

The Journey: A Personal Narrative Essay

Branden A. Barnes

Old Dominion University

IDS-493: Electronic Portfolio Project

Professor Carin Andrews

September 10, 2024

Abstract

I am a senior at Old Dominion University and will soon graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity, complemented by a minor in Risk Management and Insurance. This personal narrative allows me to share my story and overall personal brand. I will showcase and reflect on learning materials and academic experiences on this forum. The ePortfolio platform serves as a way for me to explore my identity and create a narrative space that fosters a deeper connection with you, the reader.

The Journey: A Personal Narrative Essay

I didn't initially begin my major exploration in Cybersecurity, but I was fortunate to discover the field by chance, and it didn't take long to realize it was the perfect fit for me. The path that led me to this point is the topic of discussion. Predominantly, my personal brand begins with a couple of values I hold, efficiency, purpose, integrity, perseverance, and hard work. These values are what have guided me through life. For example, I would consider myself a problem solver who likes to maximize both time and effort. I analyze a project not just before work begins but also afterward, to enhance efficiency for future endeavors. For the past couple of years, I have spent my time working in Marine Construction in the Outer Banks (OBX) to pay for my college degree. What I have learned over the years is that projects have deadlines. The ability to learn how to work smarter and save time is a skill that most defines me. Now, that doesn't mean cutting corners and doing things the easy way, it means learning how to be productive to deliver quick results. To accomplish this, you must ensure your team is on the same page. It is my personal brand to be seen as a leader, and in my experience, a leader does not bark out directions but is always thinking ahead. He encourages the team and aids them in their ability to perform tasks.

History

Growing up, my family moved around a lot. This is one of the perks of being a part of a military household, I suppose. Although it can be tough at times, military children learn various traits and values that come with growing up in that lifestyle. These include selflessness, service,

The Journey

sacrifice, strength, community, adaptability, and social obligations. I learned how to adapt to new lifestyles on two different coastlines of the country while maturing at a young age.

Becoming the “man” of the house when my father was away, taught me strength, bravery, and care for my family and others. I also learned that being a military child came with many sacrifices. The most known one is accepting that your parent must serve the country for the greater good. This means that they are going to miss a couple of baseball games, holidays, birthdays, and memories, but they look beyond themselves in service and that is something that rubs off on you as a kid in your social obligations.

We all have those defining moments in life where our paths can drastically change. Mine was after high school, when I felt directionless and couldn't envision what lay ahead for my future. I was intelligent, I did well in school, but like most others I didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up. I have the most respect for the trades and the military, but my father said something to me that I couldn't get away from. He said simply “I want you to do great things that I haven't been able to do.” He always pushed me hard to do well in school, sports, and in becoming a better man. He was the driving force for me to continue my education. He would always say that there is nothing worse than wasted potential.

When I came to Old Dominion University, I had no clear idea of what I wanted to pursue. I declared economics initially as my first major of exploration. I liked the process of using logical common sense, but within that major I found myself drifting towards data analytics. I seemed to enjoy computers and became interested in data collection. I enjoyed economics as a discipline, but where the fault lay was being involved in economics as a career. I had some friends in

The Journey

cybersecurity and decided to look further into a major change. Not before long, I found myself fascinated by the niche of cybersecurity.

Findings and Reflection

Emily Esfahani Smith (2017) describes the stories we tell about ourselves as our own creation of personal histories, filled with ups and downs, that hold the power to shape ourselves to lead our lives in a more meaningful and purposeful way. This format gives students the chance to backtrack and articulate their lives. Through this process of engagement, they learn new understandings of their significance and create, as Dan McAdams calls a “narrative identity” (Smith). McAdams, a Northwestern University psychologist, gives a great example “a childhood experience like learning how to swim by being thrown into the water by a parent might explain his sense of himself today as a hardy entrepreneur who learns by taking risks. For another, that experience might explain why he hates boats and does not trust authority figures. A third might leave the experience out of his story altogether, deeming it unimportant” (Smith). It is all a part of the reflective process and how you assign worth to experiences, which is a part of your narrative identity. Following the findings of Nguyen (2013), this Portfolio’s purpose is to use this format as a creative process. Giving meaning to events allows students to piece together their lives whether it is important or irrelevant is neither right nor wrong. In my reflection, the purpose of this narrative is best described “in a more applied sense, an ePortfolio serves as a ‘living portal,’ through which students may continually re-articulate their ideas of self to others, bringing about new understandings and ethical intentions (Nguyen, 2013).”

Context

The Journey

I will be graduating spring of 2025 with a degree in cybersecurity. I feel that I found cybersecurity for a reason. Quantitatively, a degree in cybersecurity can lead to job security, professional credentials, and a return on investment (ROI) of the cost of a degree in as little as a year. Qualitatively, cybersecurity gives me purpose, the ability to work hard efficiently, problem solve, and be a man of integrity. As cybersecurity is a new field studied in college, I've had most of my classes online. This gives me an idea of what remote work is like. However, I would like to experience hands-on, on-site work hopefully by next semester when I look for internships. Application courses like Linux Systems, Windows System Management and Security, and Ethical Hacking and Penetration Testing sparked my interest in this field. They qualified me for the School of Cybersecurity Dean's List. Principle courses like Network Systems Security, and Cybersecurity Strategy and Policy piqued my interest in risk management and information assurance. Having to get more credits to graduate I figured I wouldn't waste this opportunity and decided to minor in Risk Management and Insurance.

Conclusion

I will continue to move forward with my future endeavors, and I know my values will guide me. I would like to look back on this model in a few years to add more to the story. Maybe this narrative essay will be an event that affects my narrative identity. As for cybersecurity, this degree gives me a chance to open a new chapter in life. I am eager to use my values to safeguard internet-connected devices and cyber environments from threats. I believe my skills will help me achieve success in the field I enter. "Every human existence is a life in search of a narrative" (Nguyen p.129).

References

- Nguyen, C.F. (2013). The ePortfolio as a living portal: A medium for student learning, identity, and assessment. *International Journal of ePortfolio*, 3(2), 135-148.
- Smith, E.E. (2017, January 12). *The two kind of stories we tell about ourselves* [Video]. TED conferences. <https://ideas.ted.com/the-two-kinds-of-stories-we-tell-about-ourselves/>