Personal Narrative Essay

Colin Murphy

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Introduction

When I started college in 2021, I was introduced to my first taste of adulthood and life as a whole. I admittedly was nervous being thrown into a community of people from a variety of backgrounds and talents. This opened a greater number of opportunities and freedoms that I never got as a kid. Being able to stay up as long as I wanted and mess around at parties or the fact that I was in charge of my routines and habits was a thrill and honestly overwhelming. I was unsure of my own skills and whether the opportunities presented to me would help me achieve personal success. However, through many trials and tribulations, I found myself becoming a part of one of the largest growing fields in our infrastructure and nothing has ever piqued my interest more, except for Star Wars. My road to coming to Old Dominion and becoming a Cybersecurity major had many ups ands downs but they all led me to where I am today and why I chose this path.

Background

I was born February 11, 2003, in Annapolis, Maryland. I was born to my mom, dad, and my older brother who all lived in a small town called Crofton for my first years of life. When I was about 2 years old, my family moved from Maryland to Richmond, Virginia, which is where I lived for the majority of my childhood. Growing up, I was always constantly surrounded by technology, and it has always been one of my favorite hobbies to partake in. When I wasn't playing outside, at school, or at soccer practice, I was playing with my brother on our PlayStation, Xbox, or Wii, or using our old iMac to look at photos and videos of my old childhood as well as surf the internet. As I grew, I came to appreciate and utilize these devices more as I started to play video games with my friends online more frequently and over voice calls for hours every night. This hobby helped me build lifelong friendships and helped me

become more familiar with these technologies and how they function. However, until recently I never saw it as a career that I could go into since I was inexperienced with building and programming these machines. This ultimately pushed me away from going to college for a computer science or engineering degree, so I kept it as a hobby and just that.

Pre-college

During high school is where I started to consider possible career opportunities that I felt like I best fit into. At this point I was working on becoming an Eagle Scout and I've always known that I wanted to practice my servant-leadership to help people in my community and across the country. One of the first choices that I listed was joining the military as I have numerous family members who saw success in each of the branches. The most notable influence was my uncle who was in the Navy for over 30 years and worked as a Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman (SWCC). He worked with special boat teams across the world and I later on got to tour his station in Little Creek. This inspired me to join my high school's Navy ROTC program as my entry way to joining the military. This program helped me work on my leadership and communication skills to help influence and motivate my peers to strive for greatness. Through further research I found that I could be commissioned as an officer if I go through ROTC in college which came with scholarship opportunities and would look great on my resume. This meant I had to choose a degree and one that I could use after my time in the military. The first choice that came to mind was majoring in Criminal Justice as I saw myself working for a federal agency such as the FBI, CIA, or Department of Justice. With all of this in mind I was ready for college and looked forward to August of 2021 to start my first semester.

<u>First Year</u>

At this point is where I started to witness flaws in my plans. I applied for the Navy ROTC program at ODU, but my application was denied. This was the first wrench that was thrown into my plans which partially broke my stride. I then decided to enroll in ODU's Army ROTC program as I could take a similar path, but it didn't feel like a match for me. I didn't have the same motivation or companionship that I felt in high school and that started to push me away. It was also a huge time commitment that I wasn't sure I could feasibly uphold and so I decided to part ways with the program. My next issue arose in my classes for Criminal Justice. The classes themselves were actually interesting and I was invested in the material I was learning, but I felt like something was missing. It felt like a piece of me wasn't being satisfied with where I was and felt unfulfilled. My now fiancé Kaylee noticed this and helped me work through this internal struggle. It took some time and motivation to realize that my true passion was working with the technology that I had grown up with.

<u>Intro to Cybersecurity</u>

I never knew much about Cybersecurity other than it involved protecting devices from hackers and data breaches as well as educating people on keeping their devices and data safe. My ROTC unit in high school had a Cyber Patriots team that competed against other schools in competitions. I was interested in this team however I lacked proper devices that could be used properly for the competitions and so I never joined. I did, however, hear about the many opportunities the field presented while they were marketing the team to my peers. The mention of Cybersecurity wouldn't be brought up again until I was applying for courses for my first sophomore semester. I decided to take some cybersecurity classes as electives since they looked like they could benefit me in the future. This put the question in my mind of "would I rather be a

cybersecurity major?" I then did some research into the field, and I discovered how diverse the field was and how much it had been growing since I started college. It made me realize that my work could be much more diverse and tailored to my skillset. The greater number of opportunities offered in cyber operations as opposed to criminal justice positions also motivated me to make the right choice. After a year and a half as a Criminal Justice major, I switched majors to Cybersecurity halfway through my sophomore year.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

I never imagined myself pursuing this degree in a million years. I you'd told my high school self this is where I'd end up, I would've laughed at you and called you crazy. Since I was a kid, I felt like my talents and interests were not being utilized and couldn't be. Now I have a chance to display my expertise and help protect an increasingly vital part of our infrastructure. I have finally found my true calling and I'm excited for the possibilities and opportunities that will arise in the near future.