

**Personal Narrative**

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### **Personal Narrative**

I would have never believed that a momentary outburst of rage at having a computer blown up would spark the story of my life to come. It began when I was thirteen years old. Our family computer crashed when I attempted to put a game on it. I rebooted it repeatedly, each time trying to fix it with failure. Instead of accepting defeat, I turned to the internet forums for a solution. It took hours to discover disk partitions, drivers, and safe mode. Not only had I fixed the problem, but I knew what was happening. That night, I realized that technology was not a machine. It was a problem to be solved. We become clear about who we are through the creation of life stories that connect the past and the future, as McAdams (2001) suggests. That computer crash was just one of dozens of origin moments that would eventually merge into a larger quest, my foray into cybersecurity.

### **Early Interest Meets True Purpose**

By my high school years, curiosity had turned into passion. I was involved with the computer club and took an introduction to information systems class. When I finally set up my first small home network, it felt like I had unlocked a hidden world. Learning about firewalls and how to protect systems from intrusion fascinated me. I realized technology was more than just creating software; it was about securing it and protect people. The most thrilling thing I did that year was build a basic login system that stored hashed passwords. It was rudimentary, but it gave me a glimpse into how authentication worked and how easily systems could be compromised without proper safeguards. I spent late nights refining it, adding simple encryption features and learning about vulnerabilities. That project was not just an assignment but an epiphany about what I could do with technology. I started to think bigger: What if I could create systems that protected organizations and individuals from threats? That question became the beginning of my

journey. My identity did not form independently; it was shaped by involvement in school clubs, group projects, and online communities devoted to ethical hacking and security. I began to consider myself as someone who could not only work with technology but also make it safer, more efficient, and more trustworthy.

### **Starting College**

When I began college, I was learning cybersecurity with a mix of apprehension and excitement. I was looking forward to the same rush of discovery I had felt in high school. But my freshman semester was such a crash into a brick wall. In my *Cybersecurity Technology & Society* (CYSE 200T) and *Data Structures* (DASC 205S) classes, I struggled. Concepts like secure network configuration, memory management, and Linux permissions often left me confused and intimidated. I lost the sense of confidence I had when I was the “tech whiz” among my friends. Yet something inside me refused to give up. I started going to tutoring sessions, joining study groups, and spending hours watching online lectures about system security and networking fundamentals. I learned to break problems down into smaller parts, walk through them step by step, and ask for help. Over time, I realized I was not only learning to configure secure systems or debug code; I was learning to think like a cybersecurity professional.

McAdams (2001) informs us that narrative identity will incorporate redemptive sequences, in which previous adversity is reinterpreted as development. My college struggles early on were not signs of defeat, but determination. It served as a reminder that effort, not ability, makes an individual successful in this career. I began building my ePortfolio during this period. Nguyen (2013) argues that ePortfolios allow students to track learning and identity development across the duration of studies. As I documented projects and reflections, my path

began to form. The portfolio was not just a catalogue of what I had done but showed what I was creating and let me connect my developing skills to a greater mission.

### **Projects and Coursework**

Although I have not yet completed an internship, I have sought every opportunity to build practical experience through coursework and independent study. For example, in *Introduction to Cybersecurity* (CYSE 300) and *Cybersecurity Fundamentals* (CYSE 462), I learned about intrusion detection systems, incident response planning, and penetration testing. Completing labs that simulated cyberattacks was both nerve-wracking and exhilarating. One lab required configuring a Linux server to repel brute-force attacks, and after multiple attempts and reconfigurations, I finally succeeded in hardening the system. Another formative experience was *Cybersecurity Ethics* (PHIL 355E), where I reflected on the moral responsibility that comes with this field. Discussing real-world cases of data breaches and privacy violations showed me that technical skills alone are not enough. Professionals must also understand the societal impact of their work and make decisions with integrity. Among the most rewarding projects I have completed so far was in *Linux Systems for Cybersecurity* (CYSE 270), where I built a secure file server and practiced configuring access controls. It was the first time I felt fully in command of a system, from installation to hardening to monitoring. Though it was a class project, it felt like a small step toward the professional world I hope to join.

### **Building with Empathy**

In my upcoming *Cybersecurity Strategy and Policy* (CYSE 425W) course, I look forward to exploring not just the technical side of security but also the human element. I hope to learn how policies shape security culture and how vital it is to communicate risks clearly and actionable. This class will help reinforce what I've already come to understand: cybersecurity is

not just about locking down systems; it is about building trust and protecting communities.

While I have not yet had an internship, I am eager to gain real-world experience. My goal is to join an organization where I can apply what I have learned in the classroom to secure networks, respond to incidents, and contribute to safer systems. I have been researching opportunities to intern in vulnerability assessment and compliance, and I am committed to developing the practical skills that will prepare me to make a difference. Nguyen (2013) cites that ePortfolios record student abilities, social responsibility, and values. As I add each project and reflection to my portfolio, I see a path forming toward a career built on protecting people and organizations. My coursework in cybersecurity law has already sparked my interest in ethical decision-making and fair systems design, and I hope to expand on that understanding in the policy class next semester.

### **Looking Ahead**

As I approach graduation, I reflect on how much I have learned—technically, personally, and ethically. I am no longer defined by one project or one skill. My story is one of curiosity, setbacks, determination, and growth. My ePortfolio has become more than a collection of assignments; it is a living record of my identity as a future cybersecurity professional. Every configuration file I wrote, every lab I completed, and every reflection I documented is another chapter in the narrative I am building about myself. I aspire to work in cybersecurity operations or threat analysis, where I can combine my technical problem-solving abilities with a commitment to protecting people's privacy and security. My long-term goal is to contribute to the development of security frameworks that help organizations build resilience against emerging threats. I am also interested in mentoring new students entering this field, because sharing our stories helps us define who we are and inspires others to begin their own journeys. As McAdams

(2001) describes narrative identity as shaped by agency and communion, acting while also connecting with others. My path has been about both: the drive to understand and improve technology, and the wish to protect and support the people who rely on it. From that first moment when I repaired a broken computer as a teenager to the complex systems I configure today, I have been guided by curiosity and the conviction that security is ultimately about caring for others.

### References

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