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Winter 2021

## MikonoYetu and S.W.I.M. Report: My Fourth Year, Labour, and Learning

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ArtHum 4492G 001 FW20/ArtHum 4493G 001 FW20

9 April 2021

MikonoYetu and S.W.I.M. Report: My Fourth Year, Labour, and Learning

It would be an understatement to say that I did not expect my SASAH CEL experiences to look the way they did. Who could have foreseen a pandemic? Over the past two semesters, I have traversed territory that was unfamiliar and challenging on several levels: on one hand, the pandemic was a challenge that I, my supervisors, my professors, and everyone else have had to contend with for the past year or so now. On the other hand, before my fourth year in SASAH, I never saw myself doing an internship related to website design or marketing and promotions. Yet here I am, two semesters later, having accomplished, I think, a great deal.

### **MikonoYetu/Western Heads East**

Before working with MikonoYetu and Western Heads East (WHE), I never thought I would have done an internship related to web design. I am a writer, and admittedly online a lot of the time, but I would never have considered myself a website expert. Nevertheless, for three months, I found myself at my computer examining pages upon pages of text, trying to revise the existing WHE website as well as build a website for MikonoYetu, a Tanzania-based NGO and one of their partners.

Even before the actual bulk of the work got started, I got to learn a lot about WHE and the important work they do. The first week was simply a self-paced orientation during which the SASAH team looked through records of previous work done by WHE interns, on OWL and on YouTube. The following week, the whole SASAH team met with Bob and

Stephanie, our WHE coordinators, to go over the content of the internship, and then with the entire WHE intern team, which consisted of around twenty people. I was amazed at the sheer range of the work that WHE interns do. The other interns, though they were also working remotely, were doing business planning, comparative analysis on COVID data, lab work, yogurt-making, and more. Previous interns had done work in fields like video production, sustainability planning, and health promotion. Of course, since WHE has partners in three African countries—Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania—this kind of work takes place across multiple borders. I found myself learning just as much from the other interns during our meetings as I did from my own work.

From there, everything was slow, then fast, then slow, then fast again. The first couple of weeks after orientation mostly consisted of the SASAH team preparing questions to discuss with MikonoYetu to help us conceptualize the website, and of making notes on the WHE website for future revision. Maimuna, our primary contact at MikonoYetu, was working with several WHE interns in addition to us, and we were not able to speak with her directly until July 24, almost a month into the internship. Following our meeting, Maimuna sent us a brief organizational profile outlining MikonoYetu's mission statement, programs, and "thematic areas" where they focus their attention, all related to empowerment of women and girls. We, in turn, prepared some notes on the pros and cons of various website builders, and used their organizational profile to roughly outline a website while we waited to see how MikonoYetu decided to proceed. About three tense and somewhat uneventful weeks later, Maimuna sent us the link to MikonoYetu's old WordPress site. Finally hopeful, we made some notes to discuss with Maimuna, but were met with yet another obstacle: we were all locked out of the cPanel account associated with the WordPress site, which meant any work we did on the WordPress site in the meantime was not secure. Instead, we began designing a website mockup in Adobe XD with the materials we had while MikonoYetu tried (ultimately,

unsuccessfully) to regain access to the cPanel account. This eventually culminated in a mad rush in the last two weeks of the internship, as we had to abandon the old plan of revising the former WordPress site and instead create a new website from scratch. With the outlines and materials we had put together, we finally completed what we had set out to make at the beginning of the internship: a website for MikonoYetu showcasing their organizational goals and programs. Despite the difficulties, we managed to complete the task set out for us, learning technical skills along the way, making it a beneficial experience for us and for MikonoYetu.

Amid the frantic and irregular pace of all of the work, I found myself wishing several times that there had been a more defined timeline for the internship, or that we had been instructed on how to use WordPress from the beginning, or that we had had access to the original MikonoYetu website sooner, though perhaps that was impossible. It felt like everything was in flux from start to finish, and in a way, it was: Maimuna and Paul, our other MikonoYetu contact, were not sure whether their previous domain was viable, and they were stuck in limbo just like the WHE team. I wish I could have done something to help with the technical issues, but anything involving cPanel probably would have gone right over my head. What I could have done, and what I can do in the future, is to clarify anything as vital as whether a domain name is viable from the very first meeting, so we have a clear idea of how to proceed—or as clear of an idea as we can get. What I could have done, and what I will do in the future, is to communicate with our host organization regularly and openly, like the interns do with their WHE coordinators during weekly meetings, to avoid feeling constantly stuck and to figure out how to work around any technical issues we encounter. What I will continue to do is learn from my failures as well as my successes.

