

Personal Narrative Essay

Antonio Shields

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Dr. Virginia Tucker Steffen

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INTRODUCTION

Smith (2017) and McAdams (2001) discuss how there are two types of stories we tell regarding our lives, redemptive and contamination. Redemptive stories show how a bad point in a person's life became a turning point or motivation that rendered an eventual positive or successful outcome. Contamination stories are the opposite where a person's life was deemed successful until a bad situation occurs and sends their life spiraling down the wrong path. I feel that my path to Cybersecurity does not fit either of these types of stories in absolute. Smith (2017) in her TED Talk mentioned that living a meaningful life takes work and is an ongoing process as we constantly continue each day to live our lives and add to our stories. My road thus far in my Cybersecurity journey is more relatable to that point. My Cybersecurity journey has been about transformation and growth but did not arise from a bad situation to get to this point. This path has not followed the traditional route of a student and has been a four-year journey in the making, but I see it as going from a good situation to an eventual better situation. Nyugen (2013) mentions that in making ePortfolios, we use our experiences to create a coherent narrative that reflects our past, present, and future (p. 141). This essay intends to narrate my four-year Cybersecurity journey to this point chronologically and coherently.

COVID AND THE CROSSROADS

As previously mentioned, my journey to Cybersecurity is not a traditional one, I would categorize myself as a journeyman. I have a prior Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Biology from Hampton University and an Associate degree in Health Science from the University of the Incarnate Word. I also joined the Army in 2015 at the age of 32 looking for a different experience. In the military, I have served as both a Combat Medic and currently as a Respiratory Therapist since 2019. Over the last two decades, I have been heavily involved in the Health Sciences realm of education and practice. In 2020, when Covid-19 became a pandemic, as a Respiratory Therapist, I got to experience firsthand the good and bad of the

healthcare field and realized that hands-on healthcare is not what I wanted to do long-term. Also in late 2020, my wife and I found out that we were having our first child, and as an active-duty soldier, my time to re-enlist for more years or get out was quickly approaching. After discussing the next moves with my wife and deciding to provide geographical stability for my family, in 2021, I decided to leave active duty when my contract ended in May 2022.

SFL-TAP

When deciding to leave active duty, all armed forces members are required to attend a week-long course to be briefed on all of your available options of resources upon leaving service. In the Army's case, it is referred to as the Soldier For Life – Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP). This course gives you the option of using your current military skills to seek employment, start your own business through entrepreneurship, or seek to use your educational benefits and go to college. After looking at the employment route at first with my current skills and wanting to get away from healthcare, I looked into my educational benefits. I have always had a love for science and technology since middle school, but upon leaving high school, I chose to go the science route instead of technology. Now that I was looking to change careers, I figured circling back to Computer Technology would be a good idea. Upon attending the educational benefits brief and speaking to an Educational Career Counselor, I decided that going back to school was my next step. When mentioning that I was interested possibly in Information Technology (IT), I was advised that IT was a very broad field and that I needed to select a specific area within IT to pursue a degree in before taking the next steps.

A TIMELY FACEBOOK POST FROM AN OLD FRIEND

Ironically, two years ago on March 31 will be when I saw the post that gave my path more clarity. It was from a high school friend of mine and it was very simple: "Cybersecurity is the way to go if you're looking to get into I.T., or if you're in I.T. already and just want to do something different. Lots of high

paying jobs, but not a ton of candidates to fill the positions. Look into it!!” The message itself was not what drew me in, but the timing of the message when I was searching for an answer did. After messaging my friend and getting more details and insight, I decided that this was the path worth pursuing and took this information back to the educational career counselor. Since I planned to stay local and was becoming a veteran, my educational career counselor wanted me to select a college that had a good veteran support office and good veteran feedback, so my choices were between Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), William & Mary University (W&M), Christopher Newport University (CNU), and Old Dominion University (ODU). Upon getting in contact with the veteran support offices, VCU and ODU were the two that responded and ODU was selected out of the two remaining because of distance and veteran satisfaction. After selecting ODU, since I had other college education from different Universities, the process of applying and retrieving all of my transcripts from previous schools began.

ACCEPTANCE LETTER FROM ODU

Upon leaving Active Duty, I decided to continue my military service as an Army Reservist as a Respiratory Therapist for three years. When I completed Active Duty in May 2022, I started the Army Reserves in June 2022. The first day I started drilling for the Army Reserves was also the day I found out that after waiting two long months, I was accepted into ODU’s School of Cybersecurity. Since I had prior college education, I was coming in as a second-degree-seeking student and would be able to complete my degree in two years instead of the traditional four.

BACK TO SCHOOL TO CURRENT

Since my last pursuit of a degree was in the early 2000s when Blackboard was in its infancy and being that Covid-19 has changed the educational landscape of how classes are taught, becoming familiar with asynchronous and synchronous learning was a slight adjustment that I was not used to, but was able to acclimate myself to and find success. After obtaining the degree course curriculum, I was able to

register for the available classes and speak to my advisor for suggestions. From starting school in late August 2022 until now, I have seen personally my maturation in the field from a no-experience novice to having a solid two years of experience thus far. I have learned from the multiple courses I have taken throughout my two-year tenure here at Old Dominion University to the point where I successfully passed my CompTIA Security+ Exam earlier this month and will follow that up with completing my Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity in May 2024. Being an older student with family and service obligations, obtaining an internship during my short tenure here at ODU was not achievable, but the classes taken here at ODU have given me both a strong instructional and hands-on foundation that demonstrates my eagerness and willingness to better myself both educationally and professionally.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I feel that I can be an asset to any company or business that can utilize a Cybersecurity analyst. As a lifelong learner, I will continue to search for knowledge to better myself in the field and make me a benefit to any company or business. Every company or business has Cybersecurity needs and even though I have stepped away from pursuing a healthcare career, protecting Protected Health Information (PHI) is an ongoing need in the healthcare industry and with my prior experience in the healthcare industry, there may be opportunities to utilize both my degrees and life experiences to benefit that industry as well. Nguyen (2013) describes narrative identity as a series of life events that when put together into a narrative can show meaning and purpose (p. 139). Over the last four years and the decisions I have made, I believe everything happens for a reason, and in the timing that it is meant to occur. Life is a book with many chapters and as I complete this part of my chapter through completing my degree and stepping into the workforce, I do believe that what is for me, is for me, and I will continue to better myself in the meantime. Although this is not a redemptive story, Smith (2017) and McAdams (2001) mention that elements of a redemptive story include growth and the drive to contribute to

society and future generations. If I had to align my Cybersecurity path with redemptive or contamination, it would align more with a redemptive perspective than a contamination one.

References

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