

Interview Topics and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

A Wealth of Family *An Adopted Son's International Quest for Heritage, Reunion and Enrichment*

By Thomas Brooks



If you are planning a TV show, radio show, feature article or a sidebar on the topics listed below, here are some frequently asked questions (FAQ) you may find helpful during the interview.

Topic A: Adoption / Reunion / Heritage / Search

Key Message: *A Wealth of Family* is a compelling true story of adoption, reunion, and heritage that shows how to cross racial and cultural barriers.

Background: After growing up in Pittsburgh with an African-American family, Brooks started his search for his biological parents at age 25. Brooks found his biological mother, a descendant of Lithuania Jews, in London. He then located his Black Kenyan biological father in Nairobi. His international search and the resulting reunions have profoundly affected three families in the United States, England, and Kenya.

1. How has it been going with the launch of the book?

It has been exciting to travel all around the country to do speaking events. I have made a number of TV and radio appearances. As a multiracial Kenyan-American, my story is frequently compared to that of Senator Barack Obama. I have donated my public speaking skills and some book sales to raise charitable contributions for adoption and foster care agencies. I have recently achieved some key milestones for the book:

- #1 Amazon Bestseller for the Adoption category
- #1 Amazon Bestseller for the African-American Studies category
- Winner of the National Indie Excellence Award for Multicultural Non-Fiction
- “Best Books” Award Winner from *USA Book News*

2. The book is very timely given all of the changes in our nation and the world. Can you summarize your story for the audience?

A Wealth of Family is a book that details how I grew up as the only child of a struggling single mother in inner-city Pittsburgh. I was battling racial stereotypes at school and searching for a place among my peers. Then I was told at age eleven that I had been adopted as an infant. I did not know it at the time, but I had actually been born to a white biological mother who had descended from Lithuanian Jews and – like Senator Barack Obama – a black Kenyan father. Years after that stunning revelation, I escaped the ghetto and traveled to search for my heritage. I found my biological mother in London with my previously unknown British siblings. I then located my biological father and extended family in Nairobi. My international search and the resulting reunions have profoundly affected three families in the United States, England, and Kenya.

3. How did you react when you found out that you were adopted?

My adoptive mother told me when I was eleven. It really blew my mind, especially because I fit in so well

with my light skinned African-American adoptive family and extended family. My adoptive mother Joan told me that she "had prayed" that God would let her know the right time to tell me about the adoption. Until then, she did not feel that I was old enough to understand.

As an eleven-year-old, it was shocking and burdensome for me to handle this revelation. I didn't ask to be an adopted child. I felt deserted, as if this kind "adoptive" family of aunts, uncles, and cousins was not my own. I had so many questions. Why the "secrecy" that surrounded my adoption? Why wasn't I raised with this knowledge from infancy, through childhood, and into my teens? Why tell me at that particular time? What made age eleven better than seven or seventeen to share the news? At the time, I felt as though I had been living a lie. I felt like there was no one I could talk to about my situation. I was in many ways alone. The reality of suddenly finding out that I had been adopted left me hurt, confused, and resentful. I couldn't even sleep.

But, after three weeks, I realized that my adoptive mother loved me and that she was my *real* mother. I got over the shocking news. With the exception of two brief discussions, I did not talk again to Joan about the adoption until I was an adult. To me, after those three weeks, there was nothing to discuss. She loved me. She was my real mother. There was nothing more to say. (See pages 36-38.)

4. There have been a few controversial celebrity adoptions in the news that cross racial and cultural lines. What are your thoughts?

Of course, when celebrities do adopt transracially and/or transculturally, you just hope they are sincere. Angelina Jolie has adopted two children, and Madonna pledged \$3M to help the over 1 million orphans in the nation of Malawi. So, it would seem as if their hearts are in the right place. But, who can truly judge? Mia Farrow and Meg Ryan have also adopted children from developing countries. At least the media attention will help people focus on the needs of children in places like Africa.

