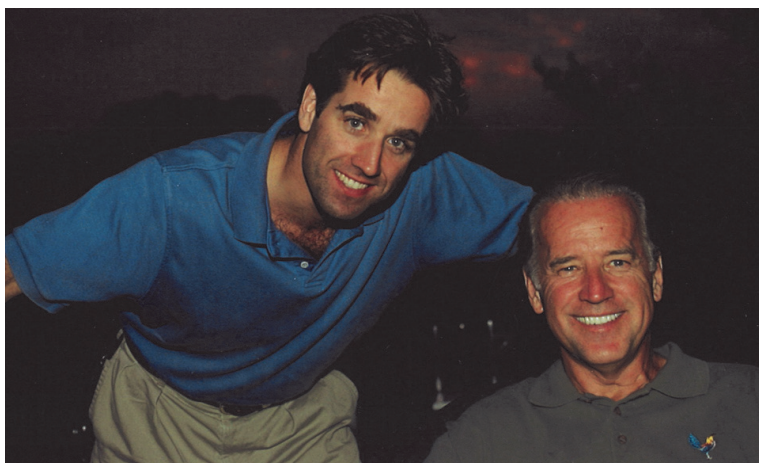




Vice President Biden and Melinda Gates wave to the crowd at Seattle's Benaroya Hall as part of his book tour for Promise Me, Dad. Photo Courtesy of David Lienemann. At right, Biden Family portraits from the Biden family personal archive.

Hope, Purpose & a Promise

Former U.S. Vice President and Delaware Senator Joe Biden
opens up about his book and what it means **BY JOHN SWEENEY**



FOR JOE BIDEN, it has always been about purpose. Always. Back when he was kid growing up. In the U.S. Senate. As vice president of the United States. And today -- when he talks to strangers about the loss of his son Beau, when he presses doctors and scientists for a cure for cancer, and when he urges everyday Americans to take heart and return to the values that have always held the country together.

The former vice president and his wife, Dr. Jill Biden, have been touring the country on behalf of his book, "Promise Me, Dad: A Year of Hope, Hardship, and Purpose." It is a tense, fast-paced account of a heart-breaking 12 months. Readers come face-to-face with the maneuvering of presidential candidates, the intrigue of international diplomacy, and, of course, the anguish of a father fighting and praying that his son would live.

Most of all, it is a book about hope.

That is the reason he wrote the book. But -- and this surprised Biden -- it is the reason people are reading it.

The book has hit Number One on the New York Times bestseller list. He has spoken to packed audiences in forums in major cities. What strikes

most readers, and reviewers, is the honest portrait of a father and his family struggling with the pain and turmoil of young man's death. Beau Biden, Delaware's former attorney general, died from brain cancer in 2015.

In city after city, in bookstores and at forums, the vice president says, "Scores of people came through the line and many said, 'I read your book.'" They then would softly say that their son or a daughter had just died.

"I was always stunned and I'd say, 'My God, what are you doing here?' 'Then they'd tell me, 'Your book gave me hope.'"

That made him contemplate the second reason for writing the book: People have to move forward.

Including Joe Biden.

In the book, he quotes the late New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan: "To fail to understand that life is going to knock you down is to fail to understand the Irishness of life."

When asked about being knocked down, Biden agrees. It is something the Irish know. But they also know that you have to pick yourself up. This is where the themes of his book -- hope and moving forward -- come together.

Cover Story

It applies to people and nations.

His son, Beau, retaught him that in his last days.

When Beau realized what was happening to him, he said he was going to be all right. “Then he said to me, ‘You’ve got to promise me, Dad, that no matter what happens, you’re going to be all right. Give me your word, Dad. Give me your word as a Biden. You’re going to be all right.’”

I knew what he meant. He was afraid that I would withdraw. ‘I won’t,’ I promised him.”

This is why he helped form the Beau Biden Foundation to combat child abuse and why he is rallying the medical community to find a “moonshot” cure for cancer. It is why he is engaged in what he sees as the fight to save the American values of civility and community.

The book, he says, is about that invisible fabric that holds up society.

“There are a lot of reasons for middle-class and working-class people to be frightened,” the vice president says. “The world is changing. I was talking to a man from Claymont. I asked him how he was doing. He is doing all right he said, but he said he is afraid his son won’t have a job in 10 years. That’s frightening.

“People are hungry for a reason to hope. But that’s no reason to go for this phony populism.

“I have never been so optimistic about America’s chances. Our worker productivity is second to none.”

