Personal Narrative Essay

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Abstract

A personal narrative is derived from coherent stories, which in turn require themes, setting, and plot. This narrative allows for greater reflection; a more concrete past allows for chartable futures. This personal narrative essay establishes four distinct time stories, weaving them together.

Keywords: Personal Narrative, College, Internship

Personal Narrative Essay

Throughout this course, we've delved into many different ways to express and understand the self as well as apply this understanding to our ePortfolios. Reflection has been one of the most potent ways to foster goals, recognize achievements, and continually improve ourselves. This reflection is spurred by artifacts, allowing us to distill a massive plethora of work into tangible, itemized hard and soft skills. This result is our narrative identity, accentuated by Nguyen as "…the significance of expressing our lives through stories." (Nguyen, 2013). This paper aims to illuminate my personal narrative, spanning from high school to current day. My goal is to impress upon the reader the importance of certain events that dictated my career path and academic successes and tribulations. Though it may not be perfect, I believe I can categorize this narrative into four distinct segments, my academics prior to ODU, freshman semester, my struggles with the CompTIA certification, and my internship experience. Each section consists of unique stages of my life at college, all essential to who I am as a person, my personal narrative. As per the rubric, I aim to keep the paper semi-casual but informative to convey my identity as McAdams states "…identity itself takes the form of a story, complete with settings, scenes, character, plot, and theme." (McAdams, 2001) Our ePortfolio project has been a daunting endeavor, but with greater reflection channeled through works like the personal narrative essay, I've be able to solidify a more coherent past to forge a more focused and productive future.

Academics Prior to ODU and Determining Major

When considering the academics of my generation, one wouldn't define it as traditional by any means. From Covid to online learning, there were numerous shifts in how the school system operated. I was homeschooled the majority of my life, and this didn't change during high

school. My learning consisted mainly of at-home instruction, but there were times I needed more advanced curriculum. A co-op supplemented my learning that couldn't be taught at home. The classes consisted of hybrid learning; classes weren't taught on a day-to-day basis. Looking back, this greatly prepared me for my college classes, as the assignment structure and class times mimicked an average college workload. It was during this time my parents and I had a serious discussion about my future. All my life I wanted to serve in the U.S army as an infantry officer, just as my father did. My parents weren't directly opposed to this but wanted me to get a skill or technical job that I could do after leaving the military. At the time, I was never apt in computers, but they piqued my interest. After deliberating, we settled on cybersecurity, as it involved computers and had military application. With a general idea of my education set, we had to plan around COVID, which was still ravaging the country. As collegiate institutions were included in this mayhem, I opted for Tidewater Community College, or TCC, to get a head start on my degree. During my senior year of High School, I took all of my classes at TCC, applying the skills I learned from the co-op and from home. This stint at TCC solidified my soft skills of time management, discipline and attention to detail. With a year of college under my belt, I applied to Old Dominion University's Cybersecurity program. I was accepted, and my bachelor's degree began.

Beginning Academics at ODU

Even though I had preparation from TCC, Old Dominion University was still a shock. Moving from my parent's house to the dorms was a completely new experience, having never spent an extended period of time away from home. This paired with an upheaval of my social group and continual assignments made it rather challenging to get a solid footing. Despite this, I dug deep and pushed forward with my course work. As the first two semesters went on, the

school schedule turned from maelstrom to a visible track. Communication with professors was essential; the more you communicated and understood their expectation, the smoother the class would be. I began to understand how to learn at a four-year institution, and how to work with the system. Freshman year came to a crescendo in the spring. One class in particular was extremely involved and pertained to programming. This class tested my ability to learn and grasp cyber related concepts; in my mind, it was the class that decided if cybersecurity was for me. The final project required many late nights of planning, writing, and physical scripting, with multiple code reviews, sometimes line by line. After hours of optimizing and troubleshooting, I submitted the assignment. I received an A. This achievement strengthened my resolve and taught me that if I put my mind to a task, I could complete it, learning new topics along the way. It was at this point I considered being a life-long learner one of the most essential things to be not only in cybersecurity, but life in general.

CompTIA Endeavor

One of the crowning achievements of a cybersecurity practitioner is to be certified. It is one thing to be in the field, but to be recognized by a global organization for your proficiency in the cyber subject matter is monumental. After freshman year, I devoted my studies to becoming certified underneath CompTIA's Security+ program. This is the premier cyber certification, required by governments and corporations alike for its coverage of industry standard technologies and security practices. Determined, I trudged through the summer, dealing with more uncertainty and struggle. During this period, I got a new job, moved into a house, and began summer classes. My schedule was packed. I forwent pleasures, trips and fun, dedicating myself to this certification. It involved staying at the library some days upwards of 10 hours, banging my head into the table while working on practice questions. As the days grew closer, I

began getting more and more flustered, as the practice scores I kept getting were just below the passing rate. On test day, I was imbued with great courage and confidence, I felt all my hard work from the semester and the summer was coming to a head. After an hour-long mental gauntlet, I passed. This milestone further strengthened the belief that cybersecurity was for me and solidified the concept of life-long learning.

Internship to Job

Rewinding the clocks, I'd like to discuss the internship turned job I attained in the summer of 2023. As previously mentioned, the overarching goal of that summer was to achieve the Security+ certification. Secondarily, I had plans to get employment within the cybersecurity field. I put myself out there, applying online and going to job fairs hosted by the university. At one fair, I noticed a booth with the name 'IPConfigure'. Their display immediately piqued my interest, and I soon after applied for their assembly position. This was the first job I considered a "real job". Prior to this, I'd worked manual labor and kitchen staff roles, nothing requiring advanced skills. The interview process seemed a formality, as they appreciated the resume. I was to start work the next week. The company focused mainly on Video Management Systems, or VMS, which controlled security cameras and centralized their management. My task was to build and configure the servers our applications would be hosted on. During my stint as an assembler, I built thousands of servers and learned a vast amount of hardware knowledge. I attribute this work to part of the reason I passed Security+, as some questions pertained to the systems and components I worked with daily. For months, I continually worked above board and passed all assembler proficiency markers. During my 6-month review, they recognized my achievements and congratulated me on my recently obtained certification and offered me a job in customer operations. This further solidified the notion that if I just worked hard enough, those

around me would recognize this and give me more responsibility and commend

accomplishments.

When drafting this narrative essay, there were many experiences to pull from. There have

been many impactful moments in my life; from boy scouts to moving around as a military

family, there's been lots of experiences. Despite this, I believe that 2023 and the years leading up

to it were the most impactful. My prior experience through homeschool and TCC instilled in me

unorthodox education styles, allowing me flexibility and adaptability when going to ODU. These

early experiences set the course for cybersecurity. From here, one of the most impactful classes

in my fledging year at ODU sealed my decision on cybersecurity. This all came to a head with

the CompTIA certification, where I poured hours into learning all the subject matter required to

become a security professional in the cyber realm. Lastly, I discussed my internship turned job,

where I was able to garner a greater appreciation and foothold in the cyber industry. This

personal narrative aimed to highlight some of the defining moments of my pre-college to college

life, illuminating the reasons on why I study the way I do, and how I'm enamored with

cybersecurity.

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