Guarding the Digital World: My Commitment to Cybersecurity and Privacy Rights

In elementary school, I was that kid who couldn't resist diving into the settings menu on any computer I could get my hands on. While my classmates were satisfied with playing games or, y'know, *doing the assignments*, I'd find myself knee-deep in the operating system, endlessly fascinated by the nuts and bolts of how things worked. My curiosity got me into trouble more than once, I still remember my teacher's frustrated sigh when she caught me starting a 45 minute update cycle "by accident" on one of the library's computers. However, what started as innocent exploration grew into something much deeper: by middle school, I was fluent in Python and Java, popular programming languages still in use today.

My commitment to mastering technology only grew as I grew, leading me down a path I hadn't anticipated. During freshman year, I found myself increasingly concerned with data privacy. At first, it was just a casual thought, something I noticed while online. But as I dug deeper, I started seeing more clearly just how much of our lives can be exposed, stored, and analyzed without our consent. I switched my search engine to DuckDuckGo, then my internet browser to Firefox, and later to Brave Browser, each step increasing my privacy online as I became more and more aware of the dangers without it. But these changes were only the beginning of what would become a journey toward digital autonomy. By the end of freshman year, I was running and experimenting with different complicated operating systems, eventually trying Arch Linux until my computer, with its brand-shiny-new NVIDIA graphics card, met an unfortunate fate; a lesson in both system limits and persistence.

My parents worried I was becoming paranoid, especially as I experimented with more privacy tools and grew increasingly skeptical of mainstream tech practices. To me, though, it was more than a phase; it was about securing a freedom I realized we too often take for granted. Through my research, I came to understand the power dynamics between users and big tech companies, especially FAANG giants (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and, of course, Google), which often prioritize profit over privacy. With each step deeper into the world of cybersecurity, I felt a sense of purpose take root. I wanted to do more than secure my own data; I wanted to help others protect themselves in an age where every click, message, and search could be tracked.

My passion for cybersecurity isn't just theoretical. Over the past few years, I've been honing my skills in system security, experimenting with network configurations, and learning to identify vulnerabilities. I even run my own website & web server and maintain it all myself. I find joy in the puzzle-like nature of cybersecurity, where every problem has a solution if you're willing to look closely enough. I've even started helping friends and family, educating them on privacy practices, and explaining why protecting their data matters, even when it feels inconvenient. Seeing them understand and adopt these practices has only reinforced my determination to pursue a career in this field.

Looking ahead, I see cybersecurity as a critical field, especially as technology continues to permeate every aspect of life. I want to be part of the movement that safeguards personal privacy in the face of rapid technological advancement. Studying cybersecurity at the university level will give me the knowledge, tools, and mentorship I need to make a broader impact. I'm excited not just to deepen my technical skills but to join a community that values privacy, autonomy, and ethical tech use as much as I do. One day, I hope to be a leading voice in digital security, helping to secure, contain, and protect the digital lives of people everywhere. I am ready to turn this passion into a lifelong career, dedicated to creating a world where digital privacy isn't a privilege but a right.