09 / 20 / 2026

Dear younger me,

It looks like 2023 actually <u>wasn't</u> your "get that bread" year like you imagined. It's actually looking pretty bad: a leukemia diagnosis, having to quit your job, stop attending school, and worst of all... leaving Kai with no one to throw his ball. Your situation is devasting but at this moment, you are the strongest, most resilient person you will ever know. After you are done with this, nothing will ever be able to bring you down.

After weeks trapped in your hospital room, your medical team finally clears you to go beyond the oncology wing. When the sun isn't awake to scorch your fragile skin, Mom and Dad will wheel you out of those freezing chambers and into the summer night's fresh air that wraps around you like a warm hug from a long lost friend. You had gotten so accustomed to being inside the sterile, brightly lit hospital that you forgot how beautiful the stars are. They have never been this bright before. This will be the moment that you realize how much significance even the most mundane things are to you. How just being able to go outside is enough for you to keep fighting.

And you do keep fighting. For 45 inpatient days and a year of treatment after that, your body keeps fighting.

When it seems like this beast eating away at you will never go away; test after test, bone marrow biopsy after bone marrow biopsy, you will receive a very important phone call. There are multiple HLA candidate matches who are in the donor registry, and a bone marrow transplant will finally cease this medical catastrophe.

I was fortunate to have received a successful bone marrow transplant, but our body will experience more medical phenomenon as a result of the treatment and GVHD. High dose long term steroid use makes our joints necrose, and as of today, my right shoulder and hip have been replaced with titanium substitutes. GVHD triggered vitiligo drained the color of my skin. New blood, new bones, new skin. I don't even feel like ME anymore. Yet, no matter how much of our body transforms after all of it, your soul will never change. Our loved ones do not see these changes and we will be just as loved as we were before and during this journey. You and I will aways be Kaelin, and the stars in the sky will always be just as bright as they were the first night out of your room.

Sincerely,

future Kaelin