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This map depicts the location of Elizabethtown, Kentucky—the closest city to the home of a young Carl Brashear.

Carl Brashear was born in 1931 to sharecropping parents who lived in Kentucky. At the time, America's black citizens were still repressed by restrictive "[Jim Crow Laws](#)."

Carl's life in that legally segregated society of [Hardin County](#) was a happy one because of his close-knit family. He was the sixth of eight children.

Black children did not have educational opportunities equal to white students when Carl attended grade school in [Sonora, Kentucky](#). The windows in his segregated, one-room school were broken and his books were used.

As he and his siblings walked several miles to and from school, white children (riding the bus to their own school) passed them on the road. When Carl took a bus to the closest city, Elizabethtown, the law required him to sit in the back.

Carl finished the eighth grade before he went to work on the farm his father sharecropped for Dr. Glasscock.

Gonzella Brashear, Carl's mother and a ninth-grade graduate, also taught her children [at home](#). She and McDonald, Carl's father, provided a safe and happy environment for their family. As Carl recalls, in his oral history:

We didn't have electricity, didn't have running water, but we were happy. We had a lot of love in our family, a lot of togetherness. The entertainment in the evening was my father telling jokes and playing with us and things of this nature.



Religion was also an important part of young Carl's life.

I think our faith was what kept us going. Well, it played a big part. My great-uncle was a preacher, and there were a lot of deacons and preachers throughout the family.

Carl stayed at home until he was 17. He thought joining the Navy would be a good thing for him. He was right, but he was about to find out why President Truman would soon issue Executive Order 9981 to end all segregation in the military.

It was 1948, and Carl was assigned as a steward. So were the majority of other black naval recruits - as they had been throughout World War II.

After completing his basic training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, Carl was assigned to work at the Officers' Mess at Experimental Squadron One in the segregated town of Key West, Florida.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/HUMBLE-BEGINNINGS-Men-of-Honor-Story-of-Carl-Brashear>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/HUMBLE-BEGINNINGS-Men-of-Honor-Story-of-Carl-Brashear>

Questions 2 Ponder

Does a Happy Life Depend on Having Money?

When he was young, Carl Brashear had no electricity or running water in his home. That meant he didn't have a bathroom or a shower. Even so, he had a happy childhood.

If you lacked similar "things" in your home, could you still be happy? Explain your answer.

How would you overcome such hardships?

Nearly everyone in the world has "humble beginnings" in life. What are the "humble beginnings" in your life? Have those "humble beginnings" helped or harmed the shaping of your character? Explain your answer.

Media Stream



Hardin County,
Kentucky



Photo # 80-G-K-3756 Officers Mess on a Cruiser, World War II



Carl Brashear at Kentucky Home

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Hardin County, Kentucky - Map Locator

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Stewards in the Officer's Mess

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HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

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