

How I Became the Man Today

How I Became the Man Today: Narrative Essay

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The Person that helped start it all

Since I was a young boy, many people have inspired me, but one person truly shaped my passion and direction: my grandfather, Nathaniel Davis Rogers. He was an outstanding, brilliant man and the best friend a grandson could ever ask for. He taught me so many things, and though I lost him at a young age, his legacy lives on in me through his teachings.

Nathaniel Rogers earned his bachelor's degree in computer science in his 30s, followed by his master's degree in his 40s. He later ventured into real estate, owning several apartments and houses in Norfolk, Virginia, including properties on Hampton Boulevard and Saint Dennis Avenue. He made sure to leave a will and an allowance for my brother, Terrence Massenburg, my two cousins, Jonathan Davis Rogers and Brianna Day Rogers, and me, to ensure we would be taken care of after his passing.

When I was born, the doctors told my parents they could take me home from the hospital. My mother and father asked my grandfather to take me to any beach in Virginia, and he chose Virginia Beach Oceanfront. The first sounds I heard were the melody of a steel drum, the ocean waves, the wind, the seagulls, and the chatter of the crowds on the beach. During that time, my grandfather whispered some advice into my ear, even though I was still a newborn. He told me always to tell the truth, treat others the way you want to be treated, and pursue life wherever it takes you. Those few words had a lasting impact on me and shaped who I wanted to become.

Just speaking about my grandfather makes me think of some of the amazing memories I have with him. One of those spectacular memories was around Thanksgiving when I was about 5 or 6

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years old. My parents got me a drum set and my brother an acoustic guitar. They bought me the drum set because of how interested I was in music. Sometimes, when my parents and I were on car rides, we would listen to music, but it wasn't always the popular songs—often, it was music from the 1970s and beyond, like The Gap Band, OutKast, New Edition, and Bell Biv DeVoe. I could talk about this forever. I was fascinated by the drums and would always air-drum when one of those songs came on the radio or when I was in my room.

When my parents got me the drum set, I wanted to prepare a piece for my grandparents, especially for my grandpa. I remember smiling and grinning as if it were yesterday. These are some of the best memories I have of my granddad. He was so proud of me, and my grandma always loved hearing me play the drums. But he saw that music was my passion.

Nathaniel Rogers passed away in 2008 or 2009 from leukemia. It was one of the hardest things

I've ever gone through, as I lost one of my best friends. Whenever I think about my grandmother, my mother, or what I want to achieve, I think about him. I often ask myself, "What should I do? What would my grandfather have done?" I try to envision what he would want to see his grandson accomplish—not only to make him proud but also to make myself proud.

The reason I chose cybersecurity is because my grandfather inspired me to pursue technology, alongside my love for music.

The Camps for Cyber

During my years in middle school through high school, my parents signed me up for summer STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) classes, such as the Norfolk State University Health and Science Program, the GenCyber Camp at Old Dominion University, and Starbase Academy. The Norfolk State Health and Science Program was the reason I never considered attending Norfolk State University. Some of the teachers were terrible, and I had to learn some of the programming myself because there were only two teachers, as well as a volunteer who actually taught us anything. The others would just tell us to figure it out on our own. My parents made me attend this program for two years in a row.

I initially had an interest in the program because it was supposed to motivate students to learn more about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics using fun and practical teaching modules and applications. However, it turned out to be one of the worst experiences I ever had. While some classes were interesting, like dissecting pigs, others involved teachers being on their phones all day.

The GenCyber program at Old Dominion University on the other hand, was one of the best experiences I've ever had. This program taught me how to code and introduced me to network material, such as Java and Linux. I also made valuable connections during that summer camp and even created a mathematical AI app, which was really fun. This experience played a major role in my decision to study cybersecurity at Old Dominion University.

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During my experience in elementary, middle, and high school, I was always involved in band. In elementary school, band was a required subject from 1st to 6th grade. However, I played a different instrument each year because I either broke the instrument I was playing or wasn't fully interested due to playing it too loudly. I really loved playing drums, but they didn't offer percussion instruments until I graduated middle school.

When I attended Churchland Middle School in Portsmouth, Virginia, I joined their band as an elective, as well as their concert and orchestral band. In eighth grade, Dave Longfellow, the Rhythm Project steel drum director at the Virginia Arts Festival in Norfolk, Virginia, reached out to my parents to see if I was interested in joining their group. The Rhythm Project All Stars were an elite selection of high school students from the Hampton Roads area (Portsmouth, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Suffolk). I had experience playing steel drums from a young age, so when I met with Dave Longfellow and Paul Munzerider, the assistant director at the time, I was very excited.

I stayed with the Rhythm Project All Stars throughout my seventh grade year, continuing through high school and into my first year at Old Dominion University. When I became a freshman in high school, I decided to try out for the Churchland High school marching band, as a Drumline member either on tenors or snare. They decided to place me on the auxiliary percussion, also known as PIT, I decided to stay with them for two years after that however it was great connecting with other people who love playing musical instruments. Then I decided to take a route that was just slightly different and try out for the Governor School of arts. I attended the Governor's School for the Arts (GSA), a gifted program for students in the Hampton Roads

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area specializing in instrumental music, musical theater, film, art/painting, and dance, for the remainder of my years of high school. At GSA, I felt more at home with my musical passion, playing percussion and performing with an ensemble. It gave me a sense of peace and helped clarify the direction I wanted to take in life.

I have to give credit to the Rhythm Project, GSA, and my schools' band programs for nurturing my love for music. Growing up, I never had a full adult-size drum set—only a kids' set, which I eventually outgrew. Despite my parents' support, they never got me a bigger set. So, when I reached a certain point in life, I decided to buy my own instrument: a Pearl Export Series 6-piece drum set with a 13.5-inch piccolo snare. I purchased it for \$250 from Facebook Marketplace, and it was worth it because I was able to fix and tune the drums to my own standards.

The Double Major Pursue

Deciding to become a double major was my own choice when I first started applying to colleges during my senior year. I never thought about majoring in music because I always associated it with music education or music performance. However, I wanted to pursue production because I had dreams of becoming an artist and collaborating with major artists like Charlie Wilson, Pharrell Williams, Chad Hugo, and so many others I admire.

I decided to apply to Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, since both my mother and father earned their bachelor's degrees there. I was accepted into their cybersecurity program for the fall semester of 2020. In the spring of 2021, during my freshman year, I made the decision to

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double major because I wanted to follow my passion and succeed. I auditioned for the Sound Recording Technology program at Old Dominion University's music department.

I knew that becoming a double major meant I wouldn't have the typical college student life because I would have to work twice as hard to represent myself and the legacy of my grandfather, my mother, my father, and my father's father. I am now an upcoming senior with 168 credit hours as of the fall semester of 2024.

It is important that I chose these two career paths: first, to continue the legacy of my grandfather, and second, to follow my passion, even though I know that music can be a tricky career path. I want to inspire young kids who dream of growing up and following their ideas and passions, no matter their chosen career. We only live once, and we want to make the most of it, so why not start now?