What we also need to discuss is the argument often made by some in support of so-called "racial matching". Their view is that transracial adoption would hurt children by leaving them disconnected from their heritage.

I feel that transracial and transcultural adoption can offer some unique and positive outcomes for children, such as real life "diversity training". But it also can result in some disconnects related to heritage and culture which those same children must work to overcome.

Transracial adoption is not something to be "for" or "against"; it is just a reality in our society to be dealt with. You must take the pros along with the cons.

Children caught in the state child welfare systems in our country have a lot more problems getting placed with permanent families if they are minorities, and/or older than 2 years of age, and/or part of a sibling group, and/or dealing with special needs. As an African-American I would say that there are just not enough black families in this country who are adopting the black children. On a personal note, my wife and I have applied to adopt an African-American child to join the two wonderful biological children we already have.

In a society that still includes some racism, people of color must come to understand how they are being viewed in order to protect themselves both emotionally and physically. The parents must help, regardless of the race and ethnicity of the adoptive parents.

Each parent's ability to honor and understand his or her child's point of view and place the child's best interests first affects the child's self-esteem, development of clear racial identity, and ability to function in the world.

Regardless of the race of the parents and the children, the adoptive parents should raise the children up from the beginning in the knowledge that they are adopted, and *special*. What should be avoided is a "shocking day" like I had when I was eleven, when the child suddenly finds out that he or she is adopted.

To summarize, in my view it is better to have a good home with those of a different race or culture than no home at all. My book, *A Wealth of Family*, talks about how lucky I was to be adopted by Joan Brooks and her African-American family.

5. When and why did you decide to search for your biological parents?

I was twenty-five years old when, after a few months of thought, I decided to search for my biological parents. It was 1992, during the last semester of my MBA studies at the University of Maryland. Even though I had known of my adoption since I was eleven years old and had a very good relationship with my adoptive family, I had a growing need to know more about my biological background. Because I knew nothing of my biological parents and their heritage, I felt somehow that my own human identity was partially lacking. I had this sentiment in common with many African-Americans whose family heritages were erased by centuries of slavery, but in my case even the previous generation was a mystery. (See page 5.)

6. How did you feel when you got some initial information about the background of your biological parents?

I eventually received all available non-identifying information in a four-page document from the adoption agency in July 1992. I was taken aback to receive any information at all. It was incredibly fulfilling to add additional pieces to the puzzle of my own identity. I felt like I had the majority of what I wanted after getting the document provided by the agency. My biological mother was a White American who gave birth to me at the age of nineteen. My biological father was Kenyan and about twenty-six years old at the time of my birth. I was indeed multiracial. I learned that both of my parents attended college. This was more information than I had ever expected to find. It gave me a good feeling about the contribution of both of my parents to my heritage. (See page 8.)

7. How did you find your biological mother in London, England?

The woman from the adoption agency then wrote a second letter in July 1992. In the second letter she stated that she had phoned my biological maternal grandmother. Luckily, the grandmother had lived in the same house outside of Pittsburgh and had kept the same phone number since my adoption. This grandmother had put the agency in touch with my biological mother in Europe. I was surprised. I had not expected the agency to pursue this. The fact that my biological mother had written to the adoption agency years before, asking them to put a notice on file stating that if I ever sought information or contact that she would be open to contact from her child, no doubt facilitated this. This all led to my eventual face-to-face reunion with my biological mother in September 1992. (See pages 95-96.)

8. Why didn't your biological mother keep you and raise you? Did she consider having an abortion?

My biological mother, Dorothy Wallstein, has since told me, "It was a different era in 1966 in terms of race, and in terms of empowerment for women." I can neither attack nor defend how she felt back then.

As for raising me herself, she felt somewhat powerless to address some basic life issues. Where would she have stayed? She says that she could not have raised a mixed-race child, born out of wedlock, in her father's house back then. Where would she have worked, and who would have taken care of the new baby while she worked?

