Personal Narrative Essay

A Winding Journey to Choosing Cybersecurity

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Introduction

Who is Jonathan Morales? Currently I am a senior at Old Dominion University (ODU) majoring in cybersecurity. While that sounds very simple, I've taken a long journey to get where I am that has only begun. The goal of this paper is to reflect and tell the tale of how I came to choosing cybersecurity as my major and steps I have taken to achieve where I am today. While also looking at these events through the lenses of newfound concepts. One concept that is important for the rest of the paper stated by Celeste Nguyen in her writing called, "The ePortfolio as a Living Portal: A Medium for Student Learning, Identity, and Assessment", stated that, "research, based on the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (1984, 1992), viewed the ePortfolio as a medium in which students can learn about self and the world. New understandings expand one's horizon, bringing about new ways of living". By using this principle at the end of the paper, and many more, I'll be able to reflect and come to new understandings.

My Introduction to Cybersecurity

Traveling back long ago into my past, my journey to discovering and pursuing cybersecurity took many years. Starting back to when I was in eighth and ninth grade playing video games my friends had shown me how to pull the IP addresses of other people in my game and Xbox party and then use that IP in a botnet to studder and overload someone's internet. At that point in time, I had no actual clue what I was doing but only how to do the process I was taught without the logical and technical knowledge behind it. But by doing this I was introduced to cybersecurity, computers, and networking. Doing this at the time really fascinated me but I was still set on becoming an engineer of some sort.

Fast forward to sophomore year in high school two major events took place. One being I took a general engineering course and one of the objectives covered computers and coding. In the class we learned how to code our own little video game and create our own level making me fall in love with computers and enjoy the things I could do with them but not know exactly what I would like to do with this passion. A little after this introduction and newfound love for computers an organization did a speech at my school. The organization was called ATC (The Advanced Technology Center) and by applying to this program you would spend haft of your day on the TCC (Tidewater Community College) campus working in a state-of-the-art lab focusing on a specific study and then drive back to your high school to complete the rest of your day. A couple of the programs provided caught my eye, so I attended their open house and found three information technology classes offered that I really liked and applied for. As fate would have it, I got accepted into my number one choice and from my junior and senior year in high school I would split my days

haft and haft at my school and at TCC attending the class called Cybersecurity Systems Technology.

Finally, Cybersecurity

While attending this new class at ATC the course was designed to follow the CompTIA A+ certification in the first year and the CompTIA Net+ certification in the second year. Two industry leading certifications in information technology sought after by many employers. At ATC we would spend our time studying and learning what's on these certifications to eventually be given a certification voucher by the school to take the test. However, while I spent my time studying at ATC a consistent extremely intriguing topic was glanced upon in many sections of my studies. This being cybersecurity, and my brain at this time finally made the connection between what I found so cool as a kid and what it could be as a profession.

Unfortunately, I failed to pass the A+ certification but I had changed what I wanted to do initially with computers to cybersecurity. After graduating high school and ATC, I perused my education at TCC once again. Selecting cybersecurity as my major I was told of a transfer program between TCC and my current school now ODU (Old Dominion University) where the credits needed to get a associates degree in cybersecurity directly transfer over to build upon to obtain a bachelor's degree in cybersecurity. During my time studying at TCC to get my associate's many of the classes exposed me to not only the basics of cybersecurity but the reality of what jobs and different paths you can take in cybersecurity. This is where I chose my career I wanted to work towards in cybersecurity and my ideal job. I created a plan to initially become a cybersecurity threat analyst while

building a resume and work experience to get my dream job of penetration testing. Allowing me to further narrow down what classes I needed to take and what skills I need to aim my schooling towards.

During the summer of 2023 I graduated with an associates degree in cybersecurity from TCC and immediately transferred to ODU to continue my education and obtain my Bachelor's in cybersecurity where I am today.

Newfound Connections

Proceeding with my time at ODU I've been able to meet many new people and work professionals that have helped mentor me and grow. One organization I have worked with closely is called CyberLINC. CyberLINC is a nonprofit organization with the goal of helping all types of people with different backgrounds gear themselves for a career in cybersecurity. By attending their meetings and classes I have exponentially gained professional social skills and guidance on steps to take next. Through CyberLINC I have revised and edited my resume to more accurately fit my achievements for my job in cybersecurity. As well as meeting Richard Puckett the Chief Security Officer for the company Boeing along with many other cybersecurity staff members for Boeing. This has led to future job opportunities in cybersecurity being presented to me that I would have never previously had without working with this organization.

Conclusions

Recalling to the concept stated in the introduction through writing my story I can see in specific events where that exact concept has applied. This essay being part of my ePortfolio allows me to use it to reflect. As I've gotten older and was able to narrow down

what I wanted to study and then what job I wanted to achieve in my field of study slowly but surely, I changed my way of life to adhere to these goals. Every time my horizon was expanded with a new topic to discover I changed my lifestyle. For example, once I figured out, I wanted to do something information technology related I took the chance to change my life completely and attend a program to learn. Even now I can see lifestyle changes I've made to better fit into becoming a cybersecurity professional like staying up to date with security breaches, known methods used by hackers, and cybersecurity conferences. All of which I would have never done in the earlier stages of my cybersecurity journey.

Another conclusion I was able to realize using Emily Smith's concept stated in her TED talk called *The two kinds of stories we tell about ourselves*, said, "By taking the disparate pieces of our lives and placing them together into a narrative, we create a unified whole that allows us to understand our lives as coherent — and coherence, psychologists say, is a key source of meaning." Using this concept and going back and reflecting on my journey to cybersecurity I was then able to see how all along I had known what I was searching for but didn't know what it was. From the very beginning computers and hacking had been fascinating but I had never known I could make it a career. Then I finally found out and was able to begin my journey and now have a goal to target.

References

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