Working with MikonoYetu and WHE was a learning experience, despite everything. Through the weekly intern meetings, the material produced by MikonoYetu, and the research

I did on other African NGOs in preparing to create the MikonoYetu website, I learned more about the challenges faced by people living in Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania. The stigma against HIV/AIDS, challenges in collecting COVID data in Kenya due to their median age being 20 (Ausubel), gender-based violence against women in Tanzania—I had very little knowledge on any of these issues before doing this internship. Besides this, while trying to implement ecommerce on the website, I found out from Paul that PayPal did not work well in Tanzania, even though PayPal was officially available in Tanzania according to their website (“PayPal Global”). Websites and cursory Google searches are not substitutes for speaking directly with people from a specific country, and I am thankful to Maimuna and Paul for lending me their time and knowledge. Intercultural communication is never easy, and it is a skill I am glad to have developed over those few months.

So many things affected how we were able to interact with Maimuna and Paul: time zone differences, technical issues, accessibility to certain services by country. I am thankful for the Critical and Ethical Global Engagement module I completed as part of my SASAH course in third year, which helped prepare me to engage respectfully and ethically: I knew I was not swooping in to rescue anyone from their problems, but was there to provide any support and expertise I could. With the little bit of previous WordPress experience I had, and with several years of experience as a writer both online and offline, I hope I contributed something worthwhile.

I started and ended this internship utterly in awe of what WHE and MikonoYetu have been able to do despite the incredible physical distance, the sheer number of interns trying to coordinate their work across that distance, and the unprecedented and uncertain circumstances in which we find ourselves on account of COVID-19. I am still grateful to everyone: to Bob, Stephanie, and Maria (our new program coordinator who took over after Stephanie left), who worked with us through and around the chaos; to Maimuna and Paul,

who found solutions despite all of the roadblocks; to my fellow SASAH teammates, for their patience, dedication, and mentorship as we learned not only how to use tools such as WordPress and Adobe XD, but how to work together in pursuit of a shared cause—that is, MikonoYetu’s cause—across an incredible distance, both physical and cultural. I managed to cultivate these skills regardless of the obstacles in our way: the pandemic, the distance necessitating remote communication. In spite of the difficulties, I would love to do internationally collaborative work like this again someday, whether remotely or on-site, and I know that with the experience and knowledge I have gained on how to work with this kind of team, I would be able to do so much more.

### **S.W.I.M.**

Over the course of my four months with S.W.I.M., I have learned how to find lessons in intensely frustrating challenges coming from all directions. The many different kinds of work I was exposed to while working with S.W.I.M. have taught me new things, despite the many difficulties, several of which were out of my and S.W.I.M.’s control: COVID-19, Google Drive acting up and deleting files, and email communications not functioning properly among them. I have learned how to work on a diverse team of volunteers, how to do promotions work, and, perhaps most importantly, how to have grace for myself and others.

Perhaps in part due to the remote nature of the internship (and certainly due to COVID-19), there was not a moment when this internship felt less than extremely hectic. Month one (or perhaps month zero, since this was the month during which I could barely even get in contact with my supervisor, Ann-Marie) began with the new S.W.I.M. volunteers, including myself and Aleks, missing the orientation after technical issues prevented Ann-Marie from joining the video call. When I did finally manage to get in touch with Ann-Marie, it again took weeks for me to gain access to my organizational email account and the shared

