

The Journey Until Now: A Personal Narrative

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Abstract

This personal narrative examines how an unexpected change after high school, years of practical work, and an interdisciplinary education shaped my career direction. I graduated at 17 expecting to enter the military, but eczema made that plan basically impossible. Rather than discovering one dramatic calling, I built a career by taking responsibility, solving the problems in front of me, and adjusting when a path no longer fit. My work in sales purchasing, accounting, procurement, and local government gradually revealed that I am most engaged by tangible problems involving evidence, systems, money, and public service. My studies in cybercrime, sociology, criminal justice, and interdisciplinary studies gave me additional ways to understand those problems. Looking back through the concept of narrative identity, I now see that a scattered path can still have a continuity. Mine is connected by initiative, practical problem-solving, adaptability, and a desire to keep moving toward greater stability and responsibility.

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A Plan That Ended Before It Began

At 17, I graduated from high school with what seemed like a straightforward plan, I hoped to join the military. The plan ended because of my eczema. I could not change the medical restriction, and there was no dramatic speech that immediately showed me what to do next, I simply had to start a career. I was living with my father, but I was responsible for my other bills, so employment was not optional. Working did not suddenly force me to grow up; I already understood that I needed to work to survive. Although, I will say that it did give me the chance to earn, save, and begin building experience when the future I expected was no longer attainable.

That beginning matters to my narrative identity because it established a pattern that has continued throughout my life. McAdams (2001) defines narrative identity as an internalized, evolving life story that integrates a person's reconstructed past and future. The military rejection did not put my life on pause, but instead it gave me another path forward. Smith (2017) explains that people make narrative choices by selecting and interpreting significant experiences. I do not see my eczema as a tragedy that ruined my life nor as a blessing. It was a limitation, I adjusted, and my life moved in another direction.

Learning Through Work

My career developed through increasing responsibility rather than one perfectly designed ladder. I worked in sales and construction contracts, project coordination, purchasing, finance, and procurement. At Window Nation, I supported more than \$15 million in annual purchasing activity while coordinating with manufacturing teams, vendors, and project

stakeholders. Those roles taught me that I work the best with tangible problems. A vendor has supplied the required documentation, or something is missing. A deadline is approaching, and the issue has to be resolved.

One of the clearest examples occurred in my current work supporting Prince William County Fire and Rescue. A vendor submitted approximately 148 invoices at once. Many were months late, and some prices did not match the related purchase orders. Processing everything without careful review could have created a substantial financial error. I compared the invoices with purchase orders and supporting records one by one, researched the differences, documented the problems, and worked through what needed correction. Near fiscal year-end, I also helped another department resolve hundreds of invoice discrepancies. These situations were not glamorous, but they showed the kind of employee I have become which is organized, willing to initiative, and committed to following an issue until it is actually resolved.

Working for local government is the professional accomplishment that means the most to me, even though I currently serve as a contingent employee. My accounting and procurement work supports a department whose employees serve the public during emergencies. I purchase materials the department needs and process college reimbursements that help firefighters contribute to their education. I am not the person responding to a fire or medical emergency, but the department still depends on accurate purchasing, payment, records, and logistical support. Public service, to me, means helping citizens through the work I am able to do well.

An Education With More Than One Discipline

My education followed the same practical and sometimes scattered pattern as my employment. I originally considered information technology because my father worked in IT. It appeared to

offer a stable path, and I assumed I might follow his example. Over time, I realized I was not built for IT in the same way he was. I did not have his passion for purely technical work. What held my attention was the intersection of crime, evidence, systems, and data. That realization did not make the technical knowledge useless; it helped me narrow what I wanted from it.

At Old Dominion University, I am in my last semester completing my Bachelor of Science with majors in Cybercrime and Sociology with a minor in Criminal Justice. Each of these areas gives me a different way to approach a problem. Cybercrime directs my attention to data, information systems, privacy, and digital evidence. Sociology helps me understand institutions, workplace behavior, inequality, and the larger social environment in which policies operate. Criminal justice adds questions about law, ethics, accountability, and public institutions. In IDS 300W, I learned that interdisciplinary work is not merely placing several subjects beside one another. It requires identifying that each discipline contributes and integrating those insights into a more complete understanding.

That integration applies directly to my employment. An invoice discrepancy may look like a basic accounting error, but resolving it can require knowledge of software, vendor behavior, contracts, policy, documentation, and communication among departments. My academic areas may look unrelated to procurement at first, but they trained me to examine evidence, recognize patterns, understand systems, and consider the people impacted by a decision. Nguyen (2013) found that ePortfolios can help students engage with others about identity, expand prior understandings, and create a coherent narrative linking the past, present, and future. Looking across my coursework and employment has helped me see that my education is not a collection of unrelated subjects. It reflects the kind of problems I prefer which are complicated, concrete problems that cannot always be understood from one perspective.

Continuing Without a Dramatic Finish

I completed college while working throughout the entire process.

Chronic health issues mean I am often exhausted, so balancing work and school has rarely felt inspirational. I did not continue because every assignment filled me with purpose. Most of the time, my reasoning was much simpler: I had to complete it, so what else was I going to do?

Financial pressure made persistence harder. I worried about paying for the associate's degree while trying to get out of debt. I also accepted that earning the degree later was part of the cost of supporting myself and developing a career at the same time.

Graduation is important primarily because the degree helps me move forward professionally. I do not expect to cross an emotional finish line and suddenly become a different person. I will most likely continue directly into a master's program. The bachelor's degree is both an accomplishment and a tool, one that can help me compete for permanent government roles, advance beyond contingent employment, and continue building stability.

If my 17-year-old self could see me now, she would be impressed that I support a local fire and rescue department, manage financial responsibilities, and completed an interdisciplinary degree while working. These experiences did not transform me into a different person. They clarified qualities that were already present because I am persistent, organized, and willing to solve difficult problems. I now understand that life itself is scattered, and living is learning how to navigate it. My narrative identity is not a perfect success story pointing toward one career. It is the story of continuing, adjusting, and making practical choices until the scattered pieces form a direction.

References

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