of their days, fostering a deeper understanding of the temporality of earthly existence.
The Psalms invite believers to a reflective pause, urging them to "number their days" in Psalm 90:12. This verse

prompts introspection, a mindful awareness of the transient nature of life, and the pursuit of wisdom in the face of life's fleeting moments.

As a believer we navigate the intricacies of our existence, the Bible stands as a timeless source of inspiration, offering profound insights that resonate across the tapestry of human experience.

Dear Future Self,

As I sit down to pen this letter, I'm enveloped in a wave of reflection, embracing the person I am in this very moment. The journey we've undertaken is nothing short of extraordinary, filled with twists, turns, and a kaleidoscope of emotions. You, my future self, hold the wisdom garnered from every experience, the triumphs, and the stumbling blocks.

Do you remember the stranger turned friend, Griff, and the profound conversations that left me questioning the essence of life? The young man of 19, with eyes brimming with wisdom and stories etched in the depths of his soul? Those moments are imprinted in our shared history, a testament to the richness of human connection and the beauty of diverse experiences.

Life, as he eloquently put it, is a canvas painted with a myriad of emotions, a masterpiece crafted through encounters with countless souls. I hope you're still embracing this truth, finding joy in the diversity that each person brings into your life.

The stories of comfort, perseverance, gentleness, assertiveness, and generosity, learned from Victor, Mom, Dad, and the rest, remain etched in our heart. These are the building blocks of our character, shaping the person you've become. I hope these lessons continue to guide you, serving as a compass in the complex sea of existence.

I recall the analogy of the tree stuck in the same place, devoid of the transformative touch of various weather conditions. Life's essence lies in the mix of good and bad, bitter and sweet. Those transient encounters, both fleeting and enduring, contribute to the richness of our narrative.

And the fearlessness towards death, finding strength and happiness in the mere act of being alive — may this sentiment be a perpetual flame within you. Life, that irreplaceable gift, unfolds in chapters, each one unique to your journey.

As you read this letter in the future, I hope it stirs a sense of euphoria and gratitude. Your choices, the ones made with deliberation and the spur-of-the-moment decisions, have crafted a story worth telling. Remember the blank canvas my friend talked about? I hope you've painted it with vibrant hues, reflecting the myriad experiences and choices that define our path.

Looking forward, imagine meeting me in my fifties, sharing anecdotes about the "difficulties" of going to work at 8 am. I hope you're relishing the freedom of choice and the responsibilities that come with adulthood. The delicate balance between the two, making life not all blue but a rich tapestry of colors.

Expressing gratitude for the person I am today, I eagerly anticipate the person you've become. This book, written not merely as an expression of thoughts but as a testament to our journey, holds the hope that it resonates with you, offering assurance that it gets better. Life is not a bleak

journey; it's a symphony of highs and lows, each note contributing to the beautiful melody of existence.

Embrace the future with open arms, cherish the past, and live in the vibrant present. You've got this.

With unwavering optimism,

W.K.

In the cocoon of life, a butterfly's journey begins as an egg, a tiny promise of transformation. From this, a caterpillar emerges—a creature of voracious appetite and earthly existence. It devours the leaves around it, growing and shedding its skin, a metaphor for the challenges and growth we experience in the face of change.

Then comes the chrysalis—a period of seclusion and introspection. Within this fragile shell, the caterpillar undergoes a profound metamorphosis, dissolving into a formless essence before reemerging as a butterfly. This transformative process symbolizes the potential within us all to undergo profound change and emerge with newfound wings.

As the butterfly breaks free from its cocoon, it is reborn into a world of vibrant colors and weightless flight. The once-grounded creature now soars through the air, embodying the freedom that comes with embracing change. Its delicate wings, a testament to the strength that arises from vulnerability, carry it to new heights.

In "Butterfly Crescendo," let the life of a butterfly be a metaphor for your own journey. May it inspire you to embrace the cocoon moments, the times of introspection and change, as opportunities for growth. Just as the butterfly contributes its unique flutter to the symphony of nature, may you contribute your own melody to the world.

As the final chapter of "***Butterfly Crescendo***" unfolds, may you find resonance in the transformative journey of the butterfly. Like the delicate flutter of its wings, may your life create ripples of change that echo far beyond the boundaries

of your existence. As you embark on this literary journey, may "Butterfly Crescendo" inspire you not only to witness the butterfly effect of your own life but to contribute your unique notes to the symphony of the world. For in every transformation lies the potential for a beautiful crescendo, and in every change, the opportunity to compose the masterpiece of your own existence.