She told me that she wanted me to have a good home, but she was not able to give it to me in 1966 as a 19-year-old. She did go to Sweden, planning to have an abortion. But the pregnancy was too far advanced by the time she got there. So, I was given up for adoption shortly after my birth in 1966. (See pages 101-103.)

9. After she gave you up for adoption, what happened to your biological mother?

Dorothy has led a storied life, including time as a "flower-child" in the legendary Haight-Ashbury area of San Francisco in the late 1960s. She later moved to England, married and she raised four English kids who are now my half-siblings. (See pages 131-137.)

10. How did you find your biological father in Nairobi, Kenya?

Thanks to my reunion with my biological mother in 1992, I knew my biological father's name was Mboga Mageka Omwenga. By 1995, I had done a little research to discover that his name was likely from the Kisii ethnic group in Kenya. Then, I simply flew Kenya and did some detective work. I pursued about fourteen different people and paths to find my biological father.

On that initial trip in January 1995, I met my Kenyan half-sister and a couple of uncles. My father was out of the country at the time. So, I returned to Kenya about six months later to meet my father. Now, I have three families. Hence the title of the book is *A Wealth of Family*. (See pages 148-159.)

11. Can you describe the scene when you first visited your family's village in rural western Kenya?

The entire village seemed to be waiting for me, about five hundred people. There was singing and dancing. Everyone was touching my face, skin, beard, and hair since they viewed me as being a *mzungu*, the Kiswahili word for a European or white person. Light-skinned, wavy-haired Westerners did not come through this remote village every day. In spite of my difference in skin color, I was accepted fully by everyone in the village. Kenyan Africans seem to have almost no notion of racism, despite a history that includes British colonialism. It felt wonderful, and it was truly a grand scene. It was similar to Alex Haley's experience in *Roots*. (See pages 173-174.)

12. What are some of the compelling stories that you uncovered when you discovered the heritage of your ancestors in Europe?

My great-grandfather, a Lithuanian-Jew named David Rittenburg, barely survived religious persecution in 1886. While he and two other brothers were gone on a supply run, their parents and the trio's ten other siblings who stayed behind were murdered by Orthodox Russians. It was a religiously motivated pogrom, an organized and officially encouraged massacre and violent persecution, against Jews. For much of the century, young Orthodox Russians were taught to hate the Jews because they viewed Jews to be Jesus Christ's killers. The Orthodox Russians were inflamed against the Jews living in the area, feeling that these Jews had no true loving ties with Mother Russia. When the three brothers returned home to the scene of the carnage that engulfed their home, they knew they were alone. The three brothers managed to survive thanks only to some Gentile families who acted as kind of an "Underground Railroad". For many years my great-grandfather bounced from family to family, all over Europe. By the time he reached America as an immigrant, he knew 13 different languages. He eventually graduated with an engineering degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and later used his language skills on Ellis Island as an employee of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. (See pages 113-116.)

13. What are some of the compelling stories that you uncovered when you discovered the heritage of your ancestors in Africa?

My Kenyan great-grandfather's name was Ayiera. He had a total of seven wives. One of the wives, my great-grandmother Kwamboka, was the mother of my grandfather Omwenga. These days, my younger sister Margaret proudly wears Kwamboka as her middle name. Kwamboka was a good mother and homemaker. Her husband Ayiera, a king and owner of livestock and farmland, was the son of Ogeto. Ogeto was the son of Isekerario and a powerful king before the advent of British rule. Isekerario was the son of Tibichi. Ogeto ruled about half the population of Kisiland in what is today western Kenya. He was fair and sympathetic to the downtrodden. Ayiera and Ogeto were both kings, *mfalume* in Kiswahili and *eruoti* in the Kisii language.

During the pre-colonial era, each Kenyan ethnic community was ruled by its indigenous king. The title of "chief" was created by the British. I am extremely fortunate to have knowledge of my African heritage, going back six generations before me. (See page 180.)

