



The Unitases relax in their Towson, Md., home before last year's championship game. The children are (L to R) Robert, Christopher, Janice Ann, and John, Jr.

I DIE EVERY SUNDAY!

Her husband is professional football's top quarterback—the man every lineman tries to “murder”; what does she feel when he's hit by gridiron goliaths? Here's her story

By Mrs. JOHN UNITAS

as told to Ed Fitzgerald

EVERY SUNDAY until the end of the year, you'll find me watching professional football as few people do—with a prayer on my lips and dread in my heart. And until the final gun, I'll wince at almost every offensive play, wondering if this time my prayer will fail and my husband will be hurt.

My husband is Johnny Unitas, quarterback for the Baltimore Colts. For the information of wives who leave football in the male domain, John is the key offensive player, the man who calls the signals, handles the ball, frequently passes, sometimes runs. In other words, he's the man those huge linemen try to run down with every ounce of their 225 to 275 pounds. And my Johnny weighs 190.

This Sunday it will happen all over again. Johnny will be the whipping boy, and I will pray. Probably he'll come home no more than bruised. Or will it be like that day we played Green Bay in 1958?

Johnny is a “gambler”—a quarterback who, unlike many others, tries to cross up the opposition by running the ball himself, often into the center of those behemoth linemen. That Sunday, as I sat tensely in the stands hoping he wouldn't “gamble” with himself, he took the snap from center and, head down, rammed into the Packers' middle line.

Like everybody else, I was on my feet shouting. But shouting for Johnny to be all right, not just make a first down. He was downed like a rock, but he had fallen clean, and I knew he hadn't been hurt. Then an overeager lineman hurled himself viciously on Johnny. I could hear the crowd go “oooooff!” as if the wind had been knocked out of everybody.

The referee pulled the players off Johnny. But Johnny didn't get up. I couldn't take my eyes off his still form even though I wanted to, and when he was finally helped off the field, I had to press my hands to my mouth to hold back my cries.

Johnny had three broken ribs and a punctured lung. I was told after an agonizing wait outside the locker room. Yet three weekends later, taped and determined, he was back at the job he loves. But you

can imagine how I felt that afternoon every time some opponent burst through the line to bring him down. And how I've felt every Sunday since.

Johnny and I began going together as sophomores at St. Justin's High School in Pittsburgh. He was our football and basketball star, and it was on a bus going to a basketball game that I first met him. I was standing in the aisle when the boy sitting with John offered me his seat. I sat next to him, and we had a good talk. The next day, Sunday, he called me for a date. From then on, that was it.

We talked about getting married after high school, but even then football was Johnny's great interest in life. He wanted to play in college, so we decided to wait. I got a job, and Johnny won a scholarship to the University of Louisville.

Right from his freshman year, Johnny dreamed about playing pro football. I remember one Thanksgiving we sat around the television set in my father's house watching a pro game, and Johnny said to me: “Dorothy Jean, that's what I'd like to be. How would you feel about it?”

The truth is I was unsure about it, but all I said was: “Okay, if that's what you want.” I was determined not to stand in his way. It seemed to me that if we were going to be happy together, he would have to be happy in what he was doing.

JOHNNY MADE his dream come true, but it wasn't easy. He was drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers but was cut from the squad at the end of the training period in 1955. It was a hard blow because we had been married on a rainy November day in 1954, and we had a baby girl, Janice Ann.

But we lived with my folks, and Johnny went to work as a pile driver on a construction gang. He kept in shape by playing semiprofessional football. He was paid six dollars a game, and he gave the money to me every week. Believe me, no money that John brings home today means more than those six dollars “to get something for yourself.”

Johnny's determination paid off in 1956 when the Colts invited him to their training camp. If he made good, they promised to pay him \$7,000 for the season. He made good.

By the end of the 1957 season, he was the No. 1 quarterback in pro football, and he still is. The Colts have won the championship the last two years, and in both of the winning playoff games with the New York Giants, the Eastern Division champs, Johnny has been picked as the outstanding player.

So things are good for us now. We own a modest home in Towson, a suburb of Baltimore. Johnny is a partner in a bowling alley in Baltimore, and there will be others later on. Janice Ann has three brothers, Johnny, Bobby, and baby Chris.

I'm very grateful for what God has given me, especially the kindest and most patient of husbands. And I'll be even more grateful when this Sunday's game is over, and Johnny comes home safely.

Johnny often surprises linemen with an impromptu run.



COVER:

Photographer Raymond Jacobs snapped this family expressing its hearty endorsement of one of the new '61 cars. They're all in this issue's special auto section packed with interesting features on the new models.

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