

**Personal Narrative Essay: The Past, Present, and Future**

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## **Personal Narrative Essay: The Past, Present, and Future**

As a college student in my late twenties, many life events and experiences have brought me to this point today. I am on the path to obtaining a degree in cybersecurity with a minor in criminal justice which will allow me to pursue a career in digital forensics. According to Smith (2017), one's personal narrative is not a full recounting of one's life, but rather a collection of moments that contributes to one's personal identity based on how one views each moment. The events described in this paper are not simply retelling my life's story. My interpretation of these events will provide glimpses of my character and how I have changed throughout the years. To best understand how I got here, it is best to go back to the beginning.

### **Early Life**

The first major change in my life was my relocation with my mother and brother from the Philippines to San Diego, California. The change was meant to give my brother and me a better future as well as bring my mother closer to her family. Due to immigration laws, my father would be left behind, a fact that I would tease him about as we said our goodbyes. For me, the relocation was not just a physical change. Leaving what I considered home was my introduction to the ideas of sacrifice and compromise. My relationship with my father would be sacrificed due to the physical distance causing communication to be difficult. On the other hand, my mother carried the burden of raising me and my brother on her own. The financial hardship brought on by relying on a single-parent income would later influence my decisions in life.

Later, during my senior year of high school, I was at a crossroads. Did I want to go to college or enter the workforce? The part of me that was always anxious about my future ensured my options were always open. I did well academically, took Advanced Placement (AP) level

courses to save money in college, and filled out applications to universities as well as for financial aid. The logical choice was to pick a major I had skills or interest in that would also have good job opportunities which ultimately was computer engineering. Through my computer-related electives, I realized that I had skills in working with computers and while I did not have much interest in the field, I was willing to compromise in order to be financially stable. A college degree meant a high-paying job but it would take four or five years before I achieved that goal. I thought about whether I could handle years of my family squeezing into one room, years of food insecurity, years of relying on hand-me-downs and years of just making the best of what we had. I needed to improve my life as fast as possible but I also needed to be smart about it. The option that I chose was to enlist in the Navy. I would have a stable income while I figure out what I really wanted to do in life and I would be able to go to college with my tuition paid in the future.

## **Adulthood**

Growing up in a city with a large Navy population and having family members in the Navy gave me familiarity with the occupation however, I was still unprepared when I was sent to basic training earlier than planned. I had just started my physical fitness journey, obtained a learner's permit for driving, scheduled swimming lessons and began research into what basic training entailed when I was informed I had to leave within a month. My physical health was so poor that I had pneumonia and was unable to pass the physical fitness standards. The two swimming sessions I was able to attend improved my skills just enough to be able to float on water. My lack of preparedness put me in danger of not graduating and being sent home. Failing meant my future would be uncertain. Therefore, I had no choice but to push the physical limits of my body and persevere. I successfully completed my remaining requirements on the morning of

graduation. Running on no sleep, my first purchase after graduation was an energy drink so I could complete necessary paperwork and spend what little time I had with my family who pooled their savings together to be able to attend my graduation. Struggling at the start of my naval career should have made me realize how challenging the next years would be.

The only occupation I was given as an option when enlisting was to be in the nuclear field. It was a job that I had no interest in but was willing to do in order to secure a contract with the Navy. The nuclear field's rigorous academic program and the general pressures of becoming an adult all contributed to a level of stress that I had never felt before. Rather than crumble under the pressure, I prioritized certain aspects of my life and neglected others. When a colleague who I consider a friend attempted suicide, I felt guilty and ashamed. I recognized the signs but did nothing about it because I was too busy with my own life to reach out. Our similar situations also had me afraid that I would get to a point where I no longer wanted to live. The emotions I felt due to the incident made me realize what I truly valued was my well-being and the well-being of those I cherished. The high value I placed on my well-being influenced my decision to change occupations after failing my final oral exam twice. My superiors attempted to persuade me to keep trying because the two years I spent in training would become a waste. However, I knew that the nuclear field was not good for my physical, emotional, and mental health. Using the same logic, I decided to leave the Navy after my contract ended. I was much happier as an electrician in the Navy however, my physical health was deteriorating. At that point, I decided it was time to go back to school and pursue something else.

### **The Present and Future**

My previous interest in and experience with computers nudged me towards pursuing cybersecurity. Pursuing cybersecurity would also provide me with financial opportunities that

would allow me to take care of my well-being and the well-being of my family. Through my naval career, I was able to understand my capabilities. I knew that I would be able to handle the academic demands of the course and the stress related to the occupation. I know that I can overcome any challenges that might arise.

While my first year of college was a period of adjustment, it was also a time that developed my interests. An introductory course in criminology renewed my interest in criminal justice. In my childhood, I stayed up to watch Forensic Files with my mother and as a teenager, crime shows were my choice of entertainment. At one point, I considered pursuing forensic science however, it was unrealistic due to the low job availability. Digital forensics being under the umbrella of cybersecurity convinced me to add criminal justice as a minor and to pursue digital forensics as a career. Digital forensics as a career would still give me the financial security I needed while taking care of my mental well-being due to the career being something that I am genuinely interested in.

## **Conclusion**

At a glance, my decisions may seem irrational. Why would someone who is academically successful choose to enlist instead of pursuing a degree? Why would someone who spent two years training for a job throw in the towel at the very end? Why would someone give up a stable income to start all over again in a new career? Each decision in my life was made with careful consideration. I always chose what I thought was the logical option and planned to be successful in whatever that was. My early years conditioned me to not mind hardship in exchange for upward mobility however, my adult years have taught me that success should not come at the expense of myself and those around me. I do not know what the future holds, but what I do know is that I will stick by my decisions wholeheartedly.

## References

Smith, E.E. (2017, January 12). *The two kind of stories we tell about ourselves*. TED.

<https://ideas.ted.com/the-two-kinds-of-stories-we-tell-about-ourselves/>