

THE PLAYBOOK OF LIFE

*How to take your emotions
out of relationships and*

WIN
every time



Former NFL Wife and Certified Life Coach
tells her story of triumph over despair

JOAN JACKSON





As a child, Joan dreamed about living a wonderful life. When she married her college sweetheart, who became an NFL star, her dreams became reality...at least that's what she thought! From the trials and tribulations of a celebrity lifestyle, to the rediscovery of true self, Joan shares a wealth of wisdom on how to take the emotions out of relationships and win every time. "The Playbook of Life" provides cues on when to take action.

The Playbook of Life: Former NFL Wife and Certified Life Coach tells her story of triumph and despair

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relationships
and win every time”**

**Former NFL Wife and Certified Life Coach
Tells her story of triumph and despair**

JOAN JACKSON

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First Edition

Play #7 – PASS INTERFERENCE:

Illegally hindering another player's chances of catching a forward pass.

We were on our way to another team. Although this was an exciting time, it was also a very sad time. We were leaving a team that had become our family. This is all we had known for the past ten years. Along with that, we were moving away from our families in Chicago to a state on the other side of the country. We had no friends or any other connection in this new place. Ten years ago, I had been in this same situation and I didn't think much of it, but this time with my own family to think about, I was a little nervous, though much wiser. As we arrived in the city, we had a meeting with a real estate agent to show us around. Jay had received tips from veteran teammates on the best locations where to build a new home. They suggested that we look in the northeastern part of the city. After a couple of days of looking at possible sites, we found a site that was under construction. It was a great location with lots of land, and the home was still in the stage where we could make some changes and add the final touches. We met with the builder, toured a couple of his completed projects, and were impressed with his work.

A couple of days later, Jay and I decided to put an offer on the home. This was an exciting time for our family. The boys were so excited when we told them they were going to have a full basketball court, vanishing edge pool and tennis court. Our boys are resilient and it seems that they were born to be explorers, so they were comfortable with the idea of moving to a different environment.

The season was coming up quickly, and there was so much to do before the season started. Furniture and cars had to be

shipped from Chicago, the final additions were being made to the house and we were set to move in.

Our new home was a dream house with everything you could ever imagine. After settling in, I would wake up feeling as if I was at a resort. The backside of our home was constructed of all windows that looked out to mountains and hillsides. The vegetation was breathtaking, with sections of powder pink ice plants that covered the ground and blue violets that were in the entryway. We had a natural stream that flowed through the backyard where I planned to have a bridge built. We were on three acres of land with about thirteen avocado trees that aligned the back part of our property.

There I was in a gated community with my property also gated. As I dashed out of our huge estate driving my drop-top 500sl Benz with my Chanel shoes on and my matching Chanel purse, going to have coffee with one of the players' wives, I had to pinch myself. I was living my dreams! This was the life!

This new team was going to be an excellent opportunity for us. The owner and coaches were very excited about us joining their team. They had a great deal of respect for Jay's athletic ability and the way he represented himself with his former team. Because he would be one of the older players on the team and had come from a great organization, they were looking to him to be a true leader in their organization. We were regarded as ambassadors for the team. We were given the role of representing and being the spokespeople for the team in the upcoming American Bowl game that would be played in Australia in the upcoming fall season. This role would include us visiting Sydney and Melbourne, Australia, to conduct preliminary interviews and do a little sightseeing prior to the team's arrival in August.

In preparation for that media "spin-off," we stayed in Australia for about ten days. We traveled with the owner of the

team and while there, were chauffeured to nice restaurants around Sydney. My fantasy lifestyle continued; no, it just kept getting better! Although I really enjoyed my life with the other team, this was more than I could ever imagine and dream of. Who would have thought that the lonely, little girl who had been tormented and nearly shot by her stepfather would be dining in Australia?

Having the opportunity to tour the city, with its wonderful architecture and history, left me speechless. As happy as we were to move to a new city and for Jay to be able to continue his career in this way, I did notice that he acted a little mysterious. His mind seemed to be occupied, and he always seemed to worry about something. I asked him if he had concerns about something and if he felt OK. His comment was simply, "I'm fine."

Our trip in Australia continued with public relations in and around Sydney and a sports event in Melbourne called *The Footy Show*, which is Aussie for "Footyball" (football) sports. Before the show, Jay and I watched the Aussie ball players practice, and they invited Jay to join them on the field. This version of football is much different than the American version, as the players do not have any equipment. They also did not have any front teeth. It was quite an experience for Jay and me.

