

Autobiographical Essay/Personal Narrative

My name is Gabrielle Harvey. Born in Europe, I eventually learned English in Canada from my playmates and spoke English fluently when I started school. I had a best friend throughout my elementary school years and we competed for top marks. My school principal, who also taught us French and English, came to visit me and my parents once at our home. I remember him telling my parents that he thought I had great potential. Although I never knew what inspired that home visit, I think it may have been out of a genuine concern for me. I suspect he was curious about why such a bright student was so shy.

I remained shy throughout my school years, partly because of my introspective nature and partly due to my parents' old school beliefs that a quiet, unobtrusive child was a good child. My parents faced several challenges in their lives and I became fiercely independent, not wanting to add to their burdens. Other than a few rebellious teenage years, I was a studious and responsible child.

I had a part-time job early on and continued working part time throughout junior and senior high school for the spending money and was often praised for my conscientious work attitude. I organized local fundraising events for my sister's schools and skied at the local ski club, but I also frittered away many teenage hours with a few close friends.

In high school I had a strong aptitude for language and I enjoyed writing short stories in my spare time. My career ideas included working as an interpreter or writing for a

national magazine. After graduating from high school, I chose to work full time for one year as I hadn't yet decided what exactly I wanted to study. I found a job with a fledgling newspaper, (the Record) and absolutely loved it. I enjoyed the daily deadlines, the excitement of creating a new product each day and the colourful personalities in the news room. It was there that I decided I wanted to be an advertising copywriter.

I learned that a local college offered a 2-year diploma program in advertising and public relations. But before starting the program, I convinced a friend I had met at the Record to travel through Europe with me. As a child I had often visited relatives in Europe and I wanted to explore more of Europe on my own. We spent three months spontaneously traveling to various countries and meeting fellow travelers from throughout the world. It was a wonderful experience that laid the foundation for a life-long friendship with my new friend.

I enjoyed the intensity of the studies and the high volume of writing in my college program and obtained a full time position with a Public Affairs department immediately after graduating, where I was the youngest project officer.

Shortly after starting my full time job, I enrolled in the management certificate program at a local university. After two years of intense studying every night, I found myself with too much time on my hands. Working full time seemed almost too easy.

For most of my seven years with the government, I was fortunate to have a mentor and supervisor who was highly skilled and who worked closely with me to hone my writing and public relations skills. I quickly advanced to a senior position and was seconded to

several different departments. I thoroughly enjoyed the creative aspects of the work such as producing print and film resources for the career services department, and the international marketing work for the tourism department. My mentor also praised me for my ability to quickly establish working relationships with my clients that were based on trust, a critical skill in providing communications counsel.

During this early part of my career, I met and married my husband, and left my job to start a company with him. Harvey & Associates provided public relations consulting, writing/editing, photography and audio-visual production services. Our offices were located in an industrial area downtown and our business flourished with one full time employee and other staff hired as needed. My contracts were primarily with the three levels of government, but over time I acquired work with non-profit environmental organizations because of my passion for the environment. I balanced the government work, which included speech writing and communications planning, with other work such as writing for magazines and producing campaigns for national non-profit societies.

Shortly after starting my own business I had two children. Working for myself enabled me to work part time and to take on the types of contracts that suited me. It was during my 30s that I also started my personal development to explore my true potential. I knew that to succeed in my career, I would need to become more comfortable with public speaking and verbal persuasive communications. Through various workshops and reading, I developed my self-confidence and my self identity. I gradually came to recognize and appreciate my value and my unique gifts, which included my passion for

the environment, my somewhat introspective nature, and my ability to think through complex issues and communicate them clearly.

After 10 years of successful self employment, I decided to again work in a team environment for an organization. I obtained a position as the manager of Community Relations in a government branch. My organization's innovative approach to sustainable management aligned with my interest in the environment. The move from self-employment to managing a large group of employees was a dramatic change but I was ready for the challenge. The staff I inherited was, for the most part, a dedicated group of people and my management style seemed to suit them. I built a strong team environment, enabling each person to apply their strengths to achieve our section's goals. Since joining the branch, the community relations section has grown in size and most of the original staff members are still there.

I enjoy working in local government where results are highly measurable. My team employs the techniques of community based social marketing to influence behavior. We have won several awards for our work.

My work has been highly rewarding. Our leadership in environmental issues is renowned and in 200x I had the opportunity to work abroad, leading workshops and assisting a team teaching municipal and community leaders about community engagement. I have spoken at several North American and international conferences on environmental issues and how we use social marketing to engage our residents.

In 200x, I was selected to undergo a comprehensive assessment of my abilities and potential advancement to a senior management position. The assessment included interviews with my colleagues, staff, manager and co-workers, in-depth interviews with me and various exams. My various strengths were identified including my abilities as a decisive decision-maker, my highly self-starting, conscientious work approach, my participative approach and fairness with staff, my good communication skills and my organizational savvy. Areas for further development included strategic thinking and financial analysis, strengthening my coaching skills and building my delegation skills.

Having worked in the same position for a decade now, I'm contemplating which direction I want to steer my career for the remaining 10 to 15 years. While I could quite easily remain in my current job until retirement, I feel a need to challenge myself yet again and to fulfill my unrealized goal of obtaining a university degree. Even though I have a vast amount of knowledge and practical experience in my field, some organizations are insistent on a university degree and this could impede my ability to advance to a more senior position.

For many years I have thought about furthering my education, but raising a family and working full time made it impossible. Now, at middle age, the challenge is still daunting but my stage of life makes it more achievable. My children are now young adults and next year both will be in university. This affords me the time I need to pursue a degree.

I believe I made a wise decision at 20 when I chose my career path. My success working in public relations and community relations is directly related to my talents and has

enabled me to choose fields that align with my interests and values. My commitment to my personal development has enabled me to grow as a manager, a leader and even a public speaker. I'm proud of my growth over the years, and I'm grateful for all the wonderful opportunities I've had. I have always been persistent and determined to achieve my goals. Completing a degree is one of the goals that I'm determined to achieve.