Google Drive. Many files had gone missing from both the Drive and Ann-Marie's inbox, and Aleks and I were basically forced to start the "20 Stories of Hope" project from scratch. (I can at least say this: one thing that this internship has taught me very well is to always have backups of my important files, as if I did not know this well enough already.) Moreover, the tasks and responsibilities we were presented with—promotional work, researching publishing and printing companies—did not at all match what we had read in the project proposal, which indicated that we would be interviewing single mothers. Instead, we found ourselves searching for TV stations, radio stations, and other organizations in London to request help promoting "20 Stories of Hope"—a duty we did not have previous experience in, nor did we receive mentorship from S.W.I.M. A month later, Aleks and I somehow managed to start having health issues at the same time during the internship. We hit a lot of dead ends trying to contact organizations: some ignored us, some outright refused, and some had out-of-date contact information that made it impossible to get in touch with them. I did, however, create promotional materials such as a flyer to be posted on social media and a Google form to collect nominations from children of single mothers who might be willing to participate as interviewees, while Aleks compiled information on publishing and printing companies. I got a lot of work completed in the last month, and it was only then that I felt proud of the progress I made.

Despite everything, though, I am now allowing myself to feel proud of everything in between as well. Despite the many hiccups along the way, despite the slow progress, despite my frustrations with trying to communicate over email with Ann-Marie, this internship pushed me to acquire new skills and knowledge I never would have if I had simply done work within my comfort zone. Through S.W.I.M.'s website and weekly staff meetings, I learned about the programs and projects that S.W.I.M. manages, and by extension about issues related to single motherhood I had never been in a position to think much about before:

the circumstances and challenges they face, the kinds of support they need to succeed, the ways that I and others can contribute and support them. I branched out into the wider London community rather than just working within the university, contacting various organizations, magazines, and radio stations to ask if they would help S.W.I.M. promote “20 Stories of Hope.” I learned how to use graphic design tools such as Canva to create promotional materials for the project. I practiced using audio-editing software to modify a previously recorded interview for the project, after the previous volunteer’s draft chapter for the interview was lost and I had to remove identifying information before uploading it to the shared Google Drive for future volunteers to use. Throughout my years with SASAH, I have learned how to participate in group discussions during class meetings and how to write and communicate. More recently, in our fourth-year seminar with David Simmonds, we learned how to communicate publicly and run effective campaigns. All of these were useful as I learned how to do promotional work—something I had never done on this scale before. Not only did I develop my existing skills, but I also picked up new ones I never would have otherwise.

Here, I do have to point out that, though I did acquire and develop many skills, I was more or less left to my own devices to do so. The previous volunteer mentioned in an email to me and Aleks that she, like us, had very little supervision while working with S.W.I.M. Independent work is in itself a skill, I suppose, though I wish I had been mentored more, particularly in those fields I had little to no experience in, such as graphic design and promotions/marketing. My professional communications and writing skills, developed throughout my university academic career, were perhaps transferable to this kind of context; however, I found myself wishing that I could have collaborated in a more productive way with the other volunteers, one of whom was, in fact, a graphic designer with whom I could have worked more closely, perhaps collaborating on the flyer I created to promote “20 Stories

of Hope.” Weekly staff meetings were two hours long, and going through updates from each and every volunteer was sometimes tedious; I wished there had been a way to go over each project in detail without having to go over time. Learning how to be my own mentor was perhaps the most difficult process.

Over and over, I did have to remind myself to have some compassion, understanding, and grace, not only for others but also for myself. Staff meetings were tedious and slow at times, yes, but that was probably partially due to the remote nature of the internship, and it is certainly no one’s fault that they have to work remotely at the moment. I also learned a certain kind of empathy and understanding for single mothers specifically. Listening to the previously recorded interview with a single mother, I heard some details that many might not be proud to share, but she did so anyway. It would be very tempting to judge, but I do not know others’ circumstances, and in any case, the circumstances I was born into have made me relatively fortunate. Finally, I remind myself that I am attempting to juggle working for a fairly large organization that does a lot of work in a lot of spheres with full-time studies, all in the middle of a pandemic. Sometimes, I can only be so useful. Ultimately, I got S.W.I.M. an interview with Interrobang, the Fanshawe student newspaper, and the project is finally moving along: “20 Stories of Hope” is officially gathering participants. Now that things have settled down, I am allowing myself to feel that I was good enough.

This was one of the more challenging internships I have completed. Whatever the difficulties, I now feel better prepared to do a range of different kinds of work, especially on a team, in the future. We had many volunteers from many backgrounds, many of whom were mothers themselves, some of whom were recent university graduates, and so on. The new technical skills I have acquired should be useful in the future as well. It may not be on a team or in an organization exactly like this one, but whether it is another non-profit organization like S.W.I.M. or something in a field I am more experienced in such as writing and editing, I

will likely be able to apply the things I learned to future work and whatever career path I go into. If I had to sum up these four months in three words, they would be: taxing but gratifying.

