Narrative Essay

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Narrative Essay

For some people, life is a very structured entity, with clear avenues and paths to go down, but for me, this had never been the case. I have often struggled to find things that felt meaningful to me, or felt worthwhile, so when I find something that I can tangibly do, or that seems like a good idea, I try to hold on to it as best as I can now. That more or less is a summary as to why I am a cybersecurity major; right now, it is what I have to hold on to, so I will hold onto it for as long as I can, until I am forced to choose something new, or I somehow manage to choose to do something for myself.

A Rough Start

To begin, I was never very good at deciding things for myself. Even now, I am not very willful in this regard, and it really hurt me early on. When I was growing up, my parents would frequently push different ideas on me on the sort of thing that I could be when I was growing up. At some point, I lied and said that I wanted to be a civil engineer, because it seemed to satisfy them. This was the first of many mistakes that I would make, because I did not, and still do not care about civil engineering. Old Dominion University is a college like no other, in the sense that it is located in Norfolk. In regard to the other facts about Old Dominion University, it is an accredited school that is steeped in a rich history much like all of the other ones, which is a very nice quality, but more than that, was convenient to me, because I lived near it. In my first semester attending ODU in 2016, I was a very sad individual. I still hadn't grown out of my teenage angst, and I was very mopey, all the time. In high school, I was a wall flower, and in college, I still am, but less so than I used to be. Attending classes was simultaneously annoying and frustrating, as my classes were, for me, constructed in the most frustrating way possible. I had a morning class at seven, and another at eight, with my next classes starting at noon and seven in the evening. If I had lived on campus, it might've been fine, but I lived at

home, so effectively, for three days a week, I was locked down on the campus. These are very first world problems, certainly, but I had no money for gas, and there wasn't any chance I was going to ask my parents for money. Every trip I took was very carefully calculated to maximize the fuel that I had. I effectively rationed out a hundred dollars of Christmas gift money to last me three months of driving. I still think back very unfavorably to these times.

Time Away

In what I believe was 2018, or perhaps 2019, I was suspended from ODU for failing too many of my classes in rapid succession. I don't suppose anyone reading this would really understand what I will say next, but the feeling I got from this was a sort of generalized relief. Like they say, when you hit the bottom, there isn't anywhere else left to go but up. Some astute readers might note that this isn't really the bottom, and in fact, I could have fallen a lot farther, and much harder. To this, I say; yes, you are right. I suppose there is still space in my life to fall even further. I am hoping very much my suspension was as low as I will ever go. My grandparents are both still alive, celebrating soon their 80th birthdays, and if that is anything to go off of, I still have roughly 2/3rds of my life left. At any rate, with no more obligation to school, it was time to get a job, where I could make money, and give myself breathing room. I got a job working at a firing range down in Moyock, which I still work at to this day as I re-attend school now. Working is nice, because when you have money, all the doors in life begin to open up to you. Life itself is probably about money or the acquirement of money seeing as how it is necessary for anything that you do. Working at a firing range probably sounds rather unpleasant, I'm sure, but it's actually quite the opposite, for me, anyway. It's a pleasant job, weather permitting, and the people can be as well, for the most part. I find they like to get into senseless arguments about things that do not matter, and lines are constantly drawn in the sand, so much to the point that the sands themselves might appear like a checkerboard. I am liked because I do not cause

trouble.

Cybersecurity and Myself

One day, my dad was reading a newspaper, and said that cybersecurity jobs would be growing in the future, and that it would be a good idea for me to go back to school for it, not that I had any choice in it, really. At this point, I was fine with doing anything, because I had personally changed my outlook on the situation of school. When I was a kid, there's always this idea that your life can 'really begin' after some sort of event that happens, whether it be your prom, or when you leave to go to college, or when you graduate from college, or when you turn thirty years old, or maybe when you buy your first car. I understand the 'why' of people saying such things, but I do not agree with the thought. Life began the moment you were born; everything you do *is* living. It gives people comfort to think that there is structure, and that things happen according to a nice timetable, but life itself is unstructured, and random. Not everyone wins the lottery but anyone *can* win the lottery, and in this chaos, that's where people like me can exist. All that was required for me to decide on cybersecurity was the prospect that it was a decent career path to take, and that it would be a nice job, indoors. Life is fickle, nothing is promised, and we romanticize things that really aren't all that special, in retrospect.

Tidewater Community College and A Strange Turnaround

After I worked for a long period of time to pad out my pockets so I did not need to worry about financial issues, I attended Tidewater Community College to prep myself for my return back into Old Dominion University. My favorite professor I have ever had was someone from Tidewater Community College, who taught the Unix course in Tidewater Community College. I considered including his name, but I think that I would prefer to preserve their identity; what I will say might not be understood to be good things, but for me, I thought he was the best teacher I ever had. If school worked on a mentoring system, I would probably have had him teach me everything, all of my classes. His class

was interesting, probably the most I was captivated by any course, just by virtue of the absurdity of the class itself. Class would consist of us attending a zoom link, and opening our Unix terminals through a tool called Putty, and then he would show us Unix commands and what they would do. It really wasn't complicated, and it didn't need to be, but for some reason, that method of structure was very real to me. Show up to class, play around on the computer and type out stuff for an hour or so, and then we'd have an assignment with the stuff we typed in. Sometimes, his computer would crash, and the class would end early. Sometimes, he would tell us about he enjoyed his job as a janitor more than his time as a teacher. Sometimes, he'd forget what he was teaching us, and just move on to the next lesson. These do not seem to be the makings of a good teacher, but I was always invested to see what might happen next, because it was fun, and funny. In the times that he talked, or struggled, there were always a list of commands for us to try out in the terminal, which was a very organic way of learning how to do something; by doing it. People present themselves as they want to be seen, but this makes everyone feel kind of fake to me. Many conversations I have with people feel very nearly close to platitudes at this point, with nothing of substance being said, but rather, what people *think* they should be saying, rather than what they actually want to say. Having a teacher who fumbled equally as much as his students was this really weird breath of fresh air for me. In this time, I became rather literate when it came to working on computers, by virtue of having plenty of time to experiment with them. I feel I learned a very strange lesson, and it doesn't fall into the 'try, try again' category, but rather, sometimes you misstep, and you call it quits for the day. For the most part, no mistake is so bad that you can't come in the next day and fix it afterwards.

Closing Thoughts

Some people have nice structured lives, but mine wasn't so, and I neither like nor dislike this fact. I ended up on the path of cybersecurity by chance, but I do not think that invalidates my skills and

abilities in any way. Truthfully, I am somewhat annoyed that my story is akin to that of a redemption story by virtue of returning to the school I nearly flunked out of, because it makes my experiences feel rather trite, and categorical, if it can accurately be labeled in such a way. The cybersecurity field is growing, and the wages seem good; unknown, curious spectators like myself may every now and then throw their hat into the ring, and try it for themselves. Even if I stumble along the way, I'll keep growing until something suits me, I hope.