
The Triple Balancing Act: Academics, Family and University Administration

Having settled as a lecturer, my next task was to get my life partner. I was advised by my parents that I needed a wife with whom I could live and work. They did not specify what kind of girl I should marry, but they hinted that I needed a wife from a reputable family and one who would relate to them respectfully. That statement was loaded. My other family members encouraged me to marry, settle down and raise a family. The idea was welcome and I started to search for an appropriate partner.

Gusii customs allow for formal and informal courting of a future partner. The customs also allow for relatives and close family members to do a search. Many African traditions use this method although the final decision is between the two persons.

I was introduced to my wife, Esther Nyabonyi, in 1980 by a group of relatives. I had heard of her and the information I got made me anxious to meet her. I sent emissaries and she did the same on learning about me. I was sure that many people knew about my interest and were closely watching my moves. The larger Gusiiland where both of us come from is not so large that one cannot know prominent people.

I knew through my church elders in Nyamagesa that my fiancée was the daughter of Mr Jackson Mokaya, a well-known teacher and pastor in the Gusii community who had done part of his missionary work in Nyaribari, my local home area. Her mother was one of the respected workers in many mission stations especially in Kamagambo in Kenya and Bugema in Uganda where Pastor Mokaya taught and evangelized. Her brothers, who were young students then, were also well-known in the community.

Esther was the only daughter of Pastor and Mrs Mokaya, and had eight brothers. My brothers-in-law are, in order of seniority: Stanley Memba, Samwel

Otora, Peter Ogera, Charles, Daniel Menge, Robert, Tom Migiro and Leornard Onduso. They are all professionals in diverse fields of study. Some reside in Kenya and others outside Kenya. We are always in touch and share a lot in common.

My family is large and spreads throughout the whole of Nyaribari District. My parents were also well-known in the community as staunch Christians who brought up their sons and daughter in a Christian way. My mother was instrumental in church-building and welfare matters of the community. She was a respected opinion leader in the area. Many pastors, especially during the camp meetings, stayed in our home. I would not be surprised if my father-in-law-to-be did spend some nights in our home.

Esther was teaching at Suneka Secondary School. I drove there and the headmaster was kind enough to allow me to see her. We spoke briefly and I left the school so that she could go on with her lessons.

I returned later to take her to Kisii Town for her transport home. I later made several visits mainly during the weekends to avoid cancellation of my lectures. I recall one Saturday afternoon that I went to her house; and her mother came home from church only to find a White 504 Peugeot parked outside. She was very polite to me, received me well, and then I left. It rained cats and dogs afterwards. Courting went on for over one year.

On 3 September 1981, Esther and I tied the knot followed by an elaborate party at Nyanchwa Secondary School in Kisii Town. Several people attended the wedding, including my close friends from my college. They came in the university bus. Friends like Prof. Kimani Waithaka, Eliud Gathuru, Moses Onim, Jane Mbugua and David Karanja attended our wedding.

September was a rainy period in Gusii. We were all soaked wet; cars got stuck deep in the red soils and all our wedding attire got muddy. It was the 'rainiest' day of the month. But we were comforted that those were God's blessings.

After the reception, driving to my home was even worse. We had to push vehicles to get home. It was a crowded, wet and blessed wedding. My parents were most excited to see their son get married. The rest is history, as we started to navigate through life as a married couple.

We requested for a transfer for my wife to Nairobi and it was granted. It was such a relief when my wife was posted to Mary Leaky Girls' Secondary School, next to my Kabete campus. I would drop her there and return to my office, just two kilometres away. Then we would go back together to Hurlingham where we stayed. It was a quiet neighbourhood with few people then.

I used to stay in a university three-bedroom flat on Argwings Kodhek Road, next to the Army Headquarters. University houses and apartments were so spacious and well-kept that all lecturers wanted to stay there. We were paying very little rent, basically for maintenance. The situation is different now.

This University housing arrangement proved to be academically rewarding as one had a convenient environment to pursue academic work. This situation had changed by the time I became a VC, with academic members of staff making their own housing arrangements in a manner that defeated the collegial academic culture.

Although the non-provision of university housing encouraged a few academics to own houses, in most cases, academics ended up staying in deplorable, slum-like conditions unsuitable for academic work and growth. I know of my colleagues who have lost students' academic documents under these circumstances. This has been caused by poor remuneration packages, particularly housing allowances.

We settled quickly in our flat and met several residents who were already staying there. Professors De-cock, Henry Mutoro (now DVC, Academic Affairs, University of Nairobi), Henry Maritim and Inonda Mwanje. We actually formed a soccer club. We used to meet, and the wives shared a lot in common. The twelve flats in two blocks had adequate space for sports, meetings and barbecue area. It was a lovely community of university dons.

On 11 March 1982, my wife delivered our lovely first son, Nyakundi M. Michieka. We thanked God and prayed for the baby as we got blessings from both our parents. Further blessings were witnessed when my brother David Ombogo's wife, Mary, gave birth to a baby boy, Samuel Goima Michieka, within the same week. They were born only a couple of days apart. The two were like twins as they grew up together.