### **Looking back**

Two things struck me while I was putting together my final CEL presentation, which of course covered both my CEL internships: first, that finding suitable visuals to make the slides aesthetically appealing was incredibly hard considering I had no real on-site photos, and second, that it was surprisingly easy to collapse everything from the two internships into a single cohesive presentation. It was somewhat depressing watching previous CEL presentations on Voicethread and seeing what could have been: instead, I completed both of my internships in my last year of SASAH during a pandemic that forced me and most of the people I know indoors for two and a half semesters. Of course, it was not my job to be a tourist and have fun, but rather to help the organizations I was assigned to in any way I could while being mentored by them. Still, I do have to acknowledge the toll that working remotely took on me and everyone I worked with. There are benefits as well as downsides to working on a project remotely: the schedule is more flexible, there is no need to get partners to sign release forms to get on-site photos. It was harder to connect with supervisors and professors, but I am amazed and impressed at the effort so many of them made regardless.

Incidentally, the remote nature of these internships seems to be part of the reason it was relatively easy to discuss them and their learning impacts within one seven-minute presentation. They had other things in common as well, such as the heavy use of digital technology such as Google Drive and WordPress, and the fact that they forced me out of my comfort zone and into fields like web design and promotions. Looking back at my

experiences, my summative reports, and the process of creating my CEL presentation, it was a bit of a shock to see how much these two internships had in common.

Aside from hard skills such as using WordPress as a website builder, both these internships helped me to develop some soft skills as well as wisdom I would not have otherwise. Learning how to work remotely rather than in person, how to acquire new skills and adapt in difficult circumstances, and how to grow and have compassion in frustrating situations were all things I found myself learning incidentally. Watching my classmates give their presentations, I noticed that each of them took somewhat different things from their experiences—as three of them were presenting on internships I had also done, this meant none of our presentations felt too repetitive, which was a concern of mine before giving my presentation. One observation I found particularly insightful from another student was that an arts or English degree is not limiting, and one can indeed branch out and do things like website design that are seemingly unrelated to their degree if they apply the skills they may not even know they have; for example, an English or other humanities degree can help prepare someone to undertake intercultural communication through development of writing and discussion skills.

I could perhaps write an entire paper on the impact that SASAH has had on me over the past four years. SASAH has taught me things from a beautiful range of fields, including literature, history, social theory, philosophy, Indigenous studies, art and curation, environmental studies, rhetoric, and digital humanities, some of which directly helped me in my internships: for example, a digital humanities course taught me some HTML, which is useful for website design. I am sure that I am not done discovering places where this diversity of topics and background knowledge will be of use to me, whether in my future career or elsewhere. A class on professionalization last year taught me more about how to write effective resumes, which is useful for applications to internships—in fact, that includes both

my WHE and S.W.I.M. internships. Another unit in that course covered ethical global engagement, which was directly applicable to my internship with MikonoYetu, as it necessitated a lot of intercultural engagement. I have never been happy with the tendency in academia to hyperfocus on a specific field at the expense of others; I find that the more I attempt to do this, the more I lose interest, even in things I love. I never felt that way in SASAH, and the many things I surveyed will stay with me for a long time. I am drawn in many directions, both academically and career-wise, and I am grateful for the opportunity SASAH gave me to explore in many directions, both in my internships and in my coursework. I could call my willingness to explore all of these fields at once indecisiveness, or I could call it being well-rounded, which will help as I explore future career options.

The impact that these internships have had on my career plans, though, is somewhat difficult to define. I already had a range of interests, from creative writing to editing to linguistics to teaching to translation—far too many to list comprehensively. I now feel better equipped to explore these interests in future jobs or internships with these experiences and new skills behind me, though I do not feel much more certain of what field I would like to go into moving forward. If anything, I am less sure, though that is not necessarily a bad thing, I must remind myself; many individuals in a variety of fields have told me that it is normal to not know one's own career path with much certainty well through young adulthood. In any case, being absolutely dead-set on a particular path is not necessarily beneficial; if I had refused to branch out into these two internships, I would have missed out on a lot of valuable, irreplaceable experience. I do not necessarily see myself becoming a web designer or a promotions director in the future, though if these past two semesters have taught me anything, it is that nothing is impossible. Though I have become less and less sure of my career path throughout my life, especially in these “unprecedented” COVID times and especially after

these internships, the new skills I have picked up should serve me well in whatever my career may end up being.

