

Exploring Books



What "Turn Around" Brings

By Bobby L. Hickman. Photography courtesy of owensboroliving.com and Leigh Anne Tuohy

If you were ever inspired to do good works by a movie like "The Blind Side", but didn't know how to get started, Leigh Anne Tuohy has some suggestions. Her new book, "Turn Around: Reach Out, Give Back, and Get Moving" is full of ideas for helping people make a difference in their communities.

However, "Adopting a 6 foot, 6 inch, 350-pound African-American young man is not for everybody," she acknowledged. "It was not some Cinderella fairy tale where we sprinkled magic dust over him. Like anything you want to do, it takes work." And the family did not do it alone, she added. Tutors worked with Michael; people brought casseroles; and many others pitched in with small acts of kindness. "It didn't take a village; it took an entire city." And the result? "He's the epitome of a great son."

These questions about how people could follow the Tuohy's example

Tuohy is the matriarch of the Memphis family (profiled in the book and movie, "The Blind Side") that adopted future NFL first-round draft pick Michael Oher. Tuohy was in the audience when Sandra Bullock accepted the "best actress" Oscar for portraying her in the film. Tuohy enjoyed a successful career as an interior designer – appearing in "Extreme Makeover" and other television shows. But today she spends most of her time as a motivational speaker, sharing her message that everyone can make a difference in someone's life. "The biggest thing I want people to take from the book is simply this: If you can be anything, be kind," she said. "I think kindness can change the world, and we definitely need kindness right now." The story of how the Tuohy family found and adopted Oher continues to touch people's hearts. Before they brought the teenager into their home, "Michael had lived under bridges, eaten out of garbage cans, and bounced among 23 foster homes" she said. Leigh Anne and her husband, Sean (a record-breaking SEC basketball champion at their Ole Miss alma mater, and currently a TV color commentator for Memphis Grizzlies broadcasts) first saw Oher in cutoff shorts on a snowy November day and wanted to help him. They ended up adding him to their family of four, helping him with homework, and ultimately enabling him to play football at Ole Miss. But more than sports, "The Blind Side" is a story about the challenges of building a blended family and the results of charitable acts.

Tuohy said she still gets questions every day through social media from people with the same basic concerns: I want to make a difference, but I don't know how to start. How can I get involved? What can I do to help others?

"I think that's why 'The Blind Side' continues to be so relatable," Tuohy said. "People want to emulate what we did."

Those questions about how people could follow the Tuohy's example led Leigh Anne to write "Turn Around," a daily devotional filled with small steps people can take to get more involved. She spent almost two years compiling ideas and events "that could be meaningful to someone else." The book is filled with suggestions "that someone could look at and implement in their own lives – something to get them out of their comfort zone and take a risk." The book includes a "daily difference maker" with things readers can do. "I don't expect anyone to do every one of them everyday," she said, "but I hope it plants a seed for them." There is also the companion "Turn Around Journal" so people can keep track what they do each day, which ideas they tried, and how they worked out. Tuohy added, "I'm going to bang that drum until people are sick of hearing me, and then I'll keep going. Everyone was born with the ability to make a difference in someone's life. Don't sell anyone short. We're all created equal; we all have value; but we all have our little twists and turns. You have to make a little effort to figure that out." She also said giving is "infectious. You can't take it with you when you leave, but you can help a lot of people with what you've got while you're here. It seems the more we give away, the more blessed we are. It will truly change your life."

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