Unfortunately, Samuel Goima Michieka, who was training as a medical doctor at the University of Nairobi passed away through a tragic road accident in Nairobi at the age of 22. The loss of our nephew, and the only son to Mary and David, devastated us so much that we are yet to come to terms with it.

Our son, Nyakundi, now a PhD holder, grew up with a strong desire to excel in his academic career. We later had a son, Dr Amenya M. Michieka, who was born on 11 May 1983, a daughter Kemunto Mong'ina, an advocate of the High Court, born on 20 July 1984 and Michieka Okioga, a medical doctor the last born on 22 July 1985. My wife, Esther, and I have given them the best parenting. They all attended Consolata Primary School in Westlands, Nairobi. My family life and the children's upbringing will be covered in another chapter in which I focus on my tenure as Principal and later Vice-Chancellor (JKUAT), followed by my tenure as Director-General (NEMA).

An Attempted Coup d'État

On 2 August 1982, barely two years after I started teaching and one year into marriage, the country became almost ungovernable. My stay in Nigeria was generally under military rule until Shehu Shagari took over as a civilian president in 1979. I did not expect our beloved country, Kenya, to fall under military rule. This was the least I expected.

One Saturday evening, on 2 August 1982, we all ate well and retired to bed. No one of us imagined that we could be awakened by gunshots all over Hurlingham. It was at about 4.30 am when we heard the gunshots. We thought it was a robbery somewhere in the neighbourhood. We lived opposite Kilimani Police Station and thought maybe an accident had occurred. That was it – a political accident. It was an attempted coup d'état.

We got up as more gunshots rent the air. The radio had a strange music playing and no news came through. I called my brother, David, using a landline and he told me that a friend had told him that the military was taking over the government. My colleagues in the Ambala Flats were all up by 6 am to find out what was happening. It was, indeed, an attempted coup d'état.

We monitored developments in the country on the radio, and heard veteran broadcaster, Leonard Mambo Mbotela, announcing that the government had been taken over by the military. Several military land rovers swept along Argwings Kodhek Road from the military headquarters. There was total confusion.

Our flats were less than half a kilometre from the army headquarters but we could not walk there to enquire. We also learnt that there were gunshots all over the city. We were all getting confirmation from many sources that the country was, indeed, under military rule. Further information trickled in that the University of Nairobi students and the air force had taken over the government. It was now dawning on all of us in the compound that we were under siege.

I knew that our little son, Nyakundi, had no more milk for the day. It was 7 am when only military land rovers were speeding along Argwings Kodhek Road. I quickly thought of a solution and decided to rush to the nearest petrol station which had a small shop at the present Yaya Shopping Centre to buy a few packets of milk. I took the car keys and drove as fast as I could.

I bought several packets of milk, two loaves of bread and butter. As I engaged the reverse gear in the panic of confusion, I hit a road kerb and dented my car rim. I nevertheless got the milk and bread for my son. I told my wife of the decision to get the milk first and explain later. In fact several military land rovers were now driving everywhere and advising people to stay indoors.

I was shouted at by the military personnel to go back to my house as all regular policemen and women had been ordered to stay away from duty. At least I braved to get the baby's milk but risked death. I considered my act brave even though it looked ill-advised. But, the fact was there was no milk for Nyakundi. My wife, Esther wondered how I had come back so fast, and alive!

Later at about 11.00 o'clock, Prof. Henry Mutoro and I walked to the shopping centre when we saw civilians moving hastily to various destinations. We walked amidst the crowd to the nearby city mortuary since everybody seemed to be heading there. At this time, there were fewer land rovers plying on our road. It was quiet but we could hear more gunshots in the down-town direction.

I later regretted going to the city mortuary! What we saw is beyond anybody's imagination. Hundreds of dead bodies were heaped all over the place one on top of another. It was unsightly, horrific, hideous, dreadful and utterly shocking! Bullet-riddled bodies were scattered everywhere.

Henry and I quickly left the place as more bodies were being hauled in. By midday on Sunday, total confusion prevailed. We went to our residences and found our colleagues standing outside, talking. We did not talk much as we tried to come to terms with what we had just seen.

Some radio announcements started to come over the air. As we stood outside, two air force helicopters flew past our flats towards Ngong Hills. We did not understand their motive, but assumed more fighting would go on between the air force personnel and the soldiers. We were told that the air force had staged the coup d'état but the army troops had crushed it; hence the several military land rovers on our roads at that time.

We retreated into our flats for more news. We were informed of the aborted coup d'état and that the air force personnel were being hunted alongside the university students who had supported the coup. The army, which was loyal to the government of the day, had restored some order and were busy flushing out the coup plotters.

My wife and I then became worried. We had several relatives in the university and their halls of residence were military targets for supposedly harbouring insurgents. My two brothers-in-law, Peter and Charles, were staying in the halls. There were no cell phones then. And we feared for our flats. It was known that Nairobi University staff stayed there and would certainly be an easy target for the army to come looking for rebels.

