

Personal Narrative

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Introduction:

Considering how drastically people change throughout their lives, it's beneficial to take some time to reflect on the past and understand how the shifts in our lives have impacted our present selves. This paper will be a personal narrative that describes various influences and chapters of my past that led me to choose the path I'm currently pursuing; more specifically, the factors that created my interest in the field of cybersecurity. As Nguyen (2013) states, "A critical hermeneutic approach may provide new opportunities for understanding and action in higher education." By writing this paper and reflecting on my past, I aim to gather a more cohesive understanding of myself based on the choices I've made and the experiences throughout my life that led to my decision of obtaining a bachelor's degree in cybersecurity. Further, through looking back at my past, I hope to determine a better idea of what I aim to accomplish in the future.

Early Life Experiences:

Being born in 2003, I grew up in a world that was becoming increasingly dependent on technology. For example, instead of going outside to interact with others in the neighborhood, many of the kids that were my age were more interested in the virtual worlds provided through video games. I have always considered myself a shy person, and throughout grade school I struggled to make friends and connect with others that were my age. I often found myself taking refuge in video games and other forms of digital media to account for my lack of a social circle. By the time I was in middle school, I had a handful of friends, and we all shared a common interest in video games. This was around the time that I started playing online multiplayer games

with others, and in doing so, I started to become curious about the underlying processes of video games, such as programming, animation, connecting to an online server, etc.

When I started high school, I still held my interest in digital media and technology, but I began to develop an interest in sports and physical activity. I decided to try out for the volleyball team my freshman year of high school, and I earned a position on the JV team. Being a part of a sports team helped me to develop my social skills, as it allowed me to experience the effects of teamwork. Receiving advice and training from my coaches and fellow teammates taught me a valuable lesson that feedback from others is critical for improving myself as an individual. This experience had an impact on the types of job fields I was interested in pursuing. Due to the positive influence I gained through constructive criticism, I determined that I wanted an occupation where I'd be working with others in a collaborative environment.

I've always done well academically, but math was by far the subject that I excelled at throughout my years of education. Working with numbers is like a second nature to me, so during my high school career, I came to the conclusion that I would like to pursue a career path that involved some form of arithmetic. The top three options I had in mind were video game design (based on my passion for gaming), accounting, or engineering (based on my math skills).

The Covid-19 Pandemic:

In early 2020, I was in the second half of my sophomore year of high school when the corona virus outbreak shut down the United States. It felt like the world had been turned upside down because nobody was prepared or equipped for how the pandemic changed society. School became entirely virtual, and I felt like my education was stunted by this because I had trouble focusing on the material during online class meetings. During that time, life became very

difficult for the world as a whole, and I had strong feelings of isolation because it was not safe to meet up with friends or relatives. This, in turn, had a negative impact on my mental health, and I started picking up some bad habits. I became extremely unmotivated when it came to anything, and this led me to neglect my responsibilities as a student.

A redemptive story is a period within a person's narrative that begins in a negative light, but ends with a fruitful outcome (Smith, 2017). I would consider this time of my life as a redemptive story, as I was still able to gather some positive takeaways from this experience. Firstly, the value of relationships became clearer to me. I learned not to take friendships for granted and to cherish the connections that we as people create with one another. Additionally, the importance of technology as the backbone of our society became solidified. Without technology, people across the world would have been unable to communicate, continue their education, or keep their businesses afloat during the shutdowns.

Post-Secondary Education:

Once I had graduated from high school, I had already decided that I would start attending Tidewater Community College (TCC) for two years and then transfer to Old Dominion University (ODU) to finish the remaining two years required for obtaining a bachelor's degree. Initially, I was attending TCC as an electrical engineering student; this choice was due to my interest in technology and math, as well as an influence from my father who graduated from ODU with a degree in mechanical engineering. However, after the first couple of weeks in the engineering program, I quickly realized that this field did not align with my particular interests. I decided to opt out of the program and continue my career at TCC in general studies while I put some more thought into the career path I wanted to dedicate myself to.

According to McAdams (2001), thematic coherence can be described as the development of one's life being linked to common themes or inherent values. With technology being such a recurring theme throughout my upbringing, I was certain that I wanted an occupation relating to technical systems. Furthermore, my parents always exemplified to my siblings and I that being reliable when others need someone to depend on is an important value to uphold. This belief alongside my enthusiasm for technology can be attributed to my choice of cybersecurity as my field of study at ODU, as I can apply my technical aptitude in a way that will help others.

The past couple years as a student at ODU have been rewarding. I've been introduced to many concepts relating to cybersecurity that I was entirely unaware of prior to my education at ODU. From my recent academic experiences as a cybersecurity undergraduate, one thing that stands out the most to me is that this field is continuously evolving, as new technology is developed, new vulnerabilities become apparent. Therefore, cybersecurity requires a diverse range of knowledge and skills when it comes to securing systems, identifying threats, and mitigating attacks.

Conclusion:

My choice to pursue cybersecurity as my career path can be seen as a culmination of major themes, beliefs, and experiences I've become accustomed to. Since technology can be considered a crucial aspect of modern society, I figured that receiving an education in securing and defending these systems would be greatly beneficial. Once I complete my college education, I hope to apply the skills and knowledge I've acquired over the years to support individuals and companies in a world that operates on technology.

References:

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