Topic B: Multicultural Family Relationships

Key Message: *A Wealth of Family* provides a timely and provocative perspective on multicultural and multiracial families.

Background: Brooks grew up in an African-American family in Pittsburgh as an only child. As an adult, he found his biological mother in London with his previously unknown British siblings. He then located his biological father and extended family in Nairobi.

1. What were some cultural differences you noticed between your three families?

In *A Wealth of Family*, I write about how cultural differences have been a factor. The difficult economic conditions in Kenya seem to have led to a culture of extended family closeness - effectively "I am my brother's and my cousin's keeper". The Kenyans seem to be imbued with a cheery spirit of spontaneous hospitality.

The British, while westerners like us Americans, seem to be a little more laid back with respect to their careers - which can both a positive and a negative. We Americans, while productive, definitely need more vacation time!

However, in the end, you can't make assumptions about individual people because of their cultural background, nationality or race. You have to deal with each person as an individual, while keeping an awareness of possible cultural factors.

2. Did you have any problems or misunderstandings with the "new" families?

When I was planning my third trip to Kenya, to go to my family's rural village in Kisii in western Kenya, there was a misunderstanding. Once I had my flights booked, I wrote biological father to inform him of my planned arrival in December 1995. I received a letter back from him less than one month before my trip, telling me not to travel to Kenya. He indicated that he was not able to provide financial assistance at that time. He wanted me to delay my trip because he got the *mistaken* impression from my letter that I expected him and the rest of the family to support me financially for hotels and meals during my stay in Kenya. I had asked him in my letter for help with "logistics." By that, I meant only guidance on the most convenient hotels in which to stay in Kisii, and advice on how I was to travel from Nairobi to Kisii. I did not mention finances or money in my letter. I must not have been clear, and we did have two very different cultural orientations. It was simply a misunderstanding. I really wished I could have talked to him immediately to clear this up but he did not have easy access to a phone or email at the time. (See page 171.)

3. How was your relationship with you adoptive mother affected when you found your biological mother?

After I found my biological mother Dorothy, my adoptive mother Joan started to feel that her mother-son relationship with me was threatened. Joan was uncomfortable at first, and might have even been a bit jealous. This is understandable. Joan believed that I might have more in common with Dorothy, and therefore I might not need to spend much time with her, even though she raised me. Dorothy was initially anxious to contact, call, write, and meet Joan. Dorothy wanted to thank Joan for taking care of me when she couldn't. I prevented any interaction, even letters, between Dorothy and Joan for about four years. It took a significant amount of time for me to reassure Joan that I still loved her, that she was and always would be my real mother, and that the relationship we always had would not change because I had found Dorothy. (See pages 190-191.)

4. Did your relationship with your adoptive extended family change after you found your biological parents?

One of my cousins in my adoptive family was initially sad, feeling "that Tommie was ours, a Lowry first." Some cousins were concerned that I would reject and replace the Lowry family in my life. However, they soon realized that this quest to know my birth families was important to me and they remained supportive.

Overall, the Lowry family continued to give me the same beautiful, unconditional love. Everything was fine in the end. (See page 191.)

5. What effect did you have on your English siblings and them on you?

My optimism and aggressiveness seem to have rubbed off a bit. For example, my biological mother believes that my achievements were a good influence to help one of my brothers jumpstart his career. He went on to study went on to study professional broadcasting.

My sister Lotus, for example, is a sensitive and caring person. She seems to know what people need before they say it. She is a good judge of character. I really feel like I could rely on her as a sister and a confidante.