At six in the evening, my two brothers-in-law, Charles Mokaya and Dr Peter Mokaya, and a colleague, Dr Kambuni, came running into the compound for safety. They came in and narrated to us how their fellow students had been rounded up. Getting to our residence safely had not been easy. We were happy to see them safe and told them to lie low. We were informed that some people in the town centre were looting the stores. At the same time, shooting was going on unabated.

I do recall my late brother, H.T. Michieka, who had been caught in the fiasco, had to sleep hungry in the store in town to avoid being hit in cross-fire exchange. He was lucky to be alive and was rescued with several others after two days of total confusion. The coup d'état was unsuccessful and people slowly started to assess the damage.

Everything went quiet on Sunday evening. Normalcy resumed slowly and many people started going back to their residences. There were continuous announcements that all was now calm and the government was in control. But we were advised to tread carefully. The insurgents could charge at innocent citizens

in their last attempts for survival. My brothers-in-law heard that students were being followed, searched and hunted down rigorously. Many may not have had anywhere to go.

A good number of students were put in police cells. The search continued for several days as the city slowly returned to normal. I recall one incident when the late Robert Shaw (of Starehe Boys' Centre) cornered a university land rover carrying students at the Roysambu roundabout. He stopped it at gunpoint, ordered every student to get out and lie down. Perhaps, they might have been using the vehicle to escape. They were later released as they had no weapons.

A Risky Trip to the University Dispensary

The country was assured of security and that Kenyans should carry on with their work. That was on Tuesday, 4 August 1982. Our son, Nyakundi, again was due for routine clinic check-up. I innocently told my wife that dates and times were important for children's clinic: "*Let us take the young baby for the normal check-up,*" I told her. We prepared the baby, got into my car and drove past State House Road to Nyerere Road headed for the University of Nairobi dispensary.

On arrival at Nyerere Road, opposite Serena Hotel, we saw a military truck full of armed soldiers pointing guns at any coming vehicle!! Nyerere Road is one-way and all vehicles were going towards that truck. They were searching for air force boys who might have been hidden in private cars. I had to raise the young baby high up, with my ID aloft and my wife had to explain the circumstances which made us leave our house.

We were told to make a u-turn and return to our flat as fast as was practically possible. I took a sigh of relief, rammed onto my accelerator and headed back home. That was the end of my son's clinic. It was my second risky venture within two days which I later considered silly on my part. Yet, our son's health was still paramount in my mind. The love for our children was and is still immeasurable.

After the attempted coup d'état, Kenya was never the same in many aspects. Prices of commodities shot up. There was a lot of distrust among people. Staff and students were seen as traitors and suspects, and detentions increased. All security machinery was always on the alert and then President Daniel Arap Moi made a lot of changes in his government.

It was during the 1980s and 1990s when public universities in Kenya recorded the highest number and most destructive riots in the country's history. As a lecturer, I continued to teach and conduct my research unabated as I had to account for every donor coin spent, despite the closures. I recall the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Philip Mbithi, remarking that universities were like electrical switches which can be switched on and off instantly. He meant that we were opening and closing Universities so frequently that we had to be on the alert at all times.

University education became expensive, unpredictable and unpalatable to the nation. In fact, lecturers were viewed as the worst individuals to the nation and any crime that one was suspected of committing attracted immediate detention. There is a chapter on Kenyan University riots and their likely causes later in the book. We soldiered on despite the sudden unpredictable and long closures.

Whenever students rioted and universities closed, the terse statement to order closure was so brief and did not indicate when to open. The affected groups, the students and staff, were left in abeyance and were given no timelines to expect re-opening! Everybody was left in suspense!

Suddenly, Senate would be called by the VC and dates for re-opening would be proposed. Once the proposed dates were agreed upon, an announcement would be drafted for the media to advise all those concerned that lectures should resume on that date without fail. It did not matter where the staff or students were, they just had to report and resume lectures. The lecturers were treated like automatic switches which you could switch on and off at will. The one switching would assume there was always power and the bulbs or whatever had to provide light. What the lecturers suffered was a typical Kenyan way of approaching life. For the students, they always had to be alert for re-opening announcements and it was assumed that they had money to pay bus fare to travel to their campuses without fail.

University closures are the most expensive decisions that the VC and Senate undertake. It is an agonizing decision to make! That is why I never rushed to close JKUAT whenever there were problems. I opted for protracted negotiations with the affected groups.

Family Responsibilities

Not a single day did I miss attending my children's open days unless I was out of the country or engaged in an important function. Luckily, visitation days used to be during the weekends.

My thirteen years at the helm of JKUAT took their toll on my life. The demanding times during my mid-forties, at a time when many people want to consolidate their lives were spent bringing up two great institutions in my life. I fully balanced my roles as a husband, father and family man with those of being a principal and eventually a Vice-Chancellor. My family needed me full time and so did JKUAT. I also had to ensure that other duties as chairman in some parastatals were fully executed. I promised not to compromise my integrity. Above all, I continued lecturing and supervising graduate students – hence my eventual return to the University of Nairobi as a professor.

