Personal Narrative Essay

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A Spark Ignited: My Path to Cybersecurity

It was one of the normal days at home when a simple online incident altered my life forever. I was young at that time, hardly aware of what the word cybersecurity suggested, but I really remember the tension between mom and dad while they tried to make sense of how in the world their credit card had been used to purchase games on something called Steam. For a second, each of them thought the other had made the purchase. It wasn't until a call to their credit card company that they realized their information was stolen. The moment did instill my curious nature: how was someone able to get their information without them allowing it? How could such breaches be stopped? That incident triggered my desire for technology, particularly how to keep people safe in a digital world.

This thought eventually began to take shape in my head over the years as I saw how the world was getting increasingly entangled in digital systems. I had started to think that all our shared data online, which could easily be exploited by someone with malicious intent, created a pressing need. That realization just piqued my curiosity, leading me further into technology ways I had never really pursued.

Laying the Foundation: Choosing Cybersecurity and IT

That early experience never left my mind. As I grew older, my interest in technology continued to increase. I really wanted to understand more about how digital systems worked—and more importantly, how to protect them. So when it came time to declare my major at Old Dominion University, the choice was easy: I would major in cybersecurity. It wasn't just about halting cybercrime; it was about learning how systems interact, how vulnerabilities emerge, and how to defend against threats. I minored in information

technology to strengthen this foundation. I felt a deeper understanding of how information systems worked would make me stronger as a security professional.

Choosing cybersecurity wasn't just about passion; it was also about practicality. Technology forms the core of everything today, from banking to healthcare. Simultaneously, with all the advantages it brings, it opens up uncounted vulnerabilities. The more I studied, the better I realized the critical role cybersecurity professionals play in protecting people's data, assets, and privacy. This realization further cemented my choice to enter into this domain and made me quite eager to learn more about the challenges of securing systems.

Informative Classes: Gaining Perspective

Two classes that truly have shaped my career aspirations are CS 465 and CS 462. Both these courses made me realize the usage of cybersecurity in reality rather than pure theory. The comprehensive view of challenges that organizations face when trying to secure their data was provided by CS 465, Cyber Risk Management. In this class, I learned about risk assessments, vulnerabilities, and how one could develop strategies to mitigate these threats. What interested me the most was how these principles applied not just to large companies but also to individuals. It was more about understanding the associated risks and learning how to mitigate them effectively.

On the other hand, CS 462 introduced the basics of cybersecurity and thus provided a technical basis on which to understand threats and defenses. The class gave an overview of cybersecurity technologies, concepts, and strategies that were followed to protect systems against hackers. It was in this course that I realized just how many layers of defense are involved in building a secure system-from firewalls to encryption techniques. These courses

combined have shaped my understanding of cybersecurity as an evolving field and reinforced my desire to pursue a career as a cybersecurity analyst.

Growing Through Experience: Skills from the Field

The things that happened in the classroom did not just shape my journey; it was also influenced by my work experiences. Over the years, I have worked as a soccer coach, referee, and i9 program analyst. Although these jobs may be of relevance to cybersecurity when one looks at them at face value, each has been of vital importance to me in character and skill building.

As a soccer coach, I learned the importance of clear communication and leadership. Working at the helm of a team, that means encouraging the players, making further changes in strategy during the games, and trying to find ways for everyone to work towards a common goal. I also realized that working in cybersecurity would be a lot like managing a sports team: guiding a team, organizing tasks, and adapting to situations as they came up. The coach learns how to inspire and elicit the best from others, which is an important skill in any professional setting, including cybersecurity.

On the other hand, being a referee required traits such as making quick decisions, impartiality, and a strong feeling of justice that any cybersecurity professional would need when evaluating threats or incidents. A referee needs to make fast decisions with minimal information, something similar to responding to a cybersecurity breach. In both situations, staying calm under pressure and making tough decisions to protect the larger group are key. It showed me how to make decisions, be objective, and also deal with difficult situations-all traits that will definitely help me in the cybersecurity field.

The organizational and management skills further developed when I applied them in the i9 program analyst role, working toward smooth and efficient running of programs. This position gave me a backstage look at how much documentation, flow, and accuracy are vital in managing any kind of program-something that is crucial in cybersecurity when managing logs, security protocols, and response times.

These experiences taught me how to handle pressure, communicate with teams effectively, and stay organized even in the face of unexpected challenges. Each day is another challenge in cybersecurity, and all these qualities are so valued. I definitely believe that what I learned on the field and in leadership will serve me well in this position of a cybersecurity analyst, where teamwork, quick thinking, and strategic planning are paramount.

Looking Ahead: Goals and Aspirations

These days, when I envision my future, I see myself as an avid cybersecurity analyst. This is part of my desire to know and understand not just security systems but also how to defend them and to ensure that nobody else has to go through the same kind of breach my parents have gone through. To make this vision real, I understand that along with the education, I need hands-on practice. That is why I get so excited about the idea of doing an internship in the Cyber Clinic at ODU. The atmosphere will provide real-world exposure that allows me to apply my knowledge to practical situations and take insight from proficient professionals in this field.

Beyond this immediate goal, I am committed to continuous growth and skill development in myself. I would like to major in areas such as threat intelligence, incident response, and apply my problem-solving skills toward analysis to make systems secure and enable an organization to always stay one step ahead of the attackers. Every step taken,

whether through further studies, internships, or work experience, draws me closer to that objective.

I also tend to pursue, in the future, some certifications that will add value to my qualification, such as the CompTIA Security+ and Certified Ethical Hacker, which will eventually provide me with the technical skills necessary to excel in this area. I would not like to stop learning about current threats, trends, and techniques in the cybersecurity world to adapt to one that is ever-changing. It is not about just understanding cybersecurity; it is about becoming a person who can protect other people from the fast-growing threat of cybercrime.

Reflection: A Path of Growth and Purpose

Generally speaking, my curiosity, determination, and experiences have created this path in cybersecurity. It all started with that particular moment from childhood when I first realized how vulnerable technology could be. That was the moment that started a fire in my heart, not just to learn how one secures systems and makes others safe from digital evil, but how I myself could do it. Of course, my studies at Old Dominion University-from the cybersecurity fundamental courses to risk management and serving as a coach, referee, and program analyst-only strengthened this resolve by teaching me what I needed to learn in order to succeed.

The road ahead is full of challenges and learning opportunities, and I am ready to face them. It is my dream to make a real difference each day by working as a cybersecurity analyst and specializing in areas related to threat intelligence and incident response. It is my dream to make a real difference by combining knowledge, skills, and experiences in this ever-evolving world of cybersecurity.