

Personal Narrative Essay

IDS 493

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Abstract

In this essay, I am looking to give some insight into pivotal times in my academic career that led to my ultimate decision to pursue a career in Cybersecurity. I will be starting the timeline from my middle school years in 2016. This will encompass the steps that led me to consider Cybersecurity as a career path and then it will describe the difficult process of finding the right path for myself in the broad and partially uncertain field of Cybersecurity. I believe that this narrative will give me a great chance to tell my story while also giving me a way to reflect and rekindle the exciting flame of discovering my desired career path.

From an early age, I was drawn to technology, but it wasn't until specific academic experiences, influential mentors, and exposure to real-world applications that I solidified my commitment to Cybersecurity. The journey involved trial and error, moments of self-doubt, and ultimately a growing passion for problem-solving and digital defense. My narrative will explore how coursework, extracurricular activities, and professional opportunities gradually shaped my perspective, pushing me toward this dynamic and ever-evolving field.

Additionally, I will reflect on the broader societal importance of Cybersecurity, recognizing the increasing demand for professionals who can navigate threats in a technology-driven world. By retracing my academic and professional steps, I hope to highlight not just my personal growth, but also the challenges and discoveries that define the path to a meaningful career in Cybersecurity.

Cybersecurity is one of the fastest growing career fields in the world as it grows just as fast as technology which has dominated the 2000s and only looks to have continued exponential growth in the coming centuries. As I grew up, I had no insight or thought of what cybersecurity was, and some could even say I was oblivious to its existence. It was not until I became a victim at the early age of twelve that I understood the devastation and destruction that is possible without a proper understanding of how Cybersecurity works and protects all of us. My experience dealt with me playing a video game and falling for a phishing scam which led to me losing all access to my account for nearly twelve hours. It caused me to have a sleepless night worried about what I had done and how I would be able to get my account with thousands of dollars worth of value back. Luckily, there was an incredible Cybersecurity professional there to answer my call and they were able to reverse all control back to me, and the scammer was banned for life. This experience then sparked an interest that completely changed the course of my academic journey and career path.

Fast forward through the rest of my middle school and high school years, we arrived at my college years and it was here that I learned the difference between dreams and reality. When beginning my first semester of college, I was new and excited to be pursuing my dreams. However, things quickly changed in my second semester, as I began to do coursework related to Cybersecurity. I noticed how much further behind I was compared to the other students in my class as well as how much less I felt drawn to the people in the field. This disconnect led to me losing care and hope as I settled for worse grades and gave up on trying my best like I had known for so long in my academic career. For the first time, I faced a hurdle too great for myself and I came to terms with not being good enough. That was until the following Summer when everything changed.

As the Summer arrived, I earned a promotion in my job and began to forget about the failures of my recent Spring semester. However, the carelessness quickly faded once I received an email from the Old Dominion University Office of Financial Student Aid, stating that I lost my presidential scholarship worth eight thousand dollars a year. This threw an incredible wrench into all of my dreams as all I worked for in my primary school years seemed to mean nothing as I gave up and paid a seemingly insurmountable price. With the horrible weight of my second semester weighing on my shoulders, I began to debate taking a gap year or even giving up altogether because I believed there was no way to recover to afford my college education. The situation forced me to lean to my parents to ask for help and they gave me the advice to continue even though I lost a key scholarship. With that support and my work efforts, I accumulated more wealth that gave me hope to be able to afford my education. Unfortunately, it only became more complicated as the Summer came to an end.

As the end of the Summer quickly approached, I began thinking about how much the cost of college would be since I lost my scholarship, so it would often lead to me checking the financial aid portal. Sadly, there was no financial aid for me to be found due to how badly my GPA dropped from the previous semester. It was at that moment when I called a financial aid advisor and I almost had to give up on my dreams again. After hours of conversation with the advisor and a couple of tears, I was able to get the maximum amount of aid to then give me the one more chance I wanted for my dream. It was through these experiences that I knew that I truly cared for my dream and I knew it was up to me to create the reality I so badly wanted.

I believe that my story relates closely to an idea from an article by D.P. McAdams, as my story presents a narrative that “transforms or redeems bad scenes into good outcomes (McAdams 2001).” This is because my story involves hardship after hardship until it leads to a satisfying

ending. Later in the article McAdams also mentions the idea of “redemptive sequences (bad scenes are transformed into good outcomes) (McAdams 2001).” In my story, I encountered multiple redemptive sequences that gave way to the beginning and continuation of my career path. McAdams defines the effect of these sequences as a way to provide hope that the future will have better outcomes (McAdams 2001). This is mimicked for me through my newfound commitment to my career path and the amount of passion to have a successful future I now know compared to the dreadful feelings of my past.

These experiences have given me a great deal of self-appreciation as they displayed my resilience and my determination to pursue my dreams even when I could no longer see them. Looking back and now seeing where I am today is a testament to who I am and how I would like to have my academic career remembered. With this essay, I feel more empowered to do well and to finish these last few semesters with my head held high knowing that I am in the homestretch. The obstacles faced have given me the privilege to have these stories that I hope I can use to inspire others as I continue to pursue my future in the Cybersecurity field.

References

McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2)