My family was very young at the time I was appointed a deputy principal to JKUAT. Our first child, Nyakundi, was eight; Nyakundi and Ameyia were already attending Consolata Primary in Westlands and Kemunto was in a kindergarten at the same compound. My wife and I decided to relocate to a central place

in Westlands instead of commuting from Kikuyu Township to Juja and back daily. We left our constructed house with a large compound in Kikuyu, Kiambu County and moved into a house on Rhaphta Road in Westlands which was not as spacious as ours. At the same time, my wife transferred to Ngara High School in Nairobi from Rungiri Secondary School in Kikuyu Township.

Our children continued attending the same school. My wife, Esther, and I were very particular in ensuring that all the requirements for classes were provided. She could prepare packed lunches for the three kids daily. Michieka Okioga later joined the same nursery school and we then had four children attending Consolata Primary School. We knew virtually all the teachers and the head teacher of our kids. I still meet them in shopping malls at Westgate in Nairobi and we make reference to those early days. They still remember us as dedicated parents who love their children.

Usually, my wife would drop them and proceed to her school, then the driver would drop them back at home. There were no traffic jams in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. Driving in Westlands was a pleasure. We used to get book lists for each child in November of each year. I would buy all the required school books during early December to avoid the after-Christmas rush. I also bought their uniforms in November to avoid the January rush and long queues.

I must confess here that I would stop every activity and spend any available money to ensure timely payments of school fees for the year. I did not like getting reminders on delayed fees payments. Equally important was the fact that none of my children missed classes. They were obedient and we always shared with them the social good of education.

My wife is a renowned teacher and she could always relate to them how wonderful it was to be educated. As a head of an institution, I could also demonstrate to them the beauty of being educated. For example, those who graduate wear long, beautiful gowns of academic power during the graduation ceremonies. They would hear me during the news and watch me on the television, especially during graduations. We continuously inspired them and they had role models. We used to tell them the beauty of being learned, educated and independent. Education can give you skills and opportunities.

As parents we promised ourselves one thing: That all year round, we had to attend every single academic career day and parents' day without fail. When I was young attending my primary school at Ibacho, none of my parents ever came for any school function. They were rural, agrarian church-goers who thought that it was not necessary to visit my school. They, however, encouraged us to work hard. But I do not recall them ever attending any school function for any of their children. I understood their attitude since all other kids during my time saw no parents in the compound. In fact, we had no formal parents' days except for during classroom construction. My father was always ready to take part in building classes for the school.

Back to our visiting days, Consolata Primary teachers were hard working and they always pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of each and every pupil. I used to be the first or second in the queue waiting to see the teachers. It may be instructive to point out here that to be able to see eight independent teachers for the eight subjects meant queuing eight times from 7 am to around 4 pm. We usually met on Saturdays and this meant that I would forego my Seventh Day church services. I thoroughly enjoyed interacting with the teachers who gradually became our very dear friends.

I took notes for every subject for each child and on returning home; I went through all the weaknesses and strengths of each child for every subject. I spent adequate time telling the kids what their teachers had said about them. This was very powerful in instilling discipline in them. Luckily, visits were arranged at different weekends and terms. Where necessary, I heavily reprimanded my children. I would explain and re-explain any weaknesses in specific subjects. I would also praise them in subjects where they had done well. I would then append my signature on their report cards. I still have all their end-of-term results for posterity. I would request my wife to continue with advice on the basis of on any serious observations or feedback from the teachers.

When my children joined secondary schools, the same academic and parents' days prevailed. Having done well in class 8, Nyakundi and Amenity joined Mang'u High School on Thika Road, five kilometres from my JKUAT campus. I knew that this proximity had some psychological implications for them. They saw my shadow next door, I was certain, and would therefore behave.

Furthermore, at this stage of their schooling, I found no reason to visit them unnecessarily. The principal of the school then was one of the finest disciplinarians who surely minded his work. He was Mr Paul Otula. I knew Paul and his brother, the great science writer Owuor Otula was my class-mate at Kisii High School in 1965. I knew them as good performers in whatever assignments they took on.

The principal was the national chairman of Kenya Basketball Association (KBA) and I knew that many of his students were good basketball players. The tall, strongly-built gentlemen exuded authority in Mang'u. The school was the pride of Central Province at the national level and beyond in terms of examination performance. Certainly, Mang'u High was one of the best schools in Kenya in terms of discipline, basketball and KCSE results. It rivalled Starehe Boys' and Alliance High. I used to visit the school on speech days and give career talks whenever I was invited by the principal. The school was 6 kilometres away from my JKUAT campus. I used to invite the boys for functions at JKUAT.

Nyakundi and Amenity finished their schools and were admitted into our local universities to pursue higher education in Engineering and Medicine respectively. Our daughter, Kemunto, joined Alliance Girls and later studied Law in Moi University, Eldoret. She is now an advocate of the High Court. Michieka Okioga joined Starehe

Boys' under the able directorship of Mr. Geoffrey Griffins (now deceased). Mr. Griffins, who started the centre, was a no-nonsense administrator. I knew him well and he used to invite me to give talks to his boys during career days.