The culture in Melbourne was more residential and less "touristy" than in Sydney. We learned that many of the people were big-time gamblers. It was nothing for the parents to leave their children in the car during the day while they went into the casinos and gambled. We spent more time than necessary here because Jay wanted to check out the casinos. Jay always wanted to explore different casinos, and this particular casino was different because we were in Australia. I did not necessarily like to go into casinos. I did not like the smoke or continuously putting my money into a machine. I really didn't like the fact

that gambling was one of my husband's favorite pastimes. However, at the time, I just thought it was all in fun.

After returning to California, it was visibly noticeable that Jay was not happy. After all these years with this man, I could recognize that something was worrying him. I could not put my finger on it, and at the same time, whenever I asked him, he assured me that he was fine. However, his moodiness was a big clue that not everything was fine. He was obviously in denial about his feelings. He never opened up about anything, so I trained myself not to read too much into it because when I did, it would zap my energy, and I had learned a few years earlier that I had to maintain my strength for my boys.

Unfortunately, I conditioned myself to overlook the very signs that were provided for me during those years. I was in denial. We were both walking the same path: the pride, the denial, the crazy making. I couldn't see that Jay was unhappy and that he was not going to be happy with this new team, his new home or our boys, and I could not be happy if he was not happy. He had so many issues to address that I was not even close to being aware of them all.

Three months after our first trip to Australia for the media spin-off, we packed up the family and traveled with the team, back to Sydney for the pre-season American Bowl Game. We were going for thirteen days this time, three days longer than the team. The team would play the game in the Olympic Stadium that had been built for the 2000 Olympic Games, which would occur later that year. Our sons, my mom, Jay's business manager, Alfred, and his daughter came with us to Australia. We were there to tour and watch Jay play in the American Bowl.

On the day of the game, my sons, my mom and I caught a cab to the stadium. We found our seats and were getting ready to watch the game. Suddenly, one of the trainers tapped me on my shoulder. He told me that I needed to come to the back of the

stadium because Jay was sick and wouldn't be able to play in the game. My heart literally skipped a beat. This man had played football now for over fifteen years (including his college years) and had never missed a game due to illness. In trying to get a sense of what was going on, I asked the trainer what happened. He, too, looked scared and worried, so I couldn't begin to imagine what could be wrong with Jay, especially since he hadn't even walked onto the field yet. Normally, these guys get hurt on the field, not in the back before they've made a single play.

I looked over at my Mom and the boys and said I had to go see what was going on with Jay, and I would send someone from the team to come back and get them if it was an emergency. My mom and the boys stayed in their seats.

I followed the trainer to the back of the stadium until we reached an ambulance that was waiting to take Jay to the hospital. I was escorted to a car right behind him. This was so startling. I was on the other side of the world while this was happening. It is not as if I hadn't experienced rushing to the hospital before, but at least I was in a familiar place where I felt comfortable with the hospitals. That was one of my biggest concerns, so I just relied on the team to make that call.

It was a short trip to the hospital, and after entering through the emergency room doors, I was immediately uncomfortable with the place. It reminded me of the hospital in the movie *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The people moved slowly up and down the hallways where there were bathroom accidents on the floors, and only one doctor or nurse was in sight. It didn't look clean or safe at all.

I quickly began asking to see Jay. My eyes darted around, looking to see anyone familiar. I just kept thinking, *Where's my husband? Surely, they have put him in a room already!* I searched up and down the hallways until a doctor came up and

asked what patient I was looking for, and at that moment, I saw the security guard outside Jay's room. I told the guard who I was, showed my ID, and he let me into the room. As I entered the room, it was so sterile and weird, nothing like the hospital rooms in the States. There was just a bed and a chair, and there Jay was with an IV attached to his arm. He was lying there looking like a deer in the headlights.

"Joan, what in the hell is going on?" he asked.

"What is going on with you?" I asked him right back! "What happened?"

"The team doctor said I am dehydrated and that I need thirteen bags of fluids, so I am going to have to have an IV for a while. I feel really bad," he confessed. The doctors didn't really explain very much to me about Jay's diagnosis. Although they treated him as if he was just dehydrated, in my heart, I felt there was more to it. I do not know if they were keeping things private so that Jay's diagnosis wouldn't be in the news or what. They also felt he needed a couple of days to rest and not get back on the international flight with the team until he was fully hydrated. If the team had taken the chance of him getting on the plane and he became ill, the only place they could land in an emergency was the Fiji Islands. In addition, they were not sure if this small island could accommodate Jay and the team.

