Muse seems a fitting description for Aunt Dora. Hers is the face that launched a thousand-day odyssey and twenty-five thousand words. The generosity of my 92-year-old great-aunt inspired me to embark on developing the book Giving Back: A Tribute to Generations of African American Philanthropists. Giving Back is a 400-page hardcover publication filled with revealing stories and artful photography about traditions of giving within Black communities. In prose, poetry and portraiture, my great-aunt's philanthropy and that of 199 other benefactors of African descent fill every page.

When the idea for the book took hold of me, little did I know that seeing it through and publishing it would require a high-wire walk of faith, spanning four-and-half years or one thousand days—well, 1621 days to be exact. With each day that passed, the vision for Giving Back grew so clear it haunted me. The pathway, however, grew obscured by episodes of frustration and weariness.

On those clouded, dark days, brightening my steps like bursts of light from a beacon were the narratives and biographies of the people I was chronicling. In a twist, the volume of stories that I was inspired to start writing had come to speak volumes to me and thus supplied inspiration to complete the book. Being immersed in accounts of "lovers of humankind"—their aspirations, motivations and tribulations—compelled me to push on.

Fittingly, the story of my original source of inspiration and great-aunt, Rev. Dora Atlas, opens Giving Back. After reading "Rich Aunt," indeed, you will see that she is a great aunt in deed. The book's collection of stories and photographs forever altered my thinking and my work in philanthropy, and I expect it could have the same effect on you.

Shared here is a TEDx video of my faith-fueled story of philanthropy, identity and epiphany that produced Giving Back.
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