

Mike Leonard is a TV journalist who has worked for the Today show for almost 30 years. His stories about everyday life are his trademark due to the unique, creative way he pulls together his pieces.

He also works alongside his family in Picture Show Films. This production company is digital video only and has done many critically-acclaimed television shows along with other projects, including fund-raising videos and corporate training.

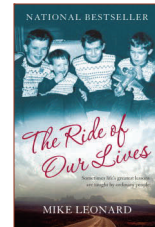
Leonard lives in Illinois with his wife. They have four grown children and three grandchildren.

2009 Theme: Family Matters

Adult Selection:

The Ride of Our Lives by Mike Leonard

The Ride of Our Lives is the humorous yet deeply moving account of NBC journalist Mike Leonard's cross-country odyssey with his eccentric parents, three grown children, and a daughter-in-law. Full of ups and downs, laughs and tears, the month-long journey becomes a much larger tale of hope, persistence, and valuable lessons learned along the way.



A celebration of the ties between parents and children, as well as the unforgettable community of people one can meet across America, *The Ride of Our Lives* is an inspiring narrative of self-discovery and self-fulfillment and how one unique family found blessings and simple pleasures on the road called life.

Discussion Questions:

- Mike Leonard was inspired to take his journey because of the advancing age of his parents and the increasingly adult responsibilities of his children. What made this a good time for the family members to reconnect?
- Did you watch the “Ride of Our Lives” video series on PBS? Which did you enjoy most, the book or the series? Why?
- Why do you think Jack and Marge have enjoyed such a solid marriage? Do their personality differences create a balance or do they simply enjoy being off-balance?
- How valuable was the journey to the Leonard children who participated — sons Matt and Brendan, daughter Kerry and daughter-in-law Margarita? Can you picture them taking a similar journey with their own parents and children some day?
- Mike indicates that there are many untold stories in his parents' past — his mother's relationship with her father, the death of Jack and Marge's first child. Does the journey in some way help Mike find out more about these dark places in his family's history?
- Do you identify more with Marge's pessimism or her husband's optimism? Which seems to be a more realistic outlook? A more desirable outlook?
- Mike tells us that he fears the passage of time. His children joke about his obsession with fitness. Does he seem like a “driven” personality?

Activity Ideas:

Host a geo-caching program. (Visit www.geocaching.com for details.)

Sponsor or attend a scrapbooking activity.

Schools/libraries can sponsor a day trip program and talk about various activities available in your area for families to experience together.

Rent an RV for a day and conduct a book discussion in it, or contact an RV dealership and ask about holding a *Ride of Our Lives* discussion in one of the vehicles!

Jack has lots of good stories. Host a storytelling contest or competition between generations.

- Mike Leonard has made a career out of observing, filming and writing about small moments in life. Do you think his observations have anything to teach us?
- The book ends with a new addition to the family. Does this give you a sense that when once journey ends, another begins? Do you feel inspired to take your own family journey?

Related Materials:**Books about Families:**

Buffalo Soldier by Chris Bohjalian

The Center of Everything by Laura Moriarty

The Color of Water by James McBride

Digging to America by Anne Tyler

The Film Club by David Gilmour

The Glass Castle by Jeanette Walls

The God of Animals by Aryn Kyle

Heart in the Right Place by Carolyn Jourdan

The Rich Part of Life by Jim Kokoris

Run by Ann Patchett

The Space Between Before and After by Jean Reynolds Page

The Stone Diaries by Carol Shields

Websites related to Leonard family adventures:

<http://mikeleonard.pictureshowfilms.com>

<http://www.pictureshowfilms.com>

<http://rideofourlives.com>

Mike Leonard participates in Books to Bridge the Region on Thursday, October 22, 2009. Both events are free and open to the public:

- 2 to 3 p.m.: Purdue University Calumet, 2200 169th St., Hammond, IN, 46323: Alumni Hall, 2nd floor, Student Union and Library Building
- 6 to 7 p.m.: LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave., LaPorte, IN

See the website at www.books2bridge.org for information on all events.

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