This is what I would like to leave other students with, whether they are applying for remote or in-person internships, whether they are sure of the career they want or not, whether they are in love with or feel exasperated with the work they are doing: have an open mind and be willing to try new things sometimes, even if you are not completely sure you have all the skills you need. There will often be people willing to mentor you, if you seek them out. Website design, promotions, and making cold calls are not my area of expertise and well outside of my comfort zone; I originally looked very hard for editorial internships, which did not work out, but I got some real skills and education out of the internships I did get anyway. Luckily, SASAH had already exposed me to a broad range of topics in its coursework, which likely taught me how to be adaptable and open-minded, preparing me to take on uncharted territory. Things probably will go a little wrong at some point, no matter how diligent your supervisors are and no matter how hard you all try, so have a plan, but more importantly, be adaptable and communicate as regularly as possible. It is difficult, but possible, to communicate and collaborate remotely when necessary, and communication is key to understanding the goals of a project and the needs of a team, whether working in-person or remotely. Challenges and unexpected circumstances can arise when you least expect it: a global pandemic that disrupts institutional functions and personal lives, a project that does not quite go as planned, job descriptions that end up being misleading or confusing. Perhaps most importantly, give yourself grace when working in difficult situations, and let yourself feel frustrated, tired, proud, anything; it is just as important to have compassion and understanding for yourself as for others. I have labored and I have learned, and I hope that you—while taking care of yourselves—do the same.

(4246 words)

### Appendix A: Report Abstract

This report covers two internships I undertook from July to September 2020 and October 2020 to February 2021: respectively, a website design internship with MikonoYetu and Western Heads East, and a promotional internship with the Single Women in Motherhood Training Program, or S.W.I.M. It discusses the duties I undertook on a team of other interns, the hard and soft skills I developed by branching out into fields I would not have on my own, the implications for my future career path, and the relevance of my SASAH education. It also discusses the remote nature of the internships and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as recommendations to other students and prospective interns.

### Appendix B: Presentation Abstract

This presentation covers two internships I undertook from July to September 2020 and October 2020 to February 2021: respectively, a website design internship with MikonoYetu and Western Heads East, and a promotional internship with the Single Women in Motherhood Training Program, or S.W.I.M. It discusses the duties I undertook on a team of other interns, the hard and soft skills I developed by branching out into fields I would not have on my own, the implications for my future career path, and the relevance of my SASAH education. It also discusses the remote nature of the internships and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as recommendations to other students and prospective interns.

## Appendix C: Keywords

- remote
- non-profit
- internship
- website
- design
- promotional
- communications

## Appendix D: Presentation Script

**Slide 1: WHE and S.W.I.M.: My CEL Experience**

Hello and welcome!

**Slide 2: Who I worked with:**

I did two internships this past school year: one with MikonoYetu and Western Heads East, and one with the Single Women in Motherhood Training Program, or S.W.I.M.

**Slide 3: MikonoYetu/Western Heads East**

And I am going to talk about the MikonoYetu internship first.

Western Heads East is a collaboration between Western International and African partner organizations, including MikonoYetu, a Tanzania-based women-led non-profit organization with a number of positive programs to support girls and women in sustainable economic development, such as Fiti probiotic yogurt kitchens, training in entrepreneurship and financial literacy, resources for prevention of violence against women, etc.

I had two main goals on a team with two other SASAH students, and working with two supervisors from Western Heads East and two contacts from MikonoYetu, we designed a website to inform a range of audiences about the programs and services like the ones I briefly described.

MikonoYetu had one or two existing websites previously, but they wanted to revise, update, and polish what they had. Originally, we were going to revise their former website, but technical difficulties made that impossible. We had to start over, modelling in Adobe XD and working in WordPress based on the previous website and the outline my team had made.

**Slide 4: Western Heads East website**

We also helped edit the Western Heads East website in a sort of consultant role to update the look and layout and make other small revisions, but this was more secondary to the MikonoYetu website.