Starehe Boys' Centre was one of the best-performing schools in Kenya for several years. It was an ardent academic competitor with Alliance High and Mang'u High schools during the Form Four (KCSE) examinations. Again, we visited these children every term for the four years of their secondary education. I never took a chance or excused myself unless I was out of the country. My wife would prepare some food and we would all share it at their grounds alongside several other parents. I still meet some of the parents that we used to interact with those days. These were my most relaxing days.

One big lesson I learnt was that children enjoyed whenever their parents visited them. They would then take their class work seriously because they knew that the teachers would monitor them closely and inform their parents of any misconduct. Boarding schools were particularly vulnerable to vices. As parents, it was possible to detect misfits early and correct them. There is no higher parental pride and esteem than school visits to well-performing kids.

The ultimate parental satisfaction was when we as a family attended Nyakundi's PhD graduation in Economics Engineering in West Virginia University, USA. Dr. Nyakundi was among the first Mechatronics students at JKUAT which had only 22 students then. Dr. Amenia's graduation in Dar-es-Salaam was equally superb. He graduated in Medicine and later continued to specialize in Paediatrics. It was a joy for us to also attend Kemunto's graduation at Moi University and later witness her admission to the Bar after her pupillage at the Kenya School of Law. She later graduated with a Master's degree in Business Administration from Baraton University in Eldoret.

We finally ended with the huge graduation ceremony at the University of Nairobi where Dr Michieka Okioga was amongst those who received their degrees in Medicine and proceeded to specialize in Gynaecology and Obstetrics. On average, we tried to ensure that our children got reasonable education which would make them competitive in Kenya and even beyond.

As parents, we are deeply grateful to their understanding and their love for us. We treated them as adults from their youth with no tolerance for any mischief. However, boys are always up to something and Nyakundi and Amenia were not any different. For example, they damaged my car despite having received good driving lessons. I condoned the error by putting them back onto the driving board. We thank God for having accorded us an understanding family.

Just like any youths, we allowed the young persons to go out and socialize with their friends, but my wife and I kept a close watch. The area we lived in had the highest concentration of night clubs and eateries. I occasionally monitored them in these joints.

My Role as a Vice-Chancellor

My students and staff at JKUAT also demanded similar attention as my family. My duties were to manage and guide them. As the fifth youngest public Kenyan University, JKUAT was seen as a privileged institution which received technical aid from JICA. It was viewed more like a Japanese college than a Kenyan one. Over time, we built an unparalleled reputation and the demand for admissions was overwhelming.

Many students who qualified for university admissions wanted to join JKUAT. My students nicknamed me Uncle Ratemo and I so happily responded. I had an open-door policy but was precise in my responses. I never entertained long stories from both staff and students. Most of my responses were often in the negative and rarely in the affirmative. If, indeed, I could not solve a problem I did not have to offer long justifications before arriving at a negative answer. It was, and still is, a sheer waste of time. 'No' is as good an answer as 'yes'; but that is something Kenyans are yet to learn.

There were several examples of students' unrest which solidified me as an administrator. I must confess here that JKUAT, like any other Kenyan university, had disciplinary problems. We dealt with many cases, some of which had bearing on the university's security and reputation. I had very good deputies who normally chaired such cases. We equally had staff problems which could also cause staff unrest. In both scenarios, our problems were not at the magnitude of the sister Universities.

In fact, JKUAT was considered the best university for students to enrol in. Despite a few insignificant threats by student leaders, we were on academic schedules for all the thirteen years I worked here. We graduated our students several months ahead of other public universities. This practice encouraged parents, guardians and sponsors to continue bringing their students to JKUAT.

Academics and higher education administrators often cite the struggles they go through to balance the demands of their real families and the wider family of the academic community. Ours was not different. From the onset, I had to learn to multi-task while ensuring that academic and administrative work was never carried home. Nothing went pending unless it was something that needed wider consultation. In this way I created adequate time for family and academic work, without interfering with the progress of the other. I also got strict with time management.

I planned my work ahead and accomplished tasks ahead of time. Many times I would make mistakes, but it was better than postponing and leaving work pending. I also advised my deputies to ensure that a day's work was completed, to avoid backlog. They understood and appreciated my demanding roles. I loved to delegate roles and functions to my deputies and anybody I considered would deliver. This was my way of assessing my staff without them knowing. Most of them performed well.

One may wonder what roles I played to my beloved family as I was building up persons and setting up institutions. I have deliberately dedicated this section to my wife, Esther, and our four children who supported me during some good and bad times. It is important to highlight my role as a husband, father and grandfather in the light of family upbringing.

My wife, Esther, is a professional teacher by training. She taught in many secondary schools across the country after graduating from the Kenyatta University College (KUC), a constituent college then of the University of Nairobi. She later pursued a Master's degree in Sociology at the University of Nairobi.

