



The Ride of Our Lives: Roadside Lessons of an American Family

Mike Leonard

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Mike Leonard is a lucky man. It's not everyone who gets parents like Jack and Marge. At eighty-seven, Jack is a pathological optimist with an inexhaustible gift of gab. Marge, Jack's bride of sixty years, though cut from the same rough bolt of Irish immigrant cloth, is his polar opposite—pessimistic and proud of it. What was their son, Mike, thinking when he took a sabbatical from his job with NBC News so he could pile these two world-class originals along with three of his grown kids and a daughter-in-law into a pair of rented RVs and hit the road for a month?

Mike was thinking that he wanted to give his parents the ultimate family reunion. And so, one February morning, three generations of Leonards set out on their journey under the dazzling Arizona sky. Thirty minutes later, one of the humongous recreational vehicles has an unplanned meeting with a concrete island at a convenience store. Thus begins the adventure of a lifetime—and an absolute gem of a book.

In the course of their humorous, often poignant cross-country tour, from the desert Southwest to the New England coastline, the Leonards reminisce about their loves, their losses, and their rich and heartwarming (and sometimes heartbreaking) lives, while encountering a veritable Greek chorus of roadside characters along the way. The home stretch finds the clan racing back to Chicago, hoping to catch the arrival of the next generation, Jack and Marge's first great-grandchild. Through it all, Mike pieces together a century of family lore and lunacy—and discovers surprising sides to his parents that allow him to see them in a whole new light.

Mike Leonard has captivated millions of television viewers with his wry and witty feature stories for NBC's Today. Now he brings that same engaging charm and keen insight to the foibles and passions of his own blessedly unique family. By turns uproariously funny and deeply moving, *The Ride of Our Lives* delivers a lifetime of laughs, lessons, and priceless memories.

This edition's exclusive DVD features never-before-seen footage from the trip as well as candid family video and photographs.

From the Hardcover edition.

The Ride of Our Lives: Roadside Lessons of an American Family Details

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Author : Mike Leonard

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From Reader Review The Ride of Our Lives: Roadside Lessons of an American Family for online ebook

Tamara Crowell says

Great book! Such an enjoyable read. I really feel like I got to know Mike Leonard's family and am so thankful he shared their story. My favorite line was "If you try to say 'What am I worth to the entire world?' you're not going to be worth a whole lot. So, why don't you make yourself worth something to the people around you and the people you care about?" Filled with colorful characters and funny as well as some sad stories, this book helps anyone appreciate the "colorful crazy" characters that make your own family special.

Jeff says

This is more along the lines of John Grogan's The Longest Trip Home: A Memoir than a touring book, much to my disappointment. I think Leonard has written a great book to share with his grandkids. It's all about their family stories, but they didn't seem that compelling to me. It was difficult to keep my interest level up through the whole book. It was especially disappointing to me that the local people and local venues they visit in their trip really only merit a brief mention. In many cases, those venues aren't even the catalyst for family story discussions.

Jayne Bartrand says

Loved it! Felt like I was on the trip with them. Tears of all kinds during this read! Reminder to appreciate the journey of life and especially the people. Follow your heart and don't second guess and delay your gut instincts. #Ragdale2017

Carole says

I loved the writer's style. He's very funny and not afraid to take pot shots at himself. Traveling around the country with his parents and children, you learn that family is what is really important. Also you cannot go back to life as it used to be, it has changed. Be happy with who you are and who you are with.

Elizabeth says

I bought this after hearing Mike Leonard speak at a book and author luncheon in 2006 or 2007. Somehow it sat on a shelf for a decade (as so many books do in my house) and I pulled it off to meet the "Read a Travel Memoir" task on Book Riot's 2017 Read Harder Challenge. And, as so often happens, the book was in my life at the right place and right time.

I am about the age that Mike Leonard was when he took this trip with his elderly parents and young adult children. I'm seeing my young adult child today and anticipating a visit from my own parents next week.

And I'm going to pay better attention and listen more.

A couple of weeks ago, I picked this book from my pile because I knew it was funny and I needed something less serious. I spent the last couple of chapters wiping away tears. That's life -- funny and tender.

