

Personal Narrative Essay

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Introduction: Personal Narrative Essay

My academic path certainly deviates from the typical one of most students, but I take solace in the fact that I have met other students treading down that alternative path with me. I would like to use this reflective essay to explain my past—and experiences along the way that have gotten me to where I am today. I will go through personal experiences in the present, including the triumphs and tribulations I am currently facing. And to close, I will discuss where I plan on going, even if this fickle life seems to have a mind of its own when it comes to personal plans.

Past

As alluded to in the opening paragraph, my academic experience is atypical—but certainly not unique—from what most students will experience in their post-high school years. I graduated from a small private Baptist school in Fredericksburg, VA in 2007. For financial reasons, I was encouraged by my parents to attend a local community college (Germanna Community College) in order to obtain my associate degree in Business Administration before transferring to a four-year university. This experience was a good one, and I think staying local while attending classes was the ideal move for me in those young years. After obtaining my associate degree in 2009, I took a year off to consider my future and where I wanted to attend next. I ultimately decided on James Madison University, largely in part because my best friend at the time attended there. Unfortunately, at the age of twenty-one, I did not have the maturity to pursue classes with the diligence and work ethic required to succeed, and as a result, floundered for two years before finally deciding to withdraw from the university. During that time, I had switched from being a

business major to a biology major. This is an important note because it helped me decide on my next course of action. Medical or physician assistant school was on my radar for the future, but I knew I had neither the grades nor experience. To help remedy this, I enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 2015 as a hospital corpsman, hoping to get the medical experience I required as well as the GI bill for further education down the road. I specifically worked as a medical laboratory technician at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, where I truly learned the meaning of hard work through many night shifts, doubles, and high patient volume.

I enjoyed my time in the Navy, and while it was certainly not always the most joyous experience, I got to take part in events that I will always fondly look back on and be proud of. Taking part in two humanitarian missions in 2018 and 2019 aboard the USNS Comfort for a total of eight months while visiting fifteen countries changed my perspective dramatically. The missions saw the completion of thousands of successful surgeries performed throughout South America and the Caribbean, as well as additional medical care being provided through medication, physical aid, and eyeglasses, to name a few.

At some point during my five-year enlistment, my goals and interests shifted. While I very much enjoyed working as a medical laboratory technician, I was also cognizant of the fact it was not a career for me. My enlistment ended in March of 2020, but by that time I had settled on what I wanted to pursue: cybersecurity at Old Dominion University.

Present

As I write this essay in Fall of 2022, I am poised to graduate in the Spring of 2023 with a bachelor's degree in Cybersecurity. It has been a long and arduous journey, but the feeling of being so close is immensely satisfying and I have no doubt will feel just as cathartic when I

receive my diploma. As I reflect on my past couple here at Old Dominion University, I am grateful for the work ethic it has helped me to develop, a significant issue for me during my first college stint at JMU many years ago. Long days of work with school, meeting deadlines, and personal study have all contributed to making me not just a more well-rounded student, but also a person.

My days are busy but gratifying. In addition to coursework, I am trying to be diligent with as much self-study as I can to give myself an edge for the career I am about to embark on. To give some examples: I am studying for my Security+ certification, as I have been encouraged by friends to do so because many jobs desire—if not outright require—it. Additionally, I have been working on my ePortfolio with artifacts and shown knowledge of skills that I can use to promote myself better to future employers.

Employment is also something I am actively pursuing. I have been fortunate to maintain my part-time job as medical laboratory technician as I continue to look for work in a cybersecurity-related field. Seeing as I only have two classes left to complete this coming Spring semester, I have been looking primarily for full-time employment. I maintain part-time work as medical laboratory technician for a great company but am looking for the transition to full-time employment in this field as I approach graduation in the Spring.

Future

In this section, I would like to layout my current five-year career plan. I first plan on looking for an entry-level position as helpdesk personnel or an entry-level security analyst position. I believe there are merits to starting in either of these positions. For starters, the helpdesk position, while not being necessarily cybersecurity-oriented in nature, would give me a solid foundation for how

IT/Cybersecurity synergize on the ground-level. It would strengthen my learned IT knowledge by giving me the hands-on experience I am looking for. Alternatively, starting as a junior information security analyst would give me a similar foundation to build upon for my career. As the five-year timeframe draws to a close, I would like to be working in an intermediate capacity for security analyst, ideally around level II. Additionally, I would like to expand my skills to include more certifications, primarily focusing on cloud-oriented skills and development, as I believe these fields will become increasingly prominent in the coming years. The entrepreneurial spirit in me stays alive in the hope that, once I have obtained a satisfactory amount of knowledge—and can one ever truly be ready—I will start my own cloud-based security firm.

These are goals, plans, and good intentions. As mentioned in my opening, life has a unique way of taking you down a path you didn't see at the time, but thankfully, providing help to aid you in this unforeseen fork in the road. My parents are college graduates (with my dad holding a PhD in physics) and five of my six younger siblings have graduated with their bachelor's degrees already. I have found through age and experience the path of progression is never perfectly linear. It is, however, always worth it.

In closing, I would like to thank whoever reads this reflective essay, as it is my humble attempt in recounting my post-high school life to present times, with a brief summation of my coming goals.