I have been a university professor involved in teaching, research and community service for 33 years. Both my wife and I, therefore, are seasoned teachers who have made tangible impact on the Kenyan youth. We both nurture and advise them at various stages of their development. We know the value of education and so we advise them to work hard. That is why both of us assist the bright but needy students. We have supported a number of them to attain university education. Many are now renowned professionals gainfully employed. We have four children, three sons and one daughter. We also have two lovely grandchildren, a granddaughter and grandson.

All our children started their nursery and primary education at Consolata School in Westlands. They passed their Standard Eight Examination and joined various secondary schools in Kenya. Nyakundi and Amenia attended Mang'u High School. I had prepared Nyakundi for the boarding life as this was the first time for him to leave the comfort of his parents. I remember him calling me one afternoon when I was in JKUAT that his nice 40 mm thick mattress was missing from his bed. It had been stolen by one of the boys and he could not trace it! I had not heard of such an occurrence in boarding schools. I had to abandon my work, travel to Thika Town and purchase another mattress.

I told my son about life in boarding schools and that he must be prepared to meet all types of characters from the whole country. I reported the incident to the principal, Mr Paul Otula, and he promised to carry out an inspection. Mr Otula was one of the finest and dedicated principals that I ever came across, besides Geoffrey Griffins of Starehe Boys' Centre. We were good friends and I used to give talks to his final-year students. Indeed, he found the mattress and I told him to take the necessary action since I had already bought a replacement.

Nyakundi sat for his Form Four examinations and qualified to join Universities in Kenya. He was admitted into JKUAT where I was as a Vice-Chancellor just before I left for NEMA. He was among the first 22 pioneer students who studied Mechatronics. This was a new course as a hybrid between Mechanical and Electronic Engineering. Prof. Ndirangu Kioni, the current Vice-Chancellor of Dedani Kimathi University, was the founding dean of the course and my son's academic advisor. He was very fond of the young man.

Nyakundi excelled in the course and graduated after five years. My family and several relatives attended his graduation ceremony in Juja. We later held a party at our residence and invited his friends to enjoy. He applied for an MSc course and was admitted at Stroudsburg University, USA, where he studied Natural Resource Economics. He graduated and later applied for a PhD at West Virginia University in the USA to pursue the same discipline.

He received his PhD in May 2013 in the same field. I attended his graduation which brought all the family members in the USA together in Morgantown, W.V., USA. It was one of those fine moments that remain a landmark in Dr Nyakundi's academic development.

He was supported by teaching assistant grants while pursuing his studies. In summary, my son Nyakundi is a fine, fast-moving and decisive young man. He has an excellent personality with a high sense of humour. He is an independent thinker. He is an accomplished and a trusted individual who is truly reliable. We shaped his character as parents. He is a post-doctoral fellow in the UWV.

Amenya, our second son, was also in Mang'u High School. Nyakundi was already there and Amenya settled quickly under the watchful eye of his older brother. He passed his Form Four well and was called to join Moi University, Eldoret, for a course he did not want to pursue. He turned down the offer and opted to go for Medicine in Hubert Kairuki University in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Amenya worked hard and graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (BMBS) after five years. He was a student leader during part of the time in the university. I recall meeting his Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Esther Mwaikambo who liked him very much and influenced him to specialize in Paediatrics.

Prof Mwaikambo is a paediatrician herself and was a member of the Governing Council of the IUCEA during my Chairmanship. Prof Esther Mwaikambo is a strong supporter of the East African Community. She wanted Amenya to stay and work in Dar-es-Salaam after his graduation. This was not, however, possible as we also needed him in Kenya.

I recall travelling with Amenya to the university for the first time and submitting the registration documents. We had forgotten his photographs in Nairobi on our dining room table. We almost had a fit as we did not know where we could take other photos to enable him register as the deadline was midday. We exchanged a few terse words and started looking for instant photo studios to have his picture taken. We finally succeeded.

Amenya's stay in Dar-es-Salaam was very beneficial to him. He became independent and mature as he interacted with several other students from the East African region and other nationalities. He became a very fluent Kiswahili speaker although he was already good at it. I usually took him to meetings in case I needed any assistance in translation.

We used to visit our son twice a year. My wife, Esther, and the other children would drive over 1,100 kilometres to Dar-es-Salaam through the most picturesque scenery imaginable. The route from Nairobi to Dar-es-Salaam through Arusha, Tengeru, Moshi, Pare Mountains, Mombo, Kigoma, Kongowea and Chalinze goes through Hills and valleys along the Eastern Rift Valley. We enjoyed the trips and learned a lot during our visits.

Driving to Dar es Salaam takes one through one of the most beautiful breathtaking landscapes in the Eastern African region. Our trip used to take us through a wide range of ecosystems, ranging from the savannah grasslands through the moist mountain areas of Mt Kilimanjaro, into the coastal reefs and mangroves. We always longed to travel to Dar es Salaam to just enjoy the beautiful scenery.

Amenya's graduation was great. My family and sister-in-law, Isabella, attended it. Dr Salim Ahmed Salim was the Chancellor of Hubert Kairuki University and Guest Speaker during Amenyas graduation in 2006. He gave a good speech which reminded me of the speech by Ted Kennedy during my graduation at Rutgers University, USA in 1974.

