



Counting the Days While My Mind Slips Away: A Love Letter to My Family

Ben Utecht , Mark A. Tabb (With)

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“In this book, Ben doesn’t allow injury, setbacks, and disappointments to define him. His faith and love for his family provide perspective in the midst of challenging circumstances.” —Tony Dungy, Hall of Fame Coach and author of *Quiet Strength*

“I strongly encourage every parent, every child, and every person who plays or plans to play football and other high impact contact sports to read this book and become enlightened and empowered by Ben’s powerful story.” —Dr. Bennet Omalu, featured in the movie *Concussion*

After five major concussions, NFL tight-end Ben Utecht of the Indianapolis Colts and Cincinnati Bengals is losing his memories. This is his powerful and emotional love letter to his wife and daughters—whom he someday may not recognize—and an inspiring message for all to live every moment fully.

Ben Utecht has accumulated a vast treasure of memories: tossing a football in the yard with his father, meeting his wife, with whom he’d build a loving partnership and bring four beautiful daughters into the world, writing and performing music, catching touchdown passes from quarterback Peyton Manning, and playing a Super Bowl Championship watched by ninety-three million people.

But the game he has built his living on, the game he fell in love with as a child, is taking its toll in a devastating way. After at least five major concussions—and an untold number of micro-concussions—Ben suffered multiple mild traumatic brain injuries that have erased important memories. Knowing that his wife and daughters could someday be beyond his reach and desperate for them to understand how much he loves them, he recorded his memories for them to hold on to after his essential self is gone.

Counting the Days While My Mind Slips Away chronicles his remarkable journey from his early days throwing a football back and forth with his father to speaking about the long-term effects of concussions before Congress, and how his faith keeps him strong and grounded as he looks toward an uncertain future. Ben recounts the experiences that have shaped his life and imparts the lessons he’s learned along the way. Emotionally powerful, inspiring, and uplifting, Ben’s story will captivate and encourage you to make the most of every day and treasure all of your memories.

Counting the Days While My Mind Slips Away: A Love Letter to My Family Details

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Nikki says

The first part of the book was very heavy on childhood, football and faith. I suppose it was necessary for some of it to be included as a base to the second half but I didn't enjoy it as much.

The second half of the book was more what I was expecting. Information about his injuries, symptoms, managing life with memory issues, how he's helping bring awareness and what he's doing to keep his hope alive for a long life with his family. That was the part of the book I really enjoyed. I also like the awareness this book may bring to people - especially those who think that concussion impacts aren't real.

Also - I didn't know he was from my home state!

Noreen says

There is a lot of conversation currently regarding head trauma in athletes, in particular, football players. Loss of memory, dementia, and inappropriate actions are some of the long lasting effects for these players. In this book, Ben Utecht tells of his life as a son, a football player, a Christian, a singer, and a husband and father. It was interesting reading an insider's story of college and professional football. His love for family came through very strong, which makes his possible future situation all the sadder. I found myself wishing the very best for him and his family.

Tracy says

This one would've been better as a long magazine feature.

You're in for a lot of football and a lot of Jesus with this one. It was on my memory-book list and I'm a sucker for completing a list, so...

Also, don't tell me that you didn't know about concussions in the early 2000s, or that you would've stopped playing had they explained the risk. BS. You played football, a risky sport by any measure and you were, by your own description, a hot-headed young guy who considered coming out of retirement for another shot even after the damage was made clear to you. I get it, at the time we didn't know the full danger/risk, but we've seen the decline of enough boxers and football players that we at least knew there was a risk. You gambled on yourself, I'm sure never thinking you would have problems. I get it, we're invincible at 20.

All of that aside, I am glad to see that there has been a big shift with our youth and how concussions are evaluated/treated. I have heard fathers make jokes about their kids "having their bell rung," but I don't hear that anymore.

Sharon says

Compassionate and compelling story of Ben Utecht and his struggles with TBI due to football and concussions. I read this as my brother was watching college football and it made me wonder and hope that things have changed since his devastating injuries. Thanks to Ben for continuing to work with the Brain Injury Alliance and keeping this subject in the limelight for future generations so progress can continue for those who have had TBI's, are family or friends and work in the field. The research needs to continue!

Darcy says

Interesting book about a guy who isn't just a dumb jock. I liked hearing how playing the game he loves so affected Ben's life. A bit preachy at times with his love of God and how when he trusts him he delivers.

Laurel says

Even though I'm by no means a football fan, this book was still interesting to me. I first heard of Ben Utecht either on Focus on the Family or Family Talk. I wanted to read his book, but then forgot about it, only to discover that my local library had a copy of it. This book chronicles the football career of Ben & how he trusted God though it. He is still trusting God as he deals w/ the aftermath of his many concussions.

