

## Pass It On®...

### **The legacy of Dorothy Vaughan, the hidden figure who helped put a man on the moon.**

Dorothy Vaughan was born in Kansas City, Missouri, just 45 years after the Civil War ended. At times, her load must have felt heavy, earthbound, during a time when African American women questioned how they would move beyond the barriers they faced. She looked for answers in two places: the African Methodist Episcopal Church, where she sang in the choir, and mathematics. She graduated high school as valedictorian and later earned a mathematics degree, cum laude, from Wilberforce University.

During the Great Depression, she supported her family as a math teacher. Her career as a human computer at NASA didn't begin until she'd been teaching for 14 years.

Imagine going from trying to hold the attention of schoolkids to specializing in calculations for flight paths. Dorothy's flight trajectory was similar to the one she plotted for John Glenn to orbit the moon. She became the supervisor over 400 human computers and taught herself the computer language FORTRAN, which she then taught to her coworkers. All of these accomplishments led to her greatest honor: being part of the team that put a man on the moon.

Dorothy stayed at NASA for 28 years and retired in 1971 having lived through slide rules to computers and segregation to desegregation. She received the Presidential Medal of Honor from President Obama and was posthumously honored by having a moon crater named after her.

As children, we often look at the moon with awe and wonder. Dorothy Vaughan saw possibilities. She applied herself to her education knowing the opportunities would follow even though the road would be harder for her than for many others heading in the same direction. As a supervisor at NASA, she was active in championing rights and opportunities for all women. Her own daughter followed in those big footsteps to also work at NASA.

Dorothy Vaughan pushed through the gravity that held women and minorities earthbound to inspire

generations of dreamers and achievers. When you shoot for the moon, you're not just setting your own sights high — you're inspiring all those around you to be the best they can be.

**Shoot for the moon...**[PassItOn.com](http://PassItOn.com)

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