Dr Salim talked about the role of a Tanzanian as a citizen. Ted Kennedy's speech had also covered the role of Americans in nation building. I thought the two speeches, given several years and miles apart, had similar themes and conclusions in shaping the youth for national development.

My wife, Esther, and my sister-in-law, Isabella, made the loudest Kenyan ululations as Amenyas name was called for the award of the degree. The congregation marvelled at the beautiful Kenyan sounds. Subsequently, all the names called thereafter received similar ululations. It was a hilarious moment. The Tanzanian crowd learnt fast. It was a thrilling moment to remember.

I was a proud father watching my son graduate. It was now my turn to celebrate and take pictures with my family. I was familiar with the proceedings since I had officiated in similar events in JKUAT. Witnessing a child's graduation is the ultimate pleasure to parents.

After the graduation ceremony, we went on a leisure boat ride to an island for lunch and supper. The Tanzanian coastline is a jewel to marvel at. We visited Bagamoyo and went through the very famous historic sites and graveyards of early missionaries. We later flew to Zanzibar Island for a retreat. We had a chance to visit the Clove Island, also known as the Stone City. It was at Stone City that slaves were packed in caves ready for shipment. We were saddened when we viewed that historic site. My wife, Esther, who is a historian, expounded to us the horrors of slave trade as we went around the caves. She further told us the role played by the early missionaries who built churches on the Island.

Amenya, my second son, is a kind-hearted and caring person. He is a paediatrician and is pursuing his MSc at the University of Nairobi in the same discipline. He meets his deadlines and wastes no time on trivialities. He respects family ties and enjoys visiting the family. Amenyas a medical students' leader

at the University of Nairobi. He is a disciplined young man who makes friends quickly. He is an early riser and enjoys nature.

Our third-born is a daughter, Kemunto, who joined Alliance Girls' High School after her Standard Eight Examinations. The four years she spent there were eventful as we always went to visit her during the parents' days. I do not recall any school visit that we missed. One memorable moment was when we were running late to visit her. I drove so fast that we took the shortest time to reach the compound before we were closed out. We made it!

Kemunto was quick to make friends and had a habit of visiting the children's homes and the elderly people. She joined a group of students who had similar interests in visiting the elderly and children. I remember that she would come home and take some of our house effects for donations. She still has a liking for children.

Kemunto joined Moi University in Eldoret for a law degree and graduated with an LLB in 2008. She continued her studies at the Kenya School of Law where she passed and eventually got admitted to the High Court of Kenya. She also graduated with an MBA course from Eastern African University, Baraton in 2013. She passed her examinations in litigations and is now a registered member of the prestigious group.

Kemunto enjoys her work and attends a number of charity organizations. She is a member of the Rotary Club, Westland Branch, Nairobi. She has two children, our beloved granddaughter, Shante Nyaboke and the grandson, Amali Ratemo.

Our last-born, Michieka, attended Starehe Boys' Centre after passing his Standard Eight. He had a choice of going to Alliance High School where he had been offered a Form One place or Starehe Boys' Centre. We opted for Starehe. I knew Geoffrey Griffins, the Director, well. We had interacted during my tenure as Vice-Chancellor at JKUAT and he was also the Director of National Youth Training Programme. I once travelled with him to Naivasha, for (ladies) and Gilgil (men) National Training Camps to address fresh recruits before they joined the Universities.

After Form Six, students had to go for a one-year mandatory training course to supposedly instil discipline in them so that they would hopefully behave better once they were admitted to their respective Universities. Mr Griffins was the Director of National Youth Service then. My university, JKUAT, also used to admit the highest number of students from Starehe Boys' Centre. I used to call Mr Griffins for consultations in case I had any problems from his students. He was glad to have my last-born son join him.

Before Michieka went to Starehe, he had vehemently resisted joining the Centre. The reason was that there was bullying in the school and he did not like boarding life! Unfortunately, or fortunately for us, we had taken the young boy to Strathmore for examinations to be admitted here in case he missed admission to other schools. He did very well and got admitted to two national schools

instead. Strathmore was hence our alternative. The young man then wanted to join Strathmore and forfeit Starehe because the former was a day school.

I firmly told him that Starehe was our choice and made preparations for his entry into boarding life. I took time to explain to him the beauty of the school and promised to visit him once a month without fail. This we did. He actually obliged and the rest is history. We knew the effect of staying home and not reading or not doing his homework. We believed in boarding schools after Form One. I was a Form One student in Kisii School at his age and so was their mother in Kamagambo Secondary School. We both enjoyed our boarding school days at different times and places. None of us regretted that arrangement.

I recall the first time I took Michieka there. A Form Two Asian boy came to receive us. He was responsible for orientating my son. I was so impressed with the explanations he gave Michieka and how he took us round the campus. The young Asian boy was so articulate that I told my son to note and emulate him. I thought that all secondary schools should have this method of welcoming fresh Form Ones.