Angela says

The book starts off with a mishaps right away. The cast of characters mirrored people in my life. The family embarks on a trip across the us in two RV's. The son wants to give his parents a last tour of the country before they can't travel anymore. They visit special places to them as well as familiar land marks along the way. The family's interactions through out the book made me laugh.

NancyS says

Book was so-so. Nothing wrong with it, but nothing overly interesting either. The best part was dealing with the crash at the beginning.

Erin Isgett says

3.5 stars--good read for book club.

Linda says

Mike Leonard's self deprecating account of his family's month long travel across the country in 2 rv's is an easy and enjoyable read. Mike's parents are in their late 80's and he loads them, some of his children and their spouses and off they go on an adventure to revisit significant areas of their lives: his parents first home together, his parents colleges, and make some other scenic stops along the way. But that's really not what the book's about.

It's about the relationships of his family, remembrances of his parents as they delve back in their memories to tell how things were when they were young, reminisces from Mike on his early years growing up with is brothers (hilarious) and just through plain happenstance met some of the people who most influenced his life.

Jay says

“The Ride of Our Lives” wasn’t what I thought it would be, but it is what it says it is. I was expecting one of those road trip stories where you got a lot of “compare and contrast” between the land and the people met along the way. There’s a bit of that here, but mostly it is a record of the stories a family tells themselves, how the ancestors came to America, how Mike got his first job in TV, how everyone met and got married. The

travel wasn't the centerpiece of the book, the family stories were. You also got a lot of description of the family members as characters, the grandpa who sings at the drop of a hat, the hard driving TV reporter who has to do two things at once. It was like binge-viewing something like "The Waltons" – you got to know a little about everyone and a lot about some, and you also know how the generations all interacted. Leonard is like a John Boy who has become a successful network TV reporter, so you do get stories of a well-to-do family, but also of family members borrowing to make ends meet and working for little pay to prove their worth – typical Walton storylines. If you have an appreciation for those kinds of stories, you will enjoy this book.

JoNel says

My husband and I listened to this book while driving the north shore of Lake Superior. The touching stories made our trip even more enjoyable.

Cat. says

This is a lovely book about families and what they mean to each other. Sure, there are times when they make you drink and want to run screaming for the exit. But this book exemplifies the good things about keeping family together: laughter, history, self-knowledge, love.

Who, when reaching middle age, doesn't realize all the things their parents have done for them? And, well, *to* them as well. Mike Leonard decided to give his parents one last vacation, one last big trip to talk about, with the topper at the end: the birth of their first great-grandchild. In the process of telling the stories of the trip, he winds in the history of his parents' families, and his own childhood and young adulthood.

The book made me cry, laugh, smile and even come to some "aha" moments about my own wacky family. There is a DVD included which contains the four-part series shown on the "Today" show (where Leonard is an occasional reporter) as well as some other material showing details about the trip that can't be conveyed in print form. It's a wonderful package.

Not that I'm rushing out to suggest this to my mom--she wouldn't, couldn't, do a trip like this--but it is a wonderful, lovely idea: enforced togetherness of three generations (three (I think?) of Leonard's children are with them on this road trip) with cameras rolling. It's just a reminder that as much as we like to think we're more evolved and don't need our parents, we did come from them, and there are some things that can't be left behind forever.

Nice job.

Sandy says

This was a delightful, light hearted, easy read, hard to put down. I laughed out loud, a LOT and cried a bit. It's a warm, wonderful look at the power of family relationships! I highly recommend it!

Peggy L says

Brave son invites crochety, outspoken mom and engaging dad to travel across the USA in two rvs, and see what they have not seen and revisit personal history locations.

I do not think I would ever agree to DO this, but I loved this book. This family is presented honestly with humor and love, but is not too sweet nor vapid. Individuals are fleshed out and failings are as charming as successes.

Mike Leonard's personal story is fascinating and his family adds to it!

Mark "Lefty" Holencik says

Very enjoyable book. Mike tells the story of three generations going on a road trip across America to be at the birth of the fourth generation. Mike's parents are in their 80's and are not shy about their quirks and shortcomings. Mike reflects on the way things fell together in his life and how his parents were accepting of him as he was. His parents reveal things about themselves that the other generations did not know. I had to laugh through the whole book.
