

# **My Journey to Cybersecurity: A Personal Narrative Essay**

Liana Davis

Old Dominion University

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Professor Carin Andrews

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## **Introduction**

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Liana Davis and I am currently a junior at Old Dominion University working towards my Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity. I am a highly motivated and dedicated student determined to succeed in my professional path.

My journey towards choosing this career path has been shaped by various milestones in my personal, academic, and work life. Working towards my goal, I have faced many challenges from adolescence to adulthood. As a young adult and military dependent, I struggled with frequent moves, which often meant starting over and adjusting to being in new environments. At twenty-two, I began my path towards motherhood while starting my freshman year at ODU and faced many challenges balancing school, work, and motherhood. Through these experiences, I have seen firsthand the importance and value of staying both focused and committed to my objectives. These milestones have not only strengthened my problem-solving skills but also fueled my determination to succeed in a challenging and constantly evolving field like cybersecurity. This narrative essay will showcase my journey, the challenges I've overcome, and the milestones that have guided me toward my chosen career path.

## **Early Academic Experiences**

In high school, I loved solving problems. Unlike many of my peers, math was my favorite subject because it allowed me to think critically and work through challenges step by step. I also took a robotics class, which, although not directly related to cybersecurity, gave me a taste of working with technology in a hands-on way. From elementary to high school, my biggest challenge was constantly being on the move. As a military child, I moved schools a total of four times. While this isn't as many as some other military dependents, the frequent transitions taught

me to adapt quickly and make the most out of every opportunity. My most impactful move was during my senior year, when relocating to Italy forced me to adjust rapidly to a completely new environment. These milestones are what guided me towards becoming a more resilient and flexible individual, able to thrive despite uncertainty. These soft skills have not only shaped who I am personally but also provided a strong foundation for success in my academic pursuits and future in cybersecurity.

### **First Work Experiences**

I was eighteen when I first began working at the Child Development Center on base where I was responsible for creating lesson plans and brainstorming new activities for young children. At the time, I didn't have much interest in childcare; however, living in a foreign country on a military base made the number of jobs for those under twenty-one extremely limited. Even though childcare wasn't my personal passion, the role instilled valuable skills and lessons in organization, planning, and time management. Beyond the practical skills, the position offered opportunities to connect with others and build meaningful relationships, including a close friendship that has lasted to this day. This experience showed me that even in roles that don't perfectly match your interests, there are still important lessons to be learned and skills to be developed.

### **Realizations About Career Interests**

The first few years after high school were spent in the working field. I jumped from job to job until I started working at a pet daycare center. I truly loved my role and ended up working there for a little over five years. I built strong relationships with the animals, my coworkers, and

even the customers. While my position with the company brought me a lot of joy, I realized that despite my love for the work, it wasn't a career that could provide long-term financial stability or opportunities for growth. I began thinking seriously about a career in cybersecurity after seeing a friend excel in the field. Her success inspired me, but my biggest motivation came from becoming a mom. I started college when my daughter was only three months old, and I knew that choosing the right career path could help me build a stable future for her. I also recognized that I had strong skills in following directions, paying attention to detail, problem-solving, and I always felt pretty tech savvy. These were qualities I knew would serve me well in cybersecurity. What excites me most about the field is the chance to tackle challenges and work with technology in a hands-on way.

### **Choosing My Major**

I chose cybersecurity because I knew that if I dedicated myself, I could excel in it. As someone who enjoys challenges, I knew this was a field that I would both enjoy and find opportunities for growth. I was a bit skeptical in the beginning, as this isn't necessarily a line of work many women lean towards and would often get comments from my peers with surprise that I decided to take on such a role. However, my college experience thus far has only confirmed that this was the right path. Making the Dean's List multiple times gave me confidence in knowing I could not only handle the job, but truly thrive in my position. More importantly, the hands-on simulations and various assignments have shown that I can apply what I learned independently, proving to myself that I am capable of succeeding in this challenging field. It all ties into the skills I developed as a young adult that have prepared me and fueled my excitement for both the work I've done and the work that still lies ahead.

## **Challenges and Growth**

Balancing school, work, and being a mom has been the most defining challenge I have faced. There are days I am pushed past limits I didn't even know existed. There have been times when I had to choose school over spending time with my daughter, and that was difficult. Yet those sacrifices have only strengthened my determination to succeed. They remind me that every step forward is not just for myself, but for her future as well. This journey has also taught me the value of time, that every moment is one to be cherished, which is why I make the most of the time I do have with loved ones, ensuring that even in the midst of a busy schedule, I maintain strong family connections.

## **My Future Goals**

In the short term, I plan to earn certifications such as Security+ by the end of 2025 in order to strengthen my skills and expand opportunities within cybersecurity. Gaining these certifications will not only validate my knowledge but also prepare me for more advanced challenges in the field. My long-term goal is to build a fulfilling career where I can solve real-world problems, contribute to safe digital spaces, and continue learning. Beyond practical reasons, this career is meaningful because it allows me to combine problem-solving, creativity, and helping others. It gives me a sense of accomplishment and purpose, knowing that the work I do has a tangible impact.

## **Conclusion: The Story I'm Telling**

Overall, my journey to cybersecurity has been worthwhile. From moving frequently as a military child to balancing school and motherhood, every experience has shaped the person I am

today. My story reflects my determination, adaptability, and a willingness to grow despite challenges. I hope my journey shows that success is built on dedication, resilience, and learning from every experience, big or small. Every step of my journey has prepared me for a meaningful and exciting future in cybersecurity, and I am eager to continue building my skills, achieving my goals, and making a positive impact in the field.