

**Constructing a Personal Narrative for the Pursuit of Cybersecurity**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to construct a personal narrative related to my personal decision to study and work in the field of cybersecurity. To do so, my initial inclinations towards computers from a young age are explored, which is followed by a discussion of the events leading up to my formal education in the field. My current status and objectives for the future are also laid out. Put together, this should help illuminate the causes and reasoning behind my actions, as well as provide some small insight into a piece of my own identity.

### **Introduction**

Numerous life factors played a part in my decision to study cybersecurity. Communicating these contributing factors, along with my own personal narrative, can provide a greater level of insight, to both others and myself, about my own disposition and individuality, and how that might contribute to my current and future work (McAdams, 2001). Though I did not have a clear career goal in mind for many years, I eventually discovered cybersecurity, and learned how individuals like myself could perform the tasks that compose it, as well as the benefits this work could provide to others. Now, I have nearly completed my Bachelor's degree in the discipline, and plan to seek a career in the field in the coming months.

### **Experience With Computers in Early Life**

For as long as I can remember, I have found technology and the ways it is used to be quite fascinating. A large part of this may have to do with several of my family members and their influence on me during my childhood. For one, I would frequently watch my older brother work with hardware and software components, such as during the creation of a desktop personal computer or the setup of new programs. Through him, I gained an appreciation for the methods and complexities in which computers are created and configured. In a similar vein, one of my uncles was, and is, highly experienced in the information technology space, and provided me with a similar awareness and understanding of the ways in which IT systems support businesses in the modern era. My grandfather, too, engaged in more technical ventures during his time working for the CIA, some stories of which were relayed to me through my father. This work was done many decades ago, when single computers took up entire rooms. From these stories, I obtained a deeper understanding of the evolution of computing's use in society and the vast changes it has gone through over such a relatively short time, as well as an immense respect for

the ways in which it has benefitted the world as a whole. Naturally, I began to engage in more technical activities as time passed, as well.

### **Ongoing Technical Inclinations**

Many of my early interests and hobbies, then, involved interactions with personal computers and other devices, which contributed to my developing skills. For example, I learned to set up LAN servers, or local area network servers, initially with the intent to play various video games with my friends and family members. These activities also gave me an understanding of the Windows command-line interface, and the function of Internet Protocol addresses. Though these particular topics are not overly complicated relative to the vast number of protocols, hardware, and software components that go into modern systems as a whole, my knowledge and experience with these tools made me more technically-inclined than my peers, who were perhaps only familiar with smartphones and more common or user-friendly applications and devices. My experience with systems only continued to grow throughout my K-12 education. Over time, as my skills with systems and software continued to develop, I assisted with technical support for other family members who were not as familiar with technology. This gave me confidence in my abilities, despite the relatively simple nature of these requests, and granted me the necessary encouragement to pursue a career in a more computer-oriented field, though I had yet to determine exactly what area of study I wanted to undertake, and the kinds of positions I wished to pursue.

### **Discovering Cybersecurity**

Given that, at this point in my life, I did not have a strong preference for any particular career path, I began to work part time at a local museum, often assisting with information technology, while enrolled in community college. Though I enjoyed working with computers and

technology, I was unsure if that was the path I actually wished to follow, as I did not possess much knowledge about cybersecurity as a discipline. As such, I initially worked towards an associate's degree in General Studies in order to explore my options for the future and determine what I wanted to pursue over the coming years. Despite taking a number of different classes among several different disciplines over this roughly two year period, I still felt somewhat lost. Though I did find some subjects like art history and biology to be interesting, at this point, nothing had truly "clicked" with me. Eventually, though, I found an online creator, which provided me with a first perspective into the field of cybersecurity. Though perhaps not so striking as an event in and of itself, this introduction to the world of cybersecurity served as a "nuclear episode," as psychologist McAdams would put forth, or a major turning point for my college course and career plans (McAdams, 2001). This creator discussed penetration testing and the various steps that go along with it, as well as how they helped businesses remediate both technical problems and those that stemmed from the perspectives and activities of employees, and several other aspects of cybersecurity (Kwapisz, 2024). Seeing these discussions helped to demystify the field, providing more concrete insight into the tasks that cybersecurity professionals perform every day. My mother had, around this time, also encouraged me to pursue cybersecurity. With these two factors combined, I then gained the motivation and understanding that someone like myself could assist in supporting various types of organizations through securing systems and network infrastructure. The online creator in question has since been involved in a few controversies, causing both public perception and my own opinion of them to sour, but the fact remains that it was their discussion of the field that provided me with my initial interest in cybersecurity, specifically.

### **Current Studies**

In order to pursue cybersecurity, I decided to continue my college education at a different university and obtain a Bachelor's degree in the field. Though several universities stood out to me, I decided to attend Old Dominion University, partially because my older brother had done the same several years prior. Old Dominion University is located in Norfolk, Virginia, and is where I am currently staying and studying at the time of writing (*University Facts & Figures*, 2025). While studying through ODU, I have obtained a number of skills which I believe will assist me greatly in my future career in cybersecurity. Several networking classes have given me insight into how systems communicate with one another, both within localized organizational infrastructure and over wider networks. A handful of Windows and Linux classes have also allowed me to become far more familiar with these operating systems than I had been prior, while other classes which discussed programming and cybersecurity techniques have given me insight into and experience with the practical tools and processes those in the field use to secure systems. I have experienced similar growth in regard to cyber law and digital forensics, as well, allowing me to better understand the role laws play in how cybersecurity is approached by businesses, and how evidence is best preserved for use in investigations, respectively. Collectively, these courses also helped prepare me for CompTIA's Security+ certification, which I have successfully obtained during my final semester. My time at Old Dominion, I believe, has reaffirmed my decision to pursue cybersecurity, contributing to the development of an identity as a member of the cybersecurity field (Nguyen, 2013).

### **Future Plans**

Going forward, I intend to obtain work in the field of cybersecurity, whether in Norfolk or elsewhere. My hope is that this will continue to help me foster a better understanding of the practical operations and administration related to cybersecurity that organizations engage in.

Once I have this more real-world experience, I may choose to specialize in any number of areas in cybersecurity, though I will not know which specific area I favor most until that point.

### **Conclusion**

While not the only catalyst in my decision to pursue cybersecurity, my family likely played the largest overall role in prompting and supporting this decision. The inspiration and encouragement provided has helped shape my academic and career path into what it has become. Cybersecurity, particularly, seems to suit my skillset fairly well, given my proclivity for computers and other devices. After having spent nearly two years studying the subject, I can say that I have learned a significant amount about cybersecurity and the tools used within it since I began. Sharing this narrative has hopefully provided at least some insight into my motivations, goals, decisions, and achievements over the previous years, in regard to my academic and career development. In the coming years, I hope to learn more about the field and apply this knowledge to support whichever organizations I work with in the future.

### References

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