6. What effect did you have on your Kenyan siblings and them on you?

Stories of my struggles as an adolescent in the inner city seem to have provided my Kenyan sister Margaret with inspiration to overcome her own challenges. Although I was far from perfect, I wanted to be a positive role model for her. I believed that meeting me has facilitated positive self-evaluation for Margaret. I reinforced the principles of self-confidence and determination in Margaret, qualities she already had. Margaret eventually graduated from college in Pennsylvania, and she now understands both Kenyan and American culture. Thus, she now really helps me to better understand Kenyan culture and my Kenyan family.

7. Has race impacted any of the relationships with your three families, or have culture and country of citizenship been more significant factors?

I don't think race has been a significant factor. The cultural differences have been a factor. In the end, however, you can't make broad assumptions about people because of their nationality or race. You have to deal with each person as an individual, while keeping an awareness of possible cultural factors.

8. What is the key to healthy family relationships?

The excellent writings of Deepak Chopra have helped me a great deal. For example, when I visit someone, I now try to always bring a gift of some type, even if it is a compliment, blessing, or prayer. Most important, I now strive to make sure my actions are motivated by love, allowing me to do less and achieve more. This helps me to resist defending my actions or my point of view, and leaves me more open to hearing the views of others.

9. How did you go about finding your wife?

In *A Wealth of Family*, I used the epilogue to write about how to approach potential dating relationships. The goal is to just be comfortable with what you want for yourself, what you want in the prospective significant other, and with where and how you are looking for your partner. The rest is just a matter of time. Once you get to this point, you can then free your mental energy to focus on other parts of your life such as career, finances, health, and family, whether you are in a relationship or not. When I decided that I was open to meeting a long-term prospective mate, I made the philosophical commitment to myself to not ask for things I could not give. Then I made a list of what I wanted and needed in a future wife. What we get out of a relationship has a lot to do with what we give to our partner. (See page 232.)

10. What are you plans for future books in your *Family Success Series*™?

Since launching *A Wealth of Family*, I have started doing a number of paid speaking engagements with large companies and also with high schools and universities. The Q&A sessions that follow these engagements give me a great opportunity to interact with people on issues related to families and to cultural diversity. The topic of diversity is extremely timely. So, I am already gathering data and working on my next two books. I have plans for a book tentatively entitled *The Joy of Search*. It will be about the happy adoption and reunion stories of others. I also am working on a book on successful parenting which I should have out in a little over a year. My books will continue to be non-fiction, and deal with strengthening families and multiculturalism.

Topic C: Urban Poverty / Racism / Education

Key Message: *A Wealth of Family* delivers powerful insights on how to triumph over racism and poverty.

Background: Brooks grew up as the only child of a struggling single mother in inner-city Pittsburgh. He was battling racial stereotypes at school and searching for a place among his peers. Then he was told at age eleven that he had been adopted as an infant. Despite the shocking news, Brooks found a way to obtain both bachelor's and master's degrees while enjoying career success. In 1998, Brooks won a national award through Career Communications Group in the "Technical Sales and Marketing" category.

1. I understand that you had some struggles while growing up. Can you describe your adopted family's background?

My adoptive mother, Joan, got a divorce when I was three years old. Joan did her best to find a nice place for us to live. At that time, many properties would not rent to families with small children. The properties that did allow small children were often in bad neighborhoods and beset with rats, roaches, or noisy tenants. We continued to move around when I was in elementary school to escape difficult living conditions. As we moved, we stayed on the North Side of Pittsburgh. We rarely had money to spare. We often lived on government welfare assistance since it was a big challenge for Joan, as a single mother, to find affordable childcare on a working class salary. But what we lacked in money, Joan more than compensated for with love.

