Cyber security is a field that has been a part of my life ever since I could remember, almost entirely thanks to a single, extremely influential person in my life. The influence of this person, my father, combined with a love for both sci-fi and everything to do with computers in general proved to be immensely important in determining what I would like to do with my professional life, and by effect, my academic career as well. Throughout my education, both at the high school and college levels, I have learned much about the world of cyber security and all that it entails, giving me the knowledge and later even earning the certifications needed to work in the industry. This decision to study cyber security has made a massive impact on my life, and will allow me to obtain a job and make a living doing something that I enjoy. Now, in my senior year of college at Old Dominion University, I look back on the influences that drove me to select the field of cyber security with gratitude, and look forward to starting off my career in cyber security on the right foot.

My father has always been an incredibly important person in my life, from the very day I was born to now as I'm writing this essay. He served in the United States Navy for the vast majority of my life, serving as an information technology and cyber security specialist. He retired as a master chief in 2019, but went right back into a cyber security job immediately following his retirement. I have always looked up to my father and tried to follow the example that he set for me, and when I was younger I was very interested in his job, both as a member of the navy in general and also as an information technology specialist. This is how I first learned about the field of cyber security, and the fact that it was through my father undoubtedly left a stronger impression on me than had I learned of the field in any other way.

For about as long as I can remember, I have always been massively into the genre of sci-fi. I believe that it started when I first was introduced to the series Star Wars by my parents and my uncle, who also were big fans of the franchise. This love for Star Wars burgeoned into a love for sci-fi in general, something that I have enjoyed all throughout my life, and I do believe that this love for sci-fi has also in some ways steered me towards my choice of career in cyber security. My love for sci-fi stories, which incorporate computers and machines in a myriad of ways, was bound to lead me towards some sort of interest in computers themselves, and that is exactly what happened.

I believe that computers may be the most interesting and important devices in the world, and they are certainly the most important in my life, both from a personal perspective and also from a professional perspective. I got my first computer in the form of an older Dell laptop when I was 10, a hand me down from my father. It had spent quite some time in a closet out of use, it was extremely slow and not very powerful, failing to run many of the games that I wanted to play and taking quite a long time to boot up, but I absolutely loved that laptop. Being able to access the internet and have access to the myriad of different functions that a computer provides was such a joy as a child, and this fascination with computers never really left me. This also helped to introduce computers to me at an earlier age, which helped me understand how they worked and what could be done with them, something that I am very grateful for now.

The portrayal of hackers both online and in popular media like tv shows and movies also most definitely drive me further towards the world of cyber security. Hackers are depicted often in popular media, and I always thought that the concept of using computers in advanced, specialized ways to break into other computer systems was very cool and interesting. It also helps that hackers were often portrayed as smart and mysterious, or even heroic if the character was say a detective, even if the truth of hacking is not quite that way in real life. Due to the influence of computers on my life, I had always known that I would grow up to do something in the realm of computer science or some other career that deals with computers, but the portrayal of hackers alongside my father and the work that he did and still does is what pushed me specifically towards cyber security over any other specialty.

All of this love for computers and technology led me to make a massively important decision when I was going into high school, and that decision was to apply for the Governor's STEM academy at Landstown high school. The academy would allow for students who were accepted into the program to learn about all types of STEM fields and gain knowledge in them. In order to apply, an applicant had to submit a few different projects for evaluation, which, alongside the applicant's grades, would determine if they were accepted or not. I applied with the assistance of my father, and, to my great joy, was accepted into the program. This program is ultimately where I would make my final decision to go into the field of cyber security. If I had not been accepted, I feel as though my life would have turned out very different than it is now.

The governor's STEM academy at Landstown high school allowed me to take courses on many different STEM subjects, including classes on computer science, technical drawing, engineering and of course, information technology. This was immensely helpful for several reasons, but perhaps the most helpful reason was allowing me a taste of many different STEM fields, which allowed me to better narrow down which fields I enjoyed and which I didn't want to pursue further. Overall the classes that the academy allowed me to take helped my academic career substantially, and I am very grateful both that I made it into the program, and am especially thankful to my father for assisting me in applying. The information technology class specifically was the most important. This was mostly because of the teacher of the course, Mr. A.

The information technology course at Landstown's academy was going through a restructuring at the time, meaning that the course curriculum was not set in stone, and that left it largely up to the professor to decide what to teach. Mr. A decided to use this opportunity to teach us a few different things, making the class a sort of introduction to various types of information technology. This included the basics of python programming, understanding the internal workings of computers and what the various parts of the computer do, and most importantly, an introduction to cyber security. His class was both very interesting and also very enjoyable as he was a great and memorable teacher, and of all of the different aspects of information technology we covered, cyber security stuck out to me above the others. Mr. A and his class that year no doubt had a major influence on the course of my academic and now professional career, one that I couldn't have imagined when I signed up for his class.

This is the point where I decided to narrow down my prospective college degrees to two main choices, being computer science and cyber security. Computer science and coding was very interesting to me, with coding especially being very fun, however I am not the best at math. The litany of math classes needed to obtain a computer science degree and the amount of math that would go into actually doing the job was enough to make me finally decide on cyber security. I then applied to Old Domain University for a cyber security degree, was accepted and now am looking to graduate in December of 2024. It was a long journey to get to this moment, but looking back on my life now and understanding what brought me to this moment has certainly been a help in understanding the course of my life thus far.