**Slide 5: What we made:**

And this is what we made.

As you can see, there are tabs with information about them, their programs in more detail, some videos from their YouTube channel, resources (for example, on preventing violence against women), how to contact them and get involved in their programs...

Side note: I looked at their website recently, and it looks like they have already added to it, which is exciting for them! You can find them here, at <https://www.mikonoyetu.co.tz/>

**Slide 6: S.W.I.M.**

S.W.I.M. is another non-profit organization in London with many positive programs for single mothers, including life coaching, child care, a scholarship program for single mothers in post-secondary education, and now, “20 Stories of Hope”, the project I worked on.

Working with another SASAH student and Ann-Marie Ricketts, S.W.I.M.’s founder and our supervisor, we originally planned to (ultimately) interview single mothers to get their stories (of hardship, success, everything) and create a book out of 20 of those stories, for 20 chapters in total.

One other volunteer previously worked on this project, but we immediately lost a lot of progress because we lost a lot of their files in the drive; we recovered one interview, but not the draft chapter that volunteer wrote, so we essentially started all over again with a new plan.

Ann-Marie wanted to reach out to children of single mothers somehow and have them “nominate” their moms to participate in the project so we could generate a lot of interest in the London community, and in order to do that, we would have to reach out to organizations and platforms in London and ask them to help us get the word out: radio stations, TV stations, London Free Press, Western University organizations, etc.

### **Slide 7: What we made:**

We divided up the work.

I created some promotional materials like this flyer (to be used on social media).

Also, a means of collecting nominations (which ended up being a Google form; there’s a snippet here).

We also researched publishing and printing companies, and wrote up a report and stored everything in the Drive, including the spreadsheet with all of our contacts, to help future volunteers not be as lost as we were.

### **Slide 8: Organizations we successfully reached out to**

We did eventually put these materials together, and get Ann-Marie an interview with Interrobang (the Fanshawe student newspaper), and find some other organizations willing to help with promotions...

### **Slide 9: Dead ends**

But this wasn’t without hitting a lot of dead-ends first—making cold calls, cold emails, finding some out-of-service phone numbers—but we do have contacts now, stored in the Drive for future volunteers.

**Slide 10: Expectation...**

As for challenges: honestly, coming up with visuals for this presentation was a huge challenge.

The remote nature of the internships made looking at what previous interns did frankly kind of depressing; I couldn't help but compare it to what we were doing, looking at the photos, the travelling they did.

**Slide 11: ... vs. reality**

Expectation vs. reality hit me hard.

I'm already not much of a graphic designer—many of these visuals are just screenshots of websites, because I didn't have on-site photos.

**Slide 12: :(**

This is a screenshot from a previous Western Heads East intern blog, for example—this is what we didn't get to do. It was a very different internship.

**Slide 13: :)**

This was the closest thing I had to an “on-site photo”.

But, of course, our job was to provide these organizations with whatever support we could with what we had in the circumstances we found ourselves in, not to travel and be tourists.

**Slide 14: Learning how to:**

And I tried to take these challenges as learning experiences where possible:

First of all, these internships were outside of my comfort zone and outside of my areas of expertise. I would not have personally done these internships given complete free choice, but

I did pick up some skills that I wouldn't have otherwise if I had insisted on doing, for example, an editorial internship, which I was searching for initially.

Our community partners and teams had to collaborate remotely using tools like Zoom and WhatsApp and navigate any technical difficulties, but in some ways, the remote nature made us more aware of the importance of communication to understand the goals of the projects and the needs of these organizations.

We had to figure out how to use WordPress to create a website for MikonoYetu.

I had to use Audacity at one point to edit the sound file for an interview for S.W.I.M. to anonymize it.

We had to make cold calls to people to promote "20 Stories of Hope", which was terrifying, but in any position, you have to learn how to talk to people, and that is something I needed to learn.

On another side of things: I did have to remind myself to have some compassion, understanding, and grace, not only for others but for myself, because it is no one's fault that they all have to work remotely at the moment.

It was a lot, but I am grateful and proud nonetheless for what we were able to accomplish and the visuals I was able to put together.

**Slide 15: Thank you! :)**

Thank you!

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