Outside Jay's door, the team had provided security for him. They entered the room and asked if we wanted my mom to come in. One of the trainers and the Australian doctor brought the boys, my mom and Jay's manager, Alfred, over from the stadium. My mom was allowed to come in and see Jay, and she asked the doctor about Jay's condition. She'd worked in a hospital in Illinois for more than 20 years as a nurse's assistant. She had also raised five children and consequently knew quite a bit about health matters and the psychology of physical vs. mental conditions.

My mom stood over Jay that day and talked to him. She wanted to know how he felt and if he was in any pain. He was her homeboy, and she loved her son-in-law as if he were her own. He'd been a part of our family since he was nineteen years old. However, my mom has always analyzed situations very quickly and gives her opinion straight from the hip, meaning, the truth will be told. Anyone who knows her understands what I'm trying to say. She walked right out of that hospital room and said to me, "There's nothing wrong with Jay. It is something he has done, and he's really worried about it."

Oh, my God! I will never forget her saying that to me. This woman had such a strong discernment of the truth that she was able to walk into that room, spend a few minutes with Jay and then give me the true story. At the time, I didn't really think about her comment a great deal because I was so overwhelmed by the whole incident. Consequently, I really just let it blow over my head.

After reassuring the boys that their dad was going to be okay and that he needed to rest, I went back in the room. Unfortunately, I could see that he was stressed out and worried. The way he looked at that moment puzzled me, and that haunted me until I left Sydney, which due to Jay's illness, would not be for another week. I asked him if he wanted me to stay all night with him because I didn't feel comfortable with him even closing his eyes in this place. He said no, and that he would be fine, and that it was okay for me to go back to the hotel with the boys.

Jay continued to be monitored for several days. Finally, the doctors decided that he was well enough to travel back to the States. We packed up the family and headed home. Jay and I flew in the first-class section so he would have a bed, and he slept during the 15-hour flight. Although everyone else was in

coach, the boys came up from time to time and watched over their dad during the flight.

Upon getting home, Jay needed to report to work because the season was getting started. Unfortunately, he was not physically able to begin practicing. He was still physically sick. Sadly, his soul was also sick. However, after about a week, he quickly returned to his normal self, slowly put his game face back on, and went to work. I too began my routine of getting the boys off to school and the business of running a household. At the same time, however, I just could not get what my mom said out of my mind. I found myself becoming a little paranoid and on the watch for something. At certain times when Jay and I would settle down, I would ask him, “Are you sure you were okay in Australia?”

After the Australia trip, I could not really tell what he was thinking. I used to be able to recognize when Jay was not quite right. However, after recovering from whatever was going on in Australia, he never seemed to show any emotions. His experience as a player in the NFL made it easy for him to put on his game face. Many athletes learn how to put on a game face at a young age, since most of them have been playing sports since they were children. They learn how to hide from their opponents how rattled they really are. My hope was that Jay would realize someone was trying to warn him of something. Through his sickness and missing the opportunity to play in the game, Jay’s game face made it hard for him to listen.

Jay continued through the season with no physical incidents. We both were looking forward to the off-season. It was a time for some much-needed rest for both of us. During that time, we were really excited about having fun and enjoying each other’s company. In spite of the move to our new home, getting adjusted to a new team and city and dealing with Jay’s illness in Australia, everything seemed to slowly come together. Although

I hated being so far from my family in Chicago, the decision to move here was going to be a good one.

Instant Replay

We were both living a lie. His lies seeped into his professional life and almost destroyed it. Moreover, I was still in denial that he would never be unfaithful again.

Allowing yourself to take on such a mess and bring that mess into your family setting is like having your organs torn up because you are holding something in, something that doesn't belong there. This was wiping him out. He had suppressed everything so deeply, it grew roots. When you grow those roots, the tree can get out of control and start ripping up whatever is around—your foundation and everything else.

When people live in the dark like that, they do not realize they affect everyone around them. They crack the whole foundation. That job and lifestyle masked everything. He kept hiding behind the dark shield attached to the helmet he kept on when he was on the field and when he was with his family. He was hiding behind the mask. He kept the helmet as his representative, but that was not the real Jay. The hospital incident caused him to take the mask off and reveal what was really going on.

Something in my spirit made me feel scared all the time. If you feel scared, are having bad dreams or seeing those flags on plays, it could be that there is a lie being lived somehow. Listen! Be mindful of those signs. Watch closely. Take action.



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