In *A Wealth of Family*, I write that as a kid I grew uncomfortable with being poor—that is, poor by American standards. I struggled with being poor partly because of needs and wants, and partly because of pride. When I was six years old, an incident that hurt my fragile pride evolved from a simple trip to the grocery store with one of my friends. My friend's family sent him to get two small jars of baby food for his younger sibling. I remember each jar costing about twenty-nine cents back then. On the way home we stopped for some reason, and he asked me to hold the bag with the baby food inside. While we were waiting, the brown paper bag slipped out of my clumsy hand. The two jars broke. My friend said, "I can't show up at home without this baby food. My momma will kill me." So, I went to my mother for the fifty-eight cents, but she didn't have it. I was embarrassed to have to tell my friend that I would have to give him and his mother the fifty-eight cents the following week. From then on, I had an acute awareness of money and the fact that my family lacked it. I knew I would have to work hard if I wanted to prosper. Those feelings drove me to study intensely and eventually become valedictorian of my high school. (See pages 25-26.)

2. What kind of battles did you have with those holding racial stereotypes?

I battled racism from white people. But I also had problems with Black people who carried race-related baggage. After my junior year of high school, I was academically at the top of my class by a slim margin. My Black friends told me, "Those White folks ain't gonna let you be valedictorian, regardless of your grades." I heard them, but I didn't listen. I knew that I was in control. I was determined to be the first Black valedictorian at New Brighton High School. In the end, I reached my goal.

3. As a child in the inner city, did you ever have an occasion when you were close to going down the wrong path and permanently impacting your future potential?

Lacking a convenient park to play in, we often used the nearby railroad junction as our playground, and we had big fun. One day, my friend and I sat inside a stationary boxcar eating the train's cargo of oranges, passing the time away with idle talk.

"Do you hear something?" my friend asked timidly. "Man, I hear a train coming," I replied. "I heard that if the caboose guy takes your picture, they will give it to the police, and they will find you and put you in the juvenile detention home. Let's hide."

We quickly jumped off of the stationary boxcar and hid out of sight under it. As the initial train passed us at a high speed, I said, "Don't worry, as soon as this train goes by, it'll be cool."

A minute later, another train passed us, also at high speed, on the opposite side of the stationary boxcar. I was quite scared that the train we were under would also start, giving us no way out. The look on my friend's face was that of disbelief and despair resulting from his decision to follow my suggestion and hide under the stationary boxcar. Luckily, just minutes before the stationary train moved, one of the other trains completed its passage through the junction and we were able to run to safety. During the walk back to our street, I caught hell from my friend. We were wrong for eating the oranges and stupid for being on the railroad tracks. I never played on the railroad tracks after that. (See pages 29-30.)

4. What were the keys for you in terms of overcoming racism and poverty?

Education was the primary enabler. I worked my tail off in high school, relative to my peers, on my way to earning the scholarships I needed to attend college.

Secondly, although I did not have a father in the home while I grew up, I was fortunate to have a few good male role models. For example, my adoptive mother Joan had the same boyfriend from the time I was about five until I was thirteen years old. Luckily, her boyfriend challenged me intellectually and set high expectations for me to finish college and get some type of post-graduate degree.

Finally, sports taught me how to be a part of a team, to be responsible, to set goals, and to be healthy and physically fit. I also learned to be a leader, to take direction from a manager or coach, and to win graciously. Most of all, sports taught me how to learn from defeat and to bounce back stronger the next time.

5. Where you ever made to feel like achieving at a high level was somehow not "appropriate" for kids you knew in the inner-city?

Sometimes my Black "brothers" in high school referred to me as "acting White" when I did something positive like making straight A's, or speaking proper English. Sadly, this is not a rare experience for many educated minorities in America. In the wise words of Dr. Franklyn Jenifer, former president of Howard University: "Some people tend to worry that when Black people start talking about excellence that somehow that means that we are not talking about where we came from. I say it's just the opposite. If you look far enough back, you will see that we have never been a people who have been afraid of change or challenge." (See page 43.)

6. How did you manage to pay for college?

As a high school valedictorian who was heavily involved in sports and other school activities, I received a number of partial academic scholarships, specifically from Westinghouse, Kodak, and the University of Pittsburgh. I also received need-based financial aid. Thus, I was able to attend the University of Pittsburgh without personal expense.

