

“EARLY LIFE AND STRUGGLE
FOR AN EDUCATION,” OCTOBER 1899

I WAS BORN a slave on a plantation in Virginia in 1857 or 1858, I think. My first memory of life is that of a one-room log cabin with a dirt floor and a hole in the center that served as a winter home for sweet potatoes, and wrapped in a few rags on this dirt floor I spent my nights, and clad in a single garment about the plantation, I often spent my days.

The morning of freedom came, and though a child, I recall vividly my appearance with that of forty or fifty slaves before the veranda of the “big house” to hear read the documents that made us men instead of property. With the long-prayed-for freedom in actual possession, each started out into the world to find new friends and new homes. My mother decided to locate in West Virginia, and after many days and nights of weary travel we found ourselves among the salt furnaces and coal mines of West Virginia. Soon after reaching West Virginia I began work in the coal mine for the support of my mother. While doing this I heard in some way, I do not now remember how, of General Armstrong’s school at Hampton, Virginia. I heard at the same time, which impressed me most, that it was a school where a poor boy could work for his education, so far as his board was concerned. As soon as I heard of Hampton, I made up my mind that in some way I was going to find my way to that institution. I began at once to save every nickel I could get hold of. At length, with my own savings and a little help from my brother and mother, I started for Hampton, although at that time I hardly knew where Hampton was or how much it would cost to reach the school. After walking a portion of the distance,

Howard’s American Magazine, 4 (Nov. 1899), 3-6. This article was probably written between the writing of *The Story of My Life and Work* and *Up from Slavery*.