

Personal Narrative

Joan Perry

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Dr. Phan

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Abstract

The purpose of this personal narrative is to share my story as it relates to my academic and work experiences. I will also include important work and life events that helped me shape my career path. From a child who lacked guidance and a clear direction, I cycled through several different career ideas and paths. Important life changes, such as motherhood, marriage, and career shifts, played a role in the discovery of my passion. From the beginning of my post-high school education journey at Peninsula Community College to the completion of my degree at Old Dominion University. I will draw concepts from Don McAdams and Emily Smith that will highlight how my life shifts and turning points construct my story and shape my identity. As I move forward, I do so with purpose and passion as I prepare to be an elementary school teacher who leads with consistency, empathy, and compassion in a safe, firm, but loving environment.

Introduction

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” It’s a question almost all children are asked at some point by parents, family, friends, teachers, or even by strangers just making small talk. I know, personally, this is a question I was asked frequently as a child, and my answers changed throughout the years: princess, singer, actor, lawyer, information technology professional, interior designer, real estate agent, and even a small business owner creating personalized items and gifts. It’s clear through my career choices throughout the years that I had no clear direction, and it was obvious that I shifted paths based on whatever fascinated me at the time. I had always heard the saying, “Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” As I grew up, I chose career paths based on my interests, believing that I could simply declare a career and follow that path until I landed a job in my chosen field. However, as I got older, I realized that this approach doesn’t work as I had expected. I felt lost, and what would typically take most four years after high school to achieve took me much longer. My path was not shaped by a single bold declaration like I thought; it evolved throughout my journey in life as a mother and through professional experiences, which eventually led me to my career and passion for teaching.

Life Takes a Turn

Life after high school was easy-going to begin with, although I had no real direction. I began my post-high school academic experience at Thomas Nelson Community College, now known as Virginia Peninsula Community College, pursuing a Liberal Arts degree with plans to transfer to a four-year university after its completion. While it appeared I had a direction I was heading in, I was still very uncertain about my career path. It wasn’t until I became a mother at

twenty that my priorities changed, and in what felt like an overnight change, I went from an independent carefree life to needing to make decisions for me and my child's future. Around this time, I began to gain an interest in technology, so I locked in on a career choice and began my educational shift. I chose to transfer to ECPI University to take part in their accelerated degree programs. I eventually earned an Associate of Science with a concentration in Computer Science and began my career in Information Technology. I completed two internships within the field and landed a job on a government contract for the Army Training Help Desk. Shortly after, my personal life began to evolve as I met and married my husband, which shifted my perspective from single working mom to a married mom interested in further building our family. Together, we welcomed our son and became a family of four. With this change, we decided as a family that I would quit my job in IT to stay home and care for our family full-time. Within the next few years, we welcomed our third child, a girl, who completed our family. While raising my children, I babysat for friends and neighbors and volunteered at my children's schools. These casual experiences introduced me to a world of caring for children and education from a different perspective. I look back at this time in my life and appreciate it as it became a time of transformation. As Dan McAdams expresses in *The Psychology of Life Stories*, our sense of self is shaped through self-reflection that comes from the stories we tell about our own lives (McAdams, 2001). My perspective shifted during this time of caregiving and volunteering, leading me from focusing on career ambitions to wanting to empower the next generation with knowledge and skills. At that time, I didn't fully understand how significant those experiences would be in shaping my future career.

From Tech to Teaching

Life continued to move, and soon all three of my children attended public school during the day. I watched my youngest head into school as a Kindergartner, and I realized that it was now time to shift once again and step into something new. I wanted to return to work during the day while my children were all in school, and I knew it had to be something that fit our family's rhythm. I previously worked in IT, but with my husband already in the field, I knew how demanding it could be. This would not be beneficial for our family to return to IT, because the lack of flexibility did not suit our family. Additionally, I no longer felt a passion for the field as I once did. With all this in mind, I chose to apply to be a substitute teacher at the school my two younger children attended. This seemed like a perfect fit. I was able to work part-time, tailor my weekday schedule to fit the needs of my family, my children came to school with me and went home with me at the end of the day, and we had the same days off. It felt like a great blend, allowing me to work and still be present for my family. What started as a convenient and practical decision for my family turned into something unexpected. I loved being in the classroom! As Smith detailed, the turning points that happen in our lives become the foundation for our self-discovery in finding meaning (Smith, 2024). Teaching, even as a substitute, marked a turning point in my personal life, revealing a passion for being in the classroom. I found gratification and enjoyment in helping students learn and in guiding them through challenges. I felt I was making an impact even if it was on the smallest scale. What started as something I viewed as temporary and convenient slowly turned into something I now feel is a calling.

Purpose and Passion

After several months of substituting, I decided to return to school to pursue a bachelor's degree. I understood this was a significant decision for my family and me, and so I felt nervous, yet I also felt extreme excitement. I felt nervous about my ability to balance parenting, part-time substitute teaching, and a full-time school schedule. However, I was excited about the idea of finally completing my degree and moving toward a purposeful career. As it turned out, I had reason to be nervous. There were moments I struggled with self-doubt as I juggled school assignments with kids' after-school activities, meal preparations, cleaning, and bedtime routines. There were nights I sat at my desk asking myself, "Why did I choose to go back to school?" Through these times, I showed myself how resilient I truly am, knowing three pairs of eyes were watching, a sense of pride kept me going. Smith explains that people who find meaning within their struggles tell stories of redemption and that challenges lead to growth (Smith, 2024). While I completed courses, I also continued to gain experience in the classroom, and I developed clarity and confidence as a teacher and understanding of where I wanted to grow to prepare for my classroom. I learned I want to create a safe, inclusive, and compassionate environment where every student feels valued. I believe in whole body learning and wish to not only teach content, but to support both social and emotional learning and academic growth with an exciting and memorable delivery. This part of my path feels meaningful and was created, developed, and evolved through growth and experience (Smith, 2024).

Conclusion: Moving Forward with Purpose

As I continue to move forward in my career path, I will use the skills I have gained and the clarity in the confidence of knowing why I have chosen this path. Teaching is not just a career goal for me; it is a passion I am dedicated to being a part of. With every step toward my passion for teaching, I am committed to ensuring I create an environment that is safe, supportive, inclusive, and fun, where children can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically. This purpose fulfills me, grounds me, and most importantly, gives meaning to experiences in both motherhood and professionally, which defines my passion, finally giving my path direction and clarity.

References

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