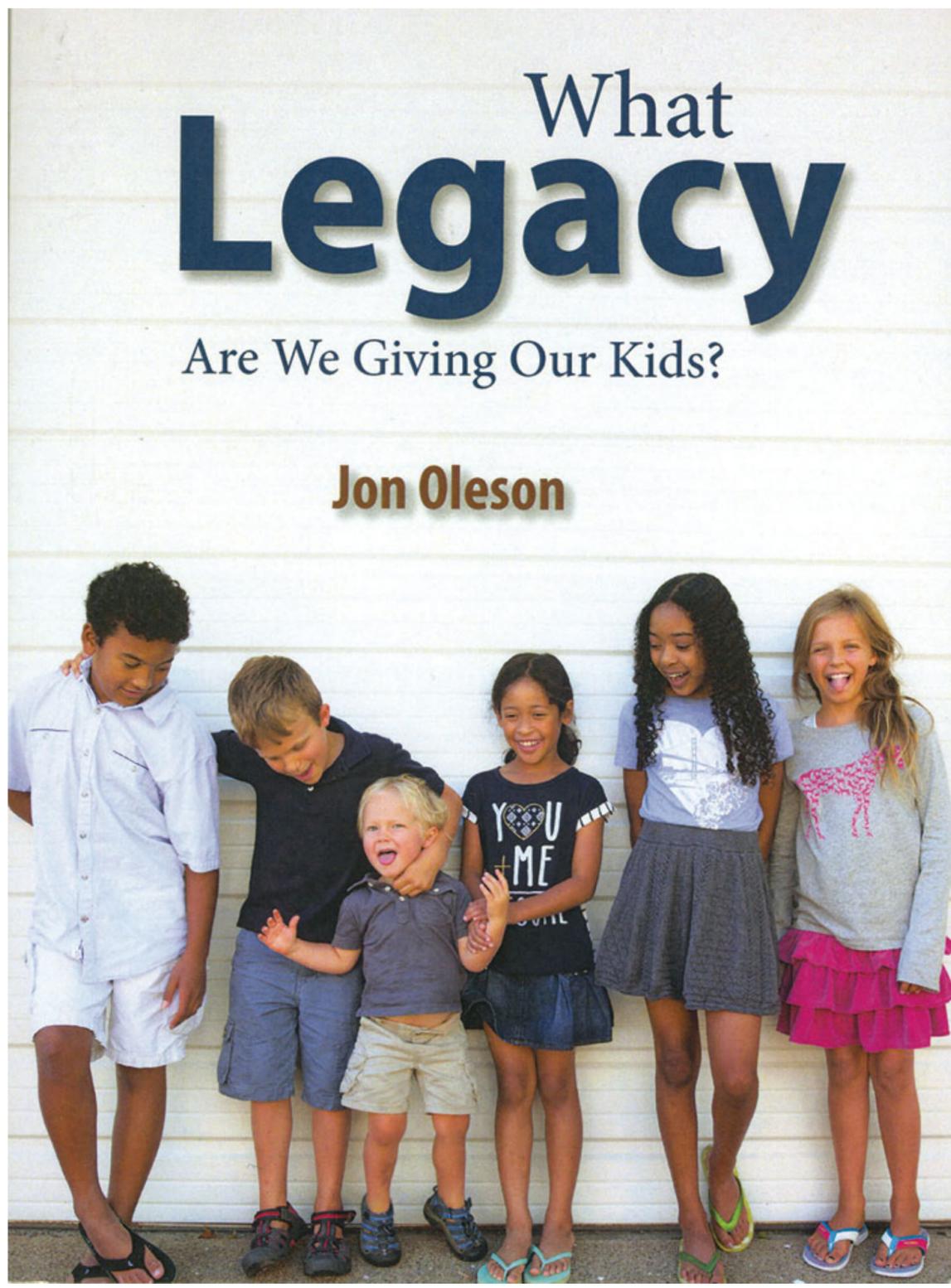


‘What Legacy Are We Giving Our Kids?’

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By [Mike Hanks](#)



Jon Oleson's book, "What Legacy Are We Giving Our Kids?"