There was no bullying. This is what Mr Griffins had promised me from the very beginning. Michieka did well in his Form Four examinations and joined the University of Nairobi. He graduated after five years and opted to specialize in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. He is now a practising doctor at the Kathiani District Hospital in Machakos County.

Michieka Okioga is a likeable young man who loves his work. He is always conscious about anything he does. He is a meticulous young man who can at times take hours to tidy up his room or brush his shoes. He enjoys the company of mature people and relates well with all ages. He is a fanatic of Formula One car racing and would stop doing anything to watch the race at any time of the day or night. He has indoctrinated me.

We had one of the best graduation ceremonies for him in December 2010 at the University of Nairobi Graduation Square. Being the last to graduate in the family, we called our relatives home and had a quiet party in praise of the Good Lord for the role He had played in giving us such wonderful children. It would have been efforts in futility if I did not put my children in order.

The society would have questioned my role as a model for my own children. My wife and I are both teachers at various levels and we knew better. It was our turn to be happy. Later on, Dr Michieka Okioga graduated with an MBA degree in Management from Presbyterian University in 2013. He is a member of various organizations.

I remember an incident that I like to share to show how to discipline children without hurting them. Our children used to be given homework. I used to sign their books as directed by the class teachers. I did this without fail for all the children. My wife could also sign when I was out of town.

One day Nyakundi delayed in completing his homework and wanted to sleep early and I sensed this. I told him to do his homework but he was still reluctant and wanted to go to bed. So, I trick him without arousing his suspicion.

I left the sitting room unnoticed and slowly headed to his room. I put off the lights, went into his bed and pretended to sleep. Sure enough after about thirty minutes, he quickly walked in and wanted to sleep. As he pulled out the bed sheets and blankets, he squarely put his hand on my face! He jumped up and wondered whether it was a ghost he had touched or a human being! He knew it was me and quickly returned to the reading table with the broadest smile ever. He knew he had been tricked and vowed to be a good boy and do homework as required. The rest of the children heard of the story and dared not to be caught unawares.

Reflections

Parental care cannot be substituted. Early relationships always bear fruits. Children recall the most trivial events during their formative ages.

My wife and I gave our children the love, humility and discipline they needed. They recognized it and always expressed it through cards or email messages. We know they love us. We vouched to attend their parents' days without fail. We might have overdone it, but that was our choice. They respected us and obeyed us.

As they grew up and became young adults, we always reminded them that life is a continuum. It perpetuates. They will have a role to play similar to the one we played, but may be in a much different environment and circumstances. The best traits shall withstand the stiff competition.

We respected their friends and accorded them respect as young adults. Our children appreciated this gesture and their peers were equally appreciative.

The other vital role I played to all my children was to teach them how to drive. I made a big notebook on dos and don'ts while driving. I spent more time discussing the theory of driving than the actual practice. I personally took them on road tests every Saturday and Sunday afternoons. After every practical lesson, I would have a review session and correct all the mistakes we might have made on the road. My first sentence to them was: *"Assume all drivers on the road are mad; practice protective driving."*

They then went to driving schools to polish up before going for the licensing tests. My notebook is still in their possession and they always refer to it. That was my extracurricular activity.

We always told the children to excel in their own areas of expertise. They should not expect free gifts from anywhere but through hard and focused work. My wife, Esther, and I spend quality time advising our children and telling them to fear God, the Creator and also respect people, both the young and old. They

had to be achievers in all aspects and strive for excellence. They are understanding, co-operative and achievers. They have not let us down and we are their living mentors.

My love for extended family members is strong. I have always believed that my position in society should have no effect on the nurturing and upbringing of my family. It should not result in the dispersal, decline or loss of the wider family touch. That would be inhuman and unnatural. Indeed, my positions were arbitrary and would come to an end someday. I used to tell them that university education can teach anybody skills and give them opportunity, but it can neither teach one sense nor give one understanding. Sense and understanding are produced within one's heart and love. I simply meant that humility cannot be taught, but practised.

The former President of Libya, Muammar Ghaddafi compared life to a tree. He gave an excellent analogy which I concur with. He stated that a man who is the head of the family should stand firm like a full-grown tree. If he breaks his family, it is like destruction of a plant, breaking of its branches, and fading of the blossoms and leaves. Any man or society in which the existence and unity of the family are threatened, in any circumstances, is similar to the fields whose plants are in danger of being swept away or threatened by drought, fire or withering away.

The blossoming garden or field is that the one whose plants grow, blossom, pollinate and root naturally. The same holds true of human society. The individual is therefore linked to the larger family of humankind like the leaf to the branch or the branch to the tree. They have no value or life if they are separated. The same is the case for the individual if he is separated from the family. That individual without a family has no value or social life.

Ghaddafi concluded his beautiful comparison by saying that if a human society reached the stage where man existed without a family, it would become a society of tramps without roots, like artificial plants.

This highlights the importance of intergeneration progression in any family or society. I made sure that I nurtured a family which would not regret my heavy responsibilities in society because I have always balanced my time well between roles and responsibilities, and have remained focused in life.