

Personal Narrative Essay

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My History

How I arrived to where I am now is a lengthy story. I did not have a technology-based upbringing, nor did I ever expect to end up where I am today. Growing up, I was the oldest of 6 children and was the go getter at school. I enjoyed school so much because it was an escape from home life. This fact led me to become the valedictorian of my class in 2012. Even with this achievement, I did not know what I wanted to do after high school.

I wanted to go to college a few hours away from home but did not know what I wanted to study. While I was still in high school, I ultimately decided that I would try to go in with an undecided major and figure things out later. Once graduation began to get closer and closer I had two talks. One was with my close friend and the other was with my dad. My friend was thinking of joining the Navy after graduation, and my dad was all for that idea. In a way, he pushed the idea of college out of my head by using my undecided major as fuel to dissuade me. He stated that I'd have my head stuck in a book as opposed to seeing the world, having my college paid for and getting out of our town. I was a little down when he said this, but in hindsight it was the best choice for me at the time. Coming from such a big family with little money, paying for college would have been solely up to me and from others I knew that I would struggle to pay the loans back. I knew then that my choice was to join the military.

A few months after graduation, I got my first job as a hostess in a restaurant. This was something that kept me busy while figuring everything out post-graduation. I visited a few recruiting offices to feel out the different branches, and really liked what I was being told and how I was treated by the US Navy recruiting office. In many ways, I felt that the other branches weren't a good fit for me. So, with that, I was told to lose a little weight and to come back. I did exactly that while I worked and managed to lose the required amount of weight in 3 months. I

went back to the recruiting office, signed all the paperwork and went off to MEPS (Military Entrance Processing Station). There I was tested for placement and physically evaluated to determine my eligibility to join over two days. Near the end of this process, I was able to choose a job. Based on my test scores and the available positions, I chose to become an aviation mechanic leaving in May of 2013. Following this, I went home and waited for the time to pass and continued to work. I got a call from the recruiting office on Monday February 25th and was offered a job as an Information Systems Technician leaving Wednesday the 27th. I immediately jumped at the opportunity; I was so excited to leave home!

I had to quickly make the arrangements to leave, which wasn't much. The only things I really needed to do was to quit my job and tell my family. I gave my job the news, for which they were happy for me but did not like the sudden loss of an employee. I do agree that it was quick, but I had given them warning that I could leave earlier in May. My family was extremely excited for me, but sad that I was leaving them so suddenly.

When that Wednesday came, I was up early with everything I needed, and was at the recruiting office before the recruiter got there. We took the 4-hour drive to the MEPS location, and I shipped out to boot camp in Great Lakes, IL. Boot camp was a 2-month blur, then I was moved to IT A-school which is the schoolhouse responsible for teaching those with the job title of Information Systems Technician all of the basic information they would need when going to their first duty station. I learned most of what we were taught for the first time, nothing was familiar. For 24 weeks, we were trained on Microsoft, Cisco, computer hardware and software fundamentals, automatic data processing, system theory and operation, and security. Eventually we tested and received out Comptia A+ certifications. I was so fortunate to be able to gain all this new knowledge and was excited to put my new skills to work.

Challenges

My first duty station following school was in San Diego, CA. Being away from home was tough, but I was absolutely overjoyed that I was in a new place and home was 5 hours away. Here I learned so many things, but there was the challenge of retaining all the new information I was being fed. Being that I did not have a technology background, I struggled with the concepts and fell behind. It appeared that most of what I learned in school no longer applied after I got to my first command. Everything was different, they used methods I was unfamiliar with. I felt so out of place, lost, and defeated. I learn best through application, most of the other people I worked with were very reluctant to let me touch equipment so that I could learn, which made it hard to catch up to my peers.

Luckily, I had some friends who helped me overcome these hurdles by simply sitting down with me and explaining things in layman's terms. They allowed me and encouraged me to learn through application and took the time to guide me every step of the way.

Following this duty station, I went off to Japan to join the USS Bonhomme Richard. This new experience was extremely intimidating. At first, I was getting used to the ship while in port, I was able to start learning all the systems I would be working with, the concepts, essentially how everything worked and what to expect while I was there. I began working with Linux, various radio frequencies as well as radio and other communications equipment.

I ran into lots of challenges here, both on and off the job. Yes, I was more familiar with the theories and concepts of the IT world, but frustratingly so I still wrestled to fully absorb everything. I was so used to being able to go home at the end of every day in the US, I struggled terribly adapting to my new lifestyle. Once we were out on deployment, I became depressed, and

my learning plummeted. I no longer tried to learn anything new, I was content staying where I was as it was all I was able to handle. I was ready to quit, I could barely take it anymore. Eventually I had a heart to heart with my leadership and they helped me out of my funk, but by then it was near my time to go to a new duty station. I feel as though the conversation was what helped pave the way for where I am today. My leadership could have simply given up on me and I would have been separated from the Navy, but instead they believed in me and pushed me to keep going.

My next two duty stations were in Naples, Italy and here in Norfolk. In Naples, I was able to use skills I already had, as well as develop new ones. I created fiber circuits, ran them from start to finish, and maintained systems. I continued to utilize Linux and Microsoft. I did not absolutely love the job or what I was doing, but I tried my best. In Norfolk, I started going to Tidewater Community College for my associate's degree in Cybersecurity to help me learn even more. I chose this path because it was familiar, and I already had many years invested into the field. Before graduating, I was medically retired from the Navy and took a break from work to focus solely on my education. I graduated with my new degree and immediately rolled into ODU to begin my bachelor's degree in Cybersecurity.

Present Day

Midway through completion of my bachelor's degree, I began a job where I could utilize all the fresh Linux I learned in school. Not all the things I had learned over the years would be applied to this position, but I was very happy to apply what I could. Since working there, I have not only learned a great deal, but I have also become more confident in where I am in terms of trusting myself and my knowledge. Before, I was very hesitant and unsure of the information I had learned but today I proudly apply my knowledge daily. It was a long and arduous journey,

but I am immensely grateful the experience that led me here. Today I am finishing up my bachelor's degree and was accepted into the master's degree program for Cybersecurity.

Reflections

When I read Smith's article, I immediately related to the quote: "We've all created our own personal histories, marked by highs and lows, that we share with the world — and we can shape them to live with more meaning and purpose." I say this because everything I just shared unmistakably pointed out my highs and lows, it also showed how my experience shaped my path. I realize that there are many paths I could have taken, but if I had not taken this one, I may never have made the same friends, visited the same places, or even have met my husband on the way. I also agree with Smith when she says that essentially, life does not go how we expect it to, that our lives don't follow a set path. Nyugen notes that ePortfolios a part of identity development. She points out that they allow students to document and showcase their evolving identities over time. By curating personal and academic achievements, students can better understand their growth, both as learners and individuals, promoting self-awareness and a stronger sense of personal and professional identity. The more I complete my ePortfolio, the more I see exactly what Nyugen means. Doing the ePortfolio allows me to document everything I have experienced, and as I highlighted earlier, to understand my overall growth in this field by noting the skills I have gained over time and where I gained them.

Conclusion

To conclude this essay, I would like to say that just because one comes from a place of little to no knowledge in a field does not mean that they are incapable of excelling in it. I know this to be true firsthand. This path came with many struggles, many highs and many lows, but I

did not quit. This may not be the field of my dreams, but I have come to love it. Through everything, I persevered, learned, grew, and excelled at something I had never thought twice about.

References

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