What does a retired school teacher and assistant principal know about life and the world we live in?

Among many things, that it's tough to know when to draw the line when writing a book.

Bloomington City Councilmember Jon Oleson recently self-published, "What Legacy Are We Giving Our Kids?" The book aims to continue the dialogue and discussions he started several years ago, sharing the wisdom and experiences he has gained throughout his life, which includes working as a youth director for Duluth-area churches and owning a small business. Anecdotes of his life in Minnesota and the community he now calls home illustrate the points he makes in each chapter of his book.

Oleson, 71, held the finished product late last year, a bit behind schedule.

"I wanted it out in 2011," he said.

Oleson has been a city council member since January 2014, but it was an unsuccessful campaign that inspired his book. In 2010 he ran as an Independence Party candidate for Minnesota's Third Congressional District. The election was the second for Erik Paulsen, the Republican who holds the seat today.

Oleson didn't put much of a dent in the vote total of either Paulsen or his Democratic-Farmer-Labor opponent, but his campaign sparked many conversations regarding issues affecting the district, conversations Oleson didn't want to cease having simply because his campaign season was over.

During the winter following his failed campaign, Oleson attended a retreat center where he spent time writing. Inspired by the conversations he had on the campaign trail, he began to formulate what would become a book nearly six years later. It was an evolutionary process. The initial drafts of chapters from his book were less than inspirational, he said. "It was absolutely deadly; it was very academic."

Oleson sought guidance and advice as he worked to produce a product worthy of publishing. A critique of his writing suggested that the strongest chapters of his book were those that began with an anecdote from his life. Following that recommendation, he reworked his book, as necessary, and put together 40 chapters that include a story that illustrates the point he is trying to make, stated at the beginning of each chapter. Each chapter then closes with a list of questions for the reader to consider.

A chapter on patriotism, for example, uses the story of Oleson learning from a relative who served in the military during World War II. Oleson explains how his act of thanking the relative for his military service changed the way he viewed patriotism at the time.

He then shares examples of patriotic efforts Americans typically make, and challenges the status quo by broadening the definition of patriotism. He closes the chapter with asking readers how they define patriotism, how patriotic Americans are today and what motivates people to do what's best for the country rather than simply what's best for themselves.

Most of the stories in his book are meant to be timeless. Conversations he had with friends and relatives could have happened eight months or eight years ago. There are a few chapters that are tied to specific timeframes and events, and there's a chapter that speaks to the current political climate, with a note about the unknown result of the 2016 presidential election at the time of his writing.

There are chapters that discuss political topics, but there are plenty of chapters devoted to societal questions that aren't connected to politics and governance. Oleson discusses getting to know people beyond the first impression, how we value life, making relationships work, how smartphones are affecting our lives and changing cultural perceptions of gender roles, among other topics.

Although it took him until the end of last year to publish the book, Oleson toyed with the idea in 2014, when he met with a publisher. That didn't pan out, a tale told by many authors. But rather than shop his idea to an endless array of publishers, he decided his time was better spent finishing the book and working with people he hired to help him achieve the feat. About a year ago he began working with a St. Louis Park company that helped him self-publish the end result.

Since receiving boxes of his finished product, Oleson has spent time doing what many self-publishers end up doing: self-promotion. The book is available at a few local bookstores, as well as in both printed and digital editions online through Amazon. One of the many lessons he has learned in his effort to self-publish: It takes a lot of follow up to reach an audience, he explained.

Much of his effort has been in the greater Twin Cities area, naturally, but Oleson also spent some time marketing his book on a recent road trip to Arizona.

Beyond simply selling books, Oleson wants to connect with potential audiences personally. He wants to hold community discussions focusing on topics in his book, and he envisions creating a discussion forum through his book's website.

His website could also serve as a platform for continuing the book with topics and ideas that didn't make it into print, although Oleson prefers dialogue to the one-way conversation his book and a blog provide. Feedback is an important component of the project, he noted.

To that end, Oleson is planning a reading and discussion from 5-8 p.m. Wednesday, May 10, in the rehearsal hall of Bloomington Civic Plaza.

Details about the book are available online at legacytokids.com.