

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

Thomas Brooks

Alpha Multimedia (August 2006)

Softcover \$17.95 (256pp)

978-0-9774629-3-3

As a boy, Thomas Brooks unconsciously began to build his skills as a uniter. When an economic situation forced his (adoptive) mother Joan to make moves between neighborhoods on the North Side of Pittsburgh, Brooks journeyed miles on foot, taking new friends back to old haunts and introducing them around. He refused to give up that which was left behind, even while he embraced the changing circumstances.

When informed of his adoption at age eleven, Brooks at first feels like a rootless impostor in the only family he'd known. With assurances and the continuation of normal treatment from aunts, uncles and cousins, this crisis passes, but a curiosity regarding origins burns from then on. As a young adult, proactive measures lead to knowledge of a white American birth mother who had descended from Lithuanian Jews and a black Kenyan birth father. Befriending them is only the beginning; he reverts to the drive to unify, bringing members of all three families into a fellowship of mutual acceptance. Brooks' prose is carefully smoothed, yet its immediacy retained. Once the search begins, obstacles are not allowed to become permanent roadblocks: distance and insecurity are systematically overcome. The effects of racism are part of the narrative, even racism based on gradations of skin tone within a single status group. Brooks applies his personal intensity to the problem, a "work hard / play hard" philosophy. A love of parties and a fairly serious religious commitment manage to coexist. Generosity, financial and otherwise is recorded rather factually, both flowing to the author and originating with him. Some readers will see immodesty while others will accept it as integral to a complete presentation of the big picture. A revealing two-page breakdown of the ideal woman's qualities emphasizes character objectives —it's inclusion is a sign that very little is held back.

Educated in engineering and business administration, the author is active in an array of programs that promote adoption and employment opportunities for minorities in business. His forte is the creation of links and the advancement of understanding between communities. This book demonstrates the superficiality of lingering racial prejudice and suggests that we'd all be better off taking the widest view possible on kinship. "When we realize that all people are citizens of the world...the world becomes less dangerous and people suffer less." Adult children of adoption typically feel that loyalty or core identity demands an either/or decision, but that is a false choice. *A Wealth of Family* documents a manifestly healthy approach to an emotionally loaded subject, and keeps the reader engaged through the entire process. It is aimed at fellow searchers, but is potentially medicinal to a wider audience.

TODD MERCER (April 17, 2007)

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