

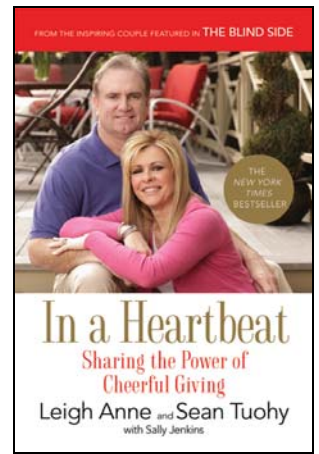


In a Heartbeat

by Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy with Sally Jenkins

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Biography of Leigh Anne Tuohy

Dubbed a “warrior princess” by author Michael Lewis in his best-selling book *The Blind Side*, Leigh Anne is the inspirational matriarch of the Tuohy family.

A Memphis, Tennessee native, Leigh Anne was raised by her devout Christian mother and tough-as-nails U.S. Marshall father, a JFK appointee who served the administration in its efforts to racially integrate schools in the Deep South. She attended Briarcrest Christian School and went on to graduate from the University of Mississippi, “Ole Miss,” with a Bachelor of Science degree in Interior Design. There Leigh Anne met Sean Tuohy, her husband of 27 years. Both were active and ambitious college students: Leigh Anne was a cheerleader, campus favorite, homecoming maid, and active member of her sorority; Sean became a record-breaking SEC basketball champion and still holds several SEC assist records. Carrying on the values passed down by her parents, Leigh Anne decided early on that her mission was to raise children who would become “cheerful givers.” The Tuohys are the proud parents of daughter Collins (23) and sons Michael Oher (23) and Sean, Jr. (16).

Leigh Anne owns “Flair I,” an interior design firm with her mother and partner, Virginia Roberts. Her work has been featured on HGTV and in numerous publications, and she has designed for such clients as Peyton Manning, Scottie Pippin, Isaac Bruce, and OJ Mayo.

The Tuohy family is actively involved in many civic and faith-based organizations, including Grace Evangelical Church of which they are founding members. The Tuohy family’s life was chronicled in Lewis’ *New York Times* number one bestseller *The Blind Side* which went on to become a record-breaking Hollywood blockbuster that earned more than \$200 million at the box office and the first sports film in history to have a number-one opening weekend.

Leigh Anne and husband, Sean, share their firsthand account of the process that brought Michael into their family in their new book, ***In a Heartbeat: Sharing the Power of Cheerful Giving***. Leigh Anne is also a highly requested speaker. At the podium, she inspires audiences to recognize the full potential of individuals in their communities—and to find value in those who society has deemed valueless. She also shares her personal Blind Side observations, from seeing Michael Oher for the first time to how the experience changed her as a person—and the Tuohys as a family. “He had a much greater impact on our lives than we did on his life,” says Leigh Anne.

Biography of Sean Tuohy

“Sean was an American success story: he had come from nothing and made himself rich,” wrote Michael Lewis in *The Blind Side*, the best-selling book that inspired the major motion picture starring Sandra Bullock (who won the Academy Award for Best Actress for her role) and Tim McGraw. *The Blind Side* tells the story of Michael Oher, a homeless teenager turned first round draft pick NFL football player with the support and love of an unlikely adoptive family: the Tuohys. Sean Tuohy, Michael’s adoptive father, was a record-breaking basketball player before becoming a successful entrepreneur and NBA broadcaster.

Sean Tuohy knew from personal experience what it meant to be the poor kid in a private school. Raised in New Orleans, Tuohy’s father coached basketball at the prestigious Isidore Newman School. After his father suffered a massive stroke, Sean continued to attend the private school, where he found himself on his own more than he ever anticipated.

With sports as his “meal ticket” through high school and college, Sean left New Orleans for the University of Mississippi on a basketball scholarship. When Sean walked off the court after his final game, he had shattered every major SEC assists-related record and become a legend in the SEC hall of fame for leading the Ole Miss Rebels to their first and only Championship.

Drafted by the NBA’s New Jersey Nets in 1982, he opted to continue his career overseas before returning to the US to be with his father in his final days. He became a successful entrepreneur, building a company that now owns and operates 70 fast food restaurants, including Taco Bell and Long John Silver’s franchises.