In *A Wealth of Family*, I wrote that my only cost was emotional, since I had no frame of reference as to what to expect. No friend or family member had ever come back from college over Christmas break or for the summer to tell this disadvantaged kid about his or her college experiences. During my first few days at Pitt, I went to my classes and received the required syllabuses. Each syllabus, of course, noted the required textbooks and supplemental readings for the course. Every day, I just sat there, waiting for the professors to hand out the books so I could start doing the reading assignments that were the subject of their lectures. During the first few days of classes, I saw this big line outside of the university book center. In the window displays of the Book Center were best-selling fictional novels and Pitt paraphernalia, not the course textbooks, which filled the inside of the store. Thus, I had no idea that I was supposed to queue with the other students and purchase textbooks. I figured the lines were full of new students waiting to buy Pitt paraphernalia before Saturday's big football season opener. It never occurred to me that the lines were full of students buying textbooks for their classes. Three days after I first noticed the lines, I asked a student coming from the bookstore why the lines were so long. I listened in disbelief. I had to *buy* my books? Embarrassed, I returned to my room for my syllabuses, took my place in line, entered the sweating crowd, and ultimately bought my textbooks. (See pages 59-60.)

7. Can you tell us about some of your accomplishments in corporate America? As an entrepreneur? In the community?

I previously served as a Director of Marketing for Lucent Technologies where I led product marketing, public relations and marketing communications related to digital signal processor (DSP) core technology. In 1998, I won a national award from the Career Communications Group in the category of *Technical Sales and Marketing* for my work in corporate America.

As an entrepreneur I have co-founded MinorityProfessionalNetwork.com in 2001, a leading global online resource for career, economic and lifestyle content. I have done community serviced as a life member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and also the National Black MBA Association. I enjoy public speaking, snow skiing, running and salsa dancing. I live near Houston with my wife and two children.

8. Since moving out of the ghetto, what have you done to give back to inner-city youth?

I felt so privileged to be receiving a university education. Thus, I found that it was rewarding and of paramount importance psychologically to give back to urban youth. It was not only good for the teenagers. I learned from these young people too. This kept me mentally young and open-minded, which has had long-term benefits for me in terms of strategic thinking, relationships, and friendships. I also had the opportunity to stay in touch with the evolving teenage culture, which I expect to help me one day when I have my own teenagers. I believe that I have done some good work with the National Black MBA Association's Leaders of Tomorrow high school mentoring program. As part of Alpha Phi Alpha, I have also participated in Project Alpha, my fraternity's effort to educate young men about the dangers of teen sex, including teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. As Deepak Chopra brilliantly suggested in his book *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, I found a relatively unique talent. I enjoyed practicing my talent, and I was using that talent to serve humanity.

9. What would you like to see in terms of education reform?

It is a complicated problem. We can make a big improvement in this area by implementing school vouchers, but let me be clear. I do not support school vouchers that allow public money to be diverted to private schools. Public tax dollars getting diverted to religious-based private schools does not sound like a separation of church and state to me. My school voucher plan would be limited to public schools only in a given city or county or school district. This way, public schools would be forced to compete with each other, and public schools that excel would be rewarded for demonstrating the desired behaviors. The rewards should include a larger budget for the school to spend, and better pay for teachers and administrators. Schools and their students would be measured based on items such as grades, attendance, graduation rates, performance on state and national standardized tests, etc. Private schools should always be an option for individuals who can afford it, but public tax dollars should not be used. By the way, the *underprivileged* Thomas Brooks of the 1970s on the North Side of Pittsburgh probably could not have afforded private school, even with vouchers. Strengthening public schools with competition and vouchers is the answer.

10. I know the audience can get your award-winning book on Amazon.com, or at their favorite book store. Do you have any final comments for the audience?

My book, *A Wealth of Family*, is actually a wealth of inspiration! Get multiple copies today since the book makes a great gift that will both help and entertain its readers.