

Personal Narrative

Daniel Lowry

Old Dominion University

What makes a person interested in technology? Is it a longing for them to understand how things function on a base level? Or is it the satisfaction of bending a machine to do your will? For me, as a child both these theories drove a small part of my fascination. However, there was a much larger entity at play. That entity was pride.

My brother and I had just received our Nintendo Entertainment System Christmas morning in 1986. I was 4 years old at the time and did not understand much of how things worked in life, but what I did have was an innate fascination with my grandfather's Atari system. One of my favorite things to do was not to play the games, but to tinker around with the cords and components of the system. On that Christmas morning that we received one of the greatest gifts of all time, my curiosity would prove effective. My father opened the box and started removing peripherals, one of them being a small cable with a red and yellow plug at each end. I also noticed the two inputs of the same color located on the back of the consol. I remember my dad saying, "now how do we hook this thing up?" I quickly sprang into action. With the lightning-fast reaction time only an enthusiastic 4-year-old pining for his father's approval could muster, I stuck the red plug into the red plug of the console, and the yellow plug in its respective location. The next step I knew from my "exhaustive research" on the Atari, was to find how this console connected to the tv. To my utter amazement, there conveniently happened to be corresponding inputs on the television, and in a matter of moments mine and my brother's lives had changed, and a deep-seated addiction to video games began to gestate inside of my brain.

Looking back on that day, I understand now that my dad was not being literal when asking how to hook the console up, but to a 4-year-old, the praise I received for my "genius" technological skills, I knew my colors well, was more than enough to bolster my pride and lead me to an interest in technology that burns inside of me to this day.

Through these early days into my high school years, I had continued to tinker with electronics. I had built gaming computers, troubleshoot issues for friends, and continued to be obsessed with video games. Unfortunately, I took a hiatus from electronics. I had discovered Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and naturally, I began to train martial arts. What I came to find out was that my “left-sided” brain would have its use in the sport. I excelled at taking a logical approach when it came to breaking boards, and my obsessive nature drew me to training 5-6 days a week. Eventually I made the United States World championship Tae Kwon-Do team as their power breaker and was on my way to my first world championships in India at the age of 15, where I won the silver medal. I continued to travel the world with team USA for the next 6 years, competing in tournaments located in Pyongyang, North Korea and Athens, Greece, winning two more medals along the way. The world experiences I received from these years were priceless, but beyond the scope of this narrative.

When I chose to get my first “grown-up” job, it was in Corrections. I excelled both at the academy, being class president and academic leader, and working with the inmates, even being told by the Major, “one day you’ll be running this jail and I’ll drive by and say, hey, I know that guy.” I became a general instructor for law enforcement personnel and was working my way up the ladder, but eventually, the job began to weigh on me. It is not easy going to jail every time you have a 12-hour shift to work. That is when I decided to start my college career at New River Community College.

College was a new thing to me, and I had no idea what I wanted to do, so I started taking part-time classes for a “general education” Associates. I also left the world of Corrections during this period and got a job installing satellite systems for DirecTV. The money was better, and the

stress was less. I made good grades in my classes and everything was going smoothly, although painfully slow at part-time, until my wife and I decided to have our children.

After a two-year hiatus from school, I decided it was finally time to really do something with my life and figure out what path I wanted to take. That is when I decided I would change my degree from general studies to computer science and shoot for a technological degree and a career I would love.

Some basic skills were learned with my computer science associates degree, but nothing like the skills I have learned after switching to full-time status and transferring to Old Dominion University (ODU) to finish my bachelors.

When looking at degree options at ODU, I noticed that they offered a degree in Cybersecurity. This sparked my interest, as I had worked alongside law enforcement in my past employment, I thought that the degree would be something I would enjoy, foolishly thinking that every class I took would be technical in nature. I was surprised, and a little disappointed, when I saw that my first semesters at ODU would consist of writing courses, sociology, and something called “interdisciplinary studies”. I also was pleasantly surprised when I finished these courses at the amount of new knowledge I had acquired.

When looking at the course named “IDS300W Interdisciplinary Theory and Concepts”, I believe it was the first time in my life that I had heard the word “interdisciplinary”, so I truly had no idea what to expect. However, learning the benefits of going at a project from an interdisciplinary approach has become a valuable tool to have in my arsenal. I also took a few other required classes such as Digital Forensics and Cyber Law that feed into my law enforcement background and led me to picking up a minor in Cyber Law.

The Cybersecurity degree is special in the fact that along the way you will learn several valuable skills through course work that coincide with other IT degrees and professions. For instance, I have learned almost as much about networking as I have about cyber threats. This knowledge of networking not only comes in useful for security admin positions, but I can show that I have enough understanding of networking to get a job as a network engineer as well.

My path may have a few more twists in it than normal, but I can be sure that every bend in the road has added to my knowledge and character. I have been able to excel at many different facets of life. I have also done things the “hard way” with trying to raise a family, work full-time, and take full time classes. But I know that when it is all done, I can look back and be grateful of every bump in the road and I take every chance I get to ask my kids, “how do these things work?”