“I think the American people have the same values they have always had. The vast majority of people have become disenchanted with the way our political system has been going. This sense of us against them is so pernicious. Why divide us? Instead, we should appeal to what we always had, a common purpose. We should remember our post-World War II values.”

“Truth matters,” he says. “Common goals matter. That is where most Americans are today.

“I have never been so optimistic about America’s chances. Our worker productivity is second to none. None. We have the greatest research universities in the world, thanks to Dwight D. Eisenhower’s foresight. We have the smartest venture capitalists.

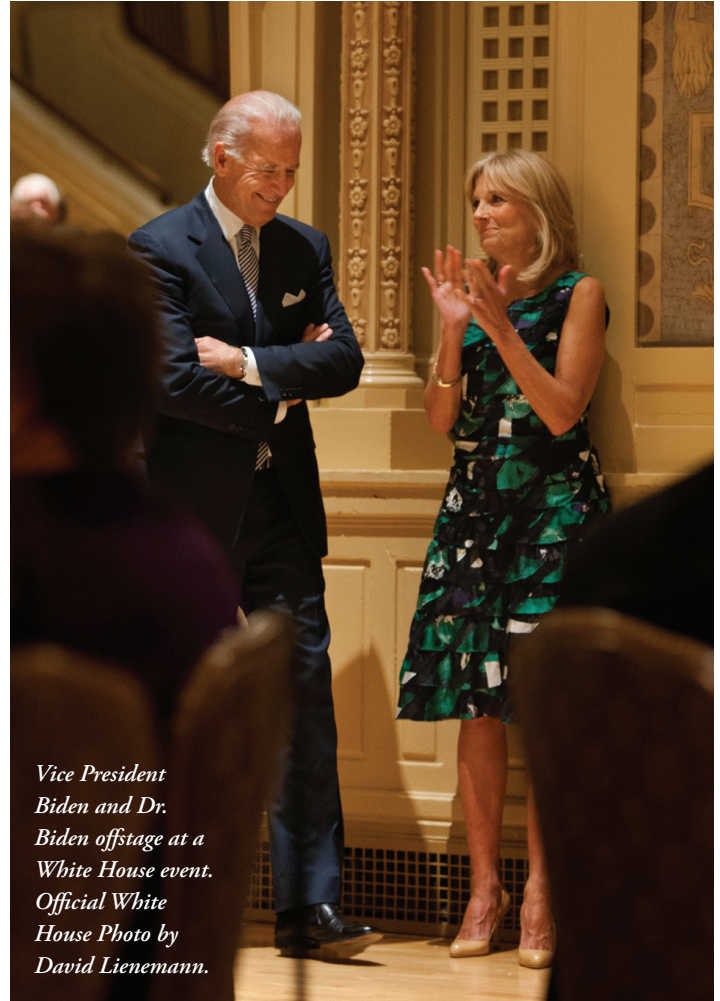
“But what are we doing to ourselves? Of course, we get knocked down. But the story of America is getting knocked down and getting back up stronger.

“I have always said, ‘It’s never a good bet to bet against America.’”

In the book, Biden remembers his “grandfather Finnegan” as always telling the young boy as he went out the door, “Keep the faith, Joey.”

It was a reminder of purpose, Biden says today. Purpose was always a part of it. Especially in the hard times. In December 1972, when he had just become Delaware’s senator-elect, his wife Neilia, and his daughter, Naomi, were killed in an automobile accident. His sons Beau and Hunter were badly injured. Biden can still see and hear Beau, barely 4 years old, reassuring his younger brother, that everything was going to be all right.

“From the accident to this, it’s always been purpose,” he adds. “Beau may be gone, but he’s still a part of me.” ■



Vice President Biden and Dr. Biden offstage at a White House event. Official White House Photo by David Lienemann.

A Note from Dr. Biden

Dr. Jill Biden has a message for Delaware’s business leaders: If you want our young people to succeed in tomorrow’s economy, step up today.

The former Second Lady of the United States spent much of the last decade crisscrossing the nation, talking to students and studying the challenges young people face. With changing technology and global competition for jobs growing ever greater, she said one thing is clear: Twelve years of schooling does not do the job any more, not for tomorrow’s economy.

“We have to make college more affordable for all students,” she said. That is why she is behind the movement to give all students 14 years of free education. Adding that extra time will allow more students to gain the skills they need for the future. It is a step that will pay dividends.

“Business also needs to offer more apprenticeships to round this out,” Dr. Biden added.

“I am a big proponent of mentoring,” she said. All young people can benefit from mentors, especially young women and minorities.

This is where Delaware’s businesses can help. Get involved, start or expand your mentoring programs.

“We have a responsibility to come together and provide mentoring for our young people.”