Doreen says

Wow! What an emotional, often heart-wrenching story this is. While in the NFL, tight end Ben Utecht suffered five serious concussions. He is now living with traumatic brain injury as a result and is losing memories without realizing it. This book is a love letter to his family where he shares his story and the things he wants them to know while he can still remember and get them written down. Many of the stories included had to be told by his wife or parents because he has no memory of very key events in his life. Other stories he tells and prays he will be able to keep those memories...like holding his baby for the first time.

This book gives a fascinating look into the NFL where being injured (at least in the past) might mean you'll be replaced, never to regain a starting position. There was great pressure on Utecht and others to play injured. I was dumbfounded that he was able to play through so many broken bones and injuries. At one point he had a broken foot. If he had surgery, it would mean he'd be out for weeks on end. Instead, doctors put a cast on it for a week, cut it off for game day, shot him up with pain killers, and recasted it after the football game. This went on for weeks. CRAZY! I will be so much more appreciative and thankful for the new rules that protect players once football season comes around again this fall. What Utecht and so many others are going through now is too high of a cost for a game.

Utecht's faith shines in this book. He is very honest and humble in retelling his story. He includes his shortcomings. His mom reminds him often that if he trusts God he won't have anything to worry about. That is the crucial issue for Ben and for us. Will we trust God when things are bleak? When He doesn't heal? When we don't get the job or position we're hoping for? Knowing that He is in control, especially when times are hard, can give so much hope and peace if we will trust Him.

I would highly recommend this book. It is a poignant memoir as well as a warning gong about the dangers of concussions and brain injuries. Thank you to Howard Books and Netgalley for providing me with a free e-copy of this book for the purpose of this review. I was not required to make it positive. All opinions are my own.

Jess Hemby says

Loved the premise- but could have done without some of the very in-depth football play-by-plays. (I get it though.) Overall- loved some of the stories, and the final two chapters were my favorite.

Lauren says

3.5 stars - Heartfelt story of an athlete who had to give up on his dream and embrace the uncertainty of his future. I added this book to my 'to read' list after seeing the movie 'Concussion' which amazed me - crazy & sad findings. This book was more about football/religion and less about science/medicine. It was also titled "a love letter to my family" but that really only applied to the last couple chapters.

Chris says

I listened to the audio book and it's pretty good. I'm not much of a football fan any longer after the Concussion movie and I don't really understand plays so much of the first half of the book was boring for me. If you are not a football fan you may not enjoy this book.

Ben Utecht narrates his own book and in most cases I believe this to be a mistake though in this case Ben was the right choice to narrate his and this book.

The book details Ben's life growing up in Minnesota as a Pastor's son and a football player and how he gets a football scholarship to play for the Minnesota Golden Gophers on a handshake. What's interesting is that Ben get's injured during his Senior High School season and the Gophers coach sticks to his agreement and let's Ben red-shirt his freshman year.

Ben meets Tony Dungy, also a Gopher alum, and Dungy says that if Ben falls through the draft crack due to injury in his final college season he would call him and he does and he goes on to play for the Indianapolis Colts with Peyton Manning and wins a Super Bowl. Dungy further shows his ethical character when he advises Utecht to sign with the Bengals.

The latter half of the book details Ben's 4 or 5 concussions and how it affects his brain and memory, how he is cut from the Bengals team (which is a breach of contract), and his 3 year arbitration case against the Bengals for the remainder of his salary for the year during which they released him.

The book as the title says is a love letter of sorts to his wife and daughters. The book also details Ben's music career or quasi career and how he becomes a spokesperson and activist for other NFL players and their

health with respect to concussions and now CTE.

I highly recommend this book.

Rebecca says

I think this is one of the sweetest love stories a man can give to his parents, wife and children. After an ride in the college and pro football arena, those wonderful sports collisions are causing him to loose pieces of my memories and life. His trust in God and opportunities to sing have been the perfect chance to record how much his life has been loved and valued.

Great eye opener for traumatic brain injury and effects.

Brenda says

Ben Utecht's father was the former pastor at my church so the parts of the book that recount exchanges between Ben and his dad particularly resonated with me. This book is a poignant story of Ben's struggles with the effects of five major concussions. I have also seen Ben perform and he does have a beautiful voice.

Angie Fehl says

Ben Utecht spent six years in the NFL as tight end for the Indianapolis Colts as well as the Cincinnati Bengals. Between those NFL years and his four years of college football, he suffered no less than FIVE documented major concussions. In the years following his last NFL game in 2009, he began to suspect that he was losing precious memories. This wasn't just temporary amnesia -- moments of his life appeared to be irretrievably wiped from his memory. With this realization, Utecht quickly became an advocate for brain health and education, nabbing a spot on the board