

Where It All Started: My Personal Narrative Essay

Tyler Walker

Old Dominion University

IDS 493: Electronic Portfolio Project

Professor Carin E. Andrews

September 13, 2025

Where It All Started: My Personal Narrative Essay

As a senior in college getting ready to step into the world with my ambitions carried on my back, I often reminisce on my past and how I became the man I am today. I think back on my mistakes, my triumphs, the times where I was down, and the times where I was raised up again. My journey as a student is not like any other, because I'm not like any other. In order for you to really understand, I have to begin where it all started.

Academic History

In my senior year of high school, I decided I wanted to become a Biomedical Engineer because of my time in the medical program at my school and my interest in robotics. I also decided that I wanted to go to Penn State University and be as far away from home as possible. No rules, no baggage, truly a fresh start. Well, that's exactly what I got when I arrived on campus. I moved into my room and started to embrace life as a college student. Little did I know that the first weeks of classes would hit me like a bullet train. This sudden realization of how advanced my classes were and how much I needed help in those classes shook me.

As time went on, I showed up less and less to those classes. I doubted if I was even capable of getting a degree. Fortunately, there was a professor who, for some reason, started to care about my success more than the other professors ever did. He taught calculus, which was my weakest subject at the time. He mentored me, tutored me, and encouraged me to do better. In a time when I felt like I had failed, he showed that there is always hope and that I just have to

keep trying. Eventually, I would start going to class again. I would enjoy taking courses like CMPSC 201: Programming for Engineers with C++, which had very intriguing lessons and assignments and labs that rarely felt like a chore. However, I still doubted my place in Biomedical Engineering. I couldn't see myself pursuing it as a career, so I continued to be lost in what I would do with my life.

As the second semester started to wrap up, I came to the decision that I would continue my college education back at home in Virginia. I went back home to reevaluate myself and to focus on what mattered most at the time, which was figuring out the path I was going to set myself on moving forward. In the meantime, I took general education classes at TCC for my sophomore year. Throughout that year I really got to hone my skills as a student, and I became very successful in all my classes, even receiving praise from the dean himself. But, I still had no idea of what to major in going forward. It wasn't until I thought back to one of the only college courses I enjoyed, CMPSC 201. This class left a lasting impact as my introduction into the programming world. So I decided to look into a major that incorporated programming. That is when I stumbled across cybersecurity, a concept fairly foreign to me. However, once I did more research, I realized how interesting and important cybersecurity is to the infrastructure of our nation and the world. That is when I came to the conclusion that cybersecurity is what I wanted to pursue. So, for my junior year of college, I attended Old Dominion University as a cybersecurity major. From then on, I fell in love with information security and cyber warfare.

Interests and Inspirations

Now that I have told you how I got here, let me tell you a little more about why I have gone down this path and what inspires me. As an adolescent, I've always had a love for gadgets and computers. My father always had something lying around since he worked in IT, so I became interested in technology. It definitely didn't help that we would watch movies that had robots and men in mechanical suits. Fast forward to today, I now found a way to integrate that love for technology into a career path. But while that was the foundation of my interest in the cyber aspect of my major, it wasn't until the second semester of my junior year that I would truly grasp the importance of security, safety, and the well-being of people across the globe. After hearing podcasts about breaches affecting families and businesses, and learning about the various types of cybercrime such as phishing and ransomware, I realized how dangerous this world is getting and how easy it is to be a victim to one of these cyber attacks. From then on I grew the desire to help those who may fall victim to these crimes and to serve others by protecting them as these threats increase. Furthermore, after visiting my cousin who is a security analyst for the U.S. Air Force, I would later decide to take these ambitions and skills that I have accumulated into the U.S. Air Force as well, where I would become an officer and could truly make a difference.

Present Day

Now in my senior year, I am working toward my goals of becoming an officer in the U.S. Air Force after I graduate and really honing my skills as a cybersecurity student. At the moment I have started working towards getting my Google Cybersecurity Professional Certification. I also recently received an internship opportunity from the Cyber Security Forum Initiative (CSFI), which I will be starting this Fall. In addition, I am preparing myself mentally and physically for the Officer Training Program (OTS) selection process. Part of this preparation is also shaping my personal brand as someone who qualifies for a slot. According to Montañez (2023), defining and communicating your personal brand helps align your career with your goals and values. For me, that brand is serving and protecting others. Each of these steps bring me closer to a strong foundation in my cybersecurity career and as an officer in the U.S. Air Force.

Conclusion

Looking back, my journey has been far from straightforward, but every setback and every breakthrough made me who I am today. From struggling in my freshman year at Penn State University to finding my purpose in cybersecurity at Old Dominion University, I have not only grown as a student, as someone who rises from his faults and makes a future for himself. What started out as just a curiosity for technology has become a calling to serve, protect, and lead in the field of cybersecurity and the U.S. Air Force. Moving forward, I carry with me on my back the lessons I've learned, the encouragement from my mentors, and the drive to make an impact in a world that relies on security more than ever.

References

Montañez, R. (2023, September 4). *How to define, develop, and communicate your personal brand*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2023/09/how-to-define-develop-and-communicate-your-personal-brand>