Abraham Lincoln: From Hard Laborer to President

Abraham Lincoln was a lawyer and politician who served as the 16th president of the United States. He is perhaps the most popular U.S. president of all time, not only because of his character, but also for his deeds. He worked to abolish slavery, carried the nation through its toughest war (the Civil War), made the federal government more powerful, and brought the American economy to great heights. In order to learn more about this remarkable man, this essay will explore his life.

Born on February 12, 1809, as the second child of Thomas and Nancy Lincoln, in a log cabin on Sinking Spring Farm close to Hodgenville, Kentucky, his beginnings were simple. Thomas was an owner and leased out farms. However, by 1811, the Lincolns had to move due to a land dispute. The family relocated to Knob Creek Farm, where Thomas acquired 230 acres of land. Yet, by 1815, the family got into another land dispute and had to move again. Thomas got tired of these issues with land and sold off his remaining share in order to go to Indiana. By 1816, the Lincolns were in Hurricane Township, Perry County, Indiana. Abraham’s father thought that Indiana’s land laws were more reliable, and thus this move took place (Sandburg, Carl, and Edward C. Goodman).

Abraham’s family had strong morals based on their Baptist beliefs: no alcohol, no slavery, no dancing, and more restrictions. The farm work was difficult, with lots of chopping wood, taking care of livestock, and other hard labor. Family life was not easy either. His mother died in 1818 due to milk sickness, and this meant his sister Sarah had to take charge of household duties. Abraham was only nine years old at the time, and his sister was 11 years old. A year after the death of his mother, his father got married to Sarah Johnston—a widow with three children. It is said that Abraham became very close to his stepmother in light of his mother passing away. Also, his sister Sarah died on January 20, 1828, during the birth of her stillborn son. This greatly affected Abraham, and these two deaths perhaps made him more introspective than most people his age (Donald, David Herbert).

Though Abraham was brought up on a farm, he was not particularly keen on doing hard labor. He was more interested in reading and writing. He enjoyed writing poems, reading books, and getting lost in learning knowledge. Abraham did not attend a proper school, and only had tutors who came by at times. However, he read widely and
was continually fascinated in obtaining new knowledge. As he became a teenager, he started to take more responsibility for his chores and stood by the principle of giving his earnings made outside the home to his father until the age of 21. Known for his athleticism, he was skilled in axe work and also as a wrestler (Donald, David Herbert).

In 1830, the family left to live in Illinois in Macon County. Scholars believe that this move was to help distant relatives who lived there obtain a more stable life. However, by 1831, Abraham decided to live on his own due to not being close to his father anymore — scholars say that since his father was not educated, he felt distant in his relationship with Thomas. He began his trip on his own by walking down the Sangamon River and settled eventually in New Salem. Although he worked as a freelance hard laborer for a while, he ultimately got hired as a deliverer of goods from New Salem to New Orleans, where he got first-hand experience of slavery. As he stayed in New Salem, according to Biography.com, “he worked as a shopkeeper, postmaster and eventually general store owner. It was there that Lincoln, working with the public, acquired social skills and honed storytelling talent that made him popular with the locals. When the Black Hawk War broke out in 1832 between the United States and Native Americans, the volunteers in the area elected Lincoln to be their captain” (“Abraham Lincoln”). It is hard to say how he made an impression on people, but he did, and he had clear leadership qualities from the beginning of his career.