**Personal Narrative Essay**

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**Abstract**

I am a senior at Old Dominion University majoring in Cybersecurity. This essay will focus on who I am as a person, how I arrived at this point, and the struggles and challenges I overcame along the way. I will reflect on how those struggles and challenges helped shape me as the person I am today. Lastly, I will discuss my motivation, specifically why I chose cybersecurity as my major.

**Who Am I?**

In an article written by McAdams (2001), he encourages people to think about their values and beliefs when it comes to their narrative. Thus, before I begin this essay, there is something you should know about me to understand my why. I am a person who has always deeply valued my connections with others, more so than most. I believe that who I am today is a result of the people I’ve met throughout my life. Those people have helped shape my hobbies and interests, quirks and personality traits, as well as my character and core values.

Growing up, I was a military child who had to move frequently from one place to another. That meant saying goodbye to many people, whether they were family or friends. Thus, unlike most people, I never really had the opportunity to settle in any one place and develop deep, meaningful, long-term relationships. In the back of my mind, goodbye was always around the corner, so I learned to cherish what I had while it lasted.

Thus, because of those experiences, I deeply cherish my connections with people. I make sure to let them know that they are someone I love and appreciate, because I learned early in my life that you never know when your last goodbye with someone may be.

**How Did I Get Here?**

Growing up, I had a myriad of interests. I would often jump from interest to interest, from something very physical like basketball, to something more artistic, like origami. Because of that, I became a jack of all trades, master of none. However, an interest that remained consistent throughout my years in primary and intermediate school was STEM. I was always very involved in STEM, primarily because my friends were interested in it, and it was engaging enough that I could spend a significant amount of time on it. Something about tinkering with robots to achieve a mundane task, such as picking up a wooden block, piqued my interest. Additionally, the friends I made while pursuing that interest made it worthwhile. So, why not, I thought. Thus, my decision to commit to a gifted magnet high school specializing in STEM education was cemented.

While I was there, I explored various areas of STEM, including coding and engineering drafting. And like with all of my other interests, I quickly got bored and moved on to the next thing that caught my attention, again becoming a jack of all trades, master of none. However, what struck my interest the most was cybersecurity. I found cybersecurity to be a great blend of both technical and social skills, areas in which I excel. That interest, I largely attribute to having had a great mentor during that period, Mr. Alberson, a former cybersecurity professional who delved into the world of teaching students like me, who were often slimy and bratty.

Now, Mr. Alberson was quite a character. He was unlike other teachers in that he didn’t care about the status quo. So he did whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. It was probably because he was old and was about to retire, but that’s besides the point.

Under his mentorship, I gained a wealth of knowledge about the world of cybersecurity. From analyzing packets from a network using Wireshark to gaining access to a virtual machine using Metasploit, we dove very deeply into these topics. We learned things we wouldn’t have otherwise learned had he decided to conform to the school’s policies. He tirelessly worked to provide us with opportunities that helped facilitate our growth in the field, even if it meant getting reprimanded by the school’s administration.

But most importantly, not only was he invested in our academic lives, but he also cared about our social lives, which earned him immense respect among us students. He ensured that we pursued things not just for the money, but also because we enjoyed it, and that we did it for the good of the people. His influence ultimately led me to Old Dominion University’s cybersecurity program, as I desired an excellent cybersecurity education and aspired to be a skilled tech professional like he was.

**Why Did I Choose Cybersecurity?**

Although my mentor was a significant influence in my decision to pursue cybersecurity, there were several other factors that contributed to my decision. I decided to pursue a career in cybersecurity due to its job security. Growing up with first-generation immigrant parents, there were a lot of moments during my childhood in which we struggled to make ends meet. Because of that, I missed out on opportunities other kids my age seemed to have, like getting to travel with their family and friends. When I have a family of my own, I don’t want to be in that position. I don’t want to be in a position where I have to deny my kids opportunities simply because we wouldn’t have enough money for something like groceries and bills. I want to be able to give them everything they need. I want to provide them with a foundation.

With that being said, I also don’t want to miss out on key moments of my family, something that my dad had to sacrifice to provide for us. Growing up, I didn’t get to spend much time with my dad because he was always working. He worked multiple jobs to ensure we had more than enough for ourselves. Thus, he was mostly absent, and my mom was left to maintain order in our household. I want to be in a good financial position so that I can be more involved in my family’s lives. I want to be there for certain milestones, such as my kids' birthday parties and their graduation ceremonies. I want to have the time and energy to dedicate to my kids when they have their first crush or get their driver's license.

Time is something that cannot be bought. It will keep ticking and ticking, until eventually you run out of it. So, I want to spend it on the things that matter to me the most, which are the people in my life.

Pursuing a career in cybersecurity will not only allow me these opportunities, but the work I do will also give others those opportunities as well. The rising use of technology has opened up people to a world full of possibilities. However, these possibilities are not only limited to opportunities, but also to new kinds of threats and vulnerabilities that can be very damaging if you’re not careful. Something as simple as a vishing attempt, which is a scam done through a phone call, could potentially fool someone who’s not careful and cause them to lose a lot of money because they thought that the call was legitimate. Those kinds of situations are unfortunately quite common nowadays, and I know someone who fell victim to this scam and lost their job as a result, a job in which they greatly enjoyed and were surrounded by some very good friends. Thus, I would like to do my part in preventing that from happening to others.

**Conclusion**

When I reflect on my journey from the ever-changing life of a military child to discovering cybersecurity through a passionate mentor and witnessing the financial and emotional challenges my family endured, I now see how each experience has shaped not only my goals but also my purpose. My upbringing instilled in me a deep appreciation for people and relationships, and my exposure to technology taught me how those connections can be protected or lost in the digital world. Cybersecurity isn’t just a career for me. It’s a way to ensure that others can live their lives safely and securely, without having their futures disrupted by avoidable threats. More than anything, I want a life where I can support my future family and be present for them in ways my parents couldn’t always be for me. Choosing cybersecurity is my way of building that life, while also helping others protect the things and people they care about. This is my “why,” and I carry it with purpose into every decision I make.

**References**

McAdams, D. P. (2014, October 7). *The two kinds of stories we tell about ourselves*. TED Ideas.<https://ideas.ted.com/the-two-kinds-of-stories-we-tell-about-ourselves/>