Sean has been married to his college cheerleader sweetheart, the former Leigh Anne Roberts, for 27 years, and they are the proud parents of daughter Collins (23) and sons Michael Oher (23) and Sean, Jr. (16).

Sean is also in his ninth season as an NBA broadcaster for the Memphis Grizzlies, after several years as an analyst for radio broadcasts at Ole Miss as well as national broadcasts for Westwood One and CBS radio.

In addition to his demanding business, broadcasting, school and church schedules (he also helped to create one of the fastest growing evangelical churches in Memphis, the Grace Evangelical Church), Sean is heavily involved in supporting several minority students at Briarcrest Christian School. “It’s easy to beat a kid up. The hard thing is to build him up,” Sean says. With that philosophy in mind, Sean and Leigh Anne brought Michael into their home, supported him through school, and eventually adopted him as their son.

Sean and Leigh Anne share their firsthand account of the process that brought Michael into their family in their new book, ***In a Heartbeat: Sharing the Power of Cheerful Giving***. Sean is also a highly requested speaker. At the podium, he invites audiences to go behind the scenes of the Tuohy household with a heartwarming message: “In our house, we believe in miracles.” Sharing personal anecdotes with his signature southern charm, Sean brings *The Blind Side* to life. From the perspective of a dedicated father and inspirational coach, Sean asks all of us to consider a simple question: how many other kids just like Michael Oher are falling through the cracks every day? And how can we make an impact big enough to change a broken system?

A Conversation with Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy

Q: Besides dominating the *New York Times* bestseller list, *The Blind Side* has also broken Hollywood records. Why do you think your family's story has captivated so many people?

A: We think people love the story because they recognize some aspect of themselves there. We want to be the kind of people who really make a difference in the world, but so many people are convinced they don't have the resources to be that kind of giver. We wrote *In a Heartbeat* to share our story in our own words precisely so that people will begin to realize that they **can** be the kind of people who help change someone's life.

Q: Let's talk about the problem of homeless and needy children in America. How do you believe this problem can be solved?

A: There are a lot of intractable problems in the U.S., from terrorism to health care. But the problem of children in need is curable; we can all do something about it today, individually, through the smallest acts. If every church in the U.S. sponsored one child, we could wipe out the problem of homeless children in this country. There are a million Michaels. Not every kid has the potential to become a star player in the NFL, but he or she may be the person who grows up to cure cancer, or becomes a great husband or wife to someone.

Q: How do you respond when people marvel at the risks you took as you brought Michael Oher into your family?

A: You know, you take a risk every day of your life. When you get in your car and drive across a bridge you take a risk. You don't know if your tires are good, or if the pilings are going to hold, or if the bridge will fall in. But you don't really stop and think about it, do you? You don't get up every morning and kick all four of your tires. You don't stare at the bridge and say, 'Yeah, I think it'll hold me.' How did you know that bridge wasn't going to fall? Yet you went right ahead and crossed it. Everybody takes risks, every day. You just don't realize that's what you're doing.

Q: How do you define "cheerful giving"?

A: This is not giving to impress someone who may be watching, and it's not giving because you feel guilty. The Bible says it best: "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." -- II Corinthians 9:7

Q: In the book, you sum up your philosophy of giving in "The Popcorn Theory." Tell us more about that.

A: The Popcorn Theory is about noticing others. It's about seeing, not turning away from the immediacy of someone in need. It starts with recognizing a fellow soul by the roadside—even if he doesn't seem to belong in your lovely red brick neighborhood and he is the biggest damn piece of popcorn you ever saw and his problems seem too immense to take on. It's about assigning that person value, and potential. Like popcorn, you don't know which kernel's gonna pop. They just show up. It's not hard to spot 'em. The Popcorn Theory goes like this: "You can't help everyone, but you can try to help the hot ones who pop right up in front of your face."

Q: What if I don't have many resources? How can I be a cheerful giver without a bunch of extra money?

A: Too often we think we lack the means to improve someone's lot. We're wrong. The Popcorn Theory doesn't require you to write a large-scale check, or to take a hungry boy with eyes like leaping flames into your household. But it does require that you perceive the person standing right in front of you, and extend a hand in kindness. Consider this story we heard from a U.S. Senator during a trip to Washington for an Adoption Coalition convention:

There is a little-known Congressional initiative to give internships to young people who were so unwanted they have aged out of the foster care system. This Senator employs one such young man. One day the Senator passed by the mailroom, and paused and turned around. He noticed that his intern, fresh out of foster care, had reorganized all the old files. "This room has never looked so clean," the Senator said. "You did a great job." A few minutes later the Senator decided to get a cup of coffee. He returned to mailroom and found that his intern had tears streaming down his face. "Son, did I offend you?" he asked. "No," the young man said. "That's the first time anyone has ever told me that I did something good." This gift had nothing to do with money. What this kid needed most was encouragement and self-worth, and that's what he was given.

Q: As you share your story, one of the points you stress is that generosity is not just your personal value. It's a core value for the entire family. What specific things have you done as parents to help your kids become cheerful givers?

A: One of our practices is something we call "Get one, give one," which means when you receive something, give part of it away. To impress the lesson on our daughter Collins, we sent her to camp with underprivileged kids and on a searing mission trip to the Guatemala City Dumps, where she saw families living in lean-tos amid the garbage, yet with pictures of Christ hung amid the wreckage. Collins came to understand how fortunate she was: "He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." (Acts 14:17) She also learned how important it was to share some of what she'd been given. Long before Michael came into our lives, Collins and Sean Jr. learned to accept the presence of kids sleeping on the sofa or lounging around the house. Friends at the Briarcrest School whose parents worked two jobs. One afternoon 7-year-old Sean Jr. came home to find them playing with his X-box. He sought out Leigh Anne and said, "What gives?" She replied, "We're just helping them out. Be generous." Sean Jr. went back downstairs and watched the brothers play a video game. "I've got the winner," he said.

Q: In the book, you point out that the most important gifts your children gave each other had nothing to do with money. Tell us about those gifts.

A: As Michael became a member of the family, he and our other kids gave each other two small but crucial mutual gifts—loyalty and protection. At Ole Miss, Collins and Michael went everywhere together, and they and their friends achieved a new level of racial integration at that old southern school. Even now, when our family attends Michael's games, he remains extremely protective of his sister, insisting on one occasion that his teammate walk her to the car to keep her away from unruly male fans. And for Sean Jr. having Michael in his family means they do more as a family—he gets much more of each of them.

This is one of the blessings of cheerful giving. We have always felt that Michael gave us far more than he received. All we did was put a roof over his head. He has given us back a stronger sense of home and family.

Reading Group Questions

1. The Tuohys have a simple philosophy: “You can’t help everyone. But you can try to help the hot ones who pop right up in front of your face.” They call this the Popcorn Theory. What’s your take on the Popcorn Theory? Do you have your own way of cheerful giving? Can you think of a time when you touched a life, or when someone’s generosity had changed yours?
2. Leigh Anne and Sean tell wonderful stories about their parents in their book, *In a Heartbeat*. How do you think Leigh Anne and Sean’s upbringing affected their values as adults and their parenting style?
3. The Tuohys embraced Michael with love, and took him off the streets and into their home. Michael’s life has been transformed by the Tuohys, and now as a professional football player he is an inspiration for many. How do you think Michael’s views on family, life’s possibilities, and cheerful giving changed over his lifetime? Do you think he sees himself differently?
4. The Tuohys were well aware of the debate about race in adoption. Michael put the issue this way: “As long as somebody is helping somebody and taking them off the streets, I don’t care— you know, black or white or what ever, it should never be a problem.” What do you think about race and adoption?
5. How has sports affected the Tuohy family? Do you think it helps bring them together as a team?
6. When Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy discuss Michael Lewis’s *The Blind Side* and the Oscar-winning film adaptation of the same title, they say that “compared to our real lives, though, the book and movie were just sketches.” How did you think the Tuohy family was portrayed in the book and movie? Now that you’ve read *In a Heartbeat* and have seen the Tuohys’ story told in their own words, have your views of the family changed?
7. Take a moment to discuss how the Tuohy children handle themselves and treat one another. What does that say about their values and character? Do you think Leigh Anne and Sean have succeeded in raising kids to be cheerful givers?
8. In the Q&A, Leigh Anne and Sean say that “We have always felt that Michael gave us far more than he received.” What do you think Michael gave back to the Leigh Anne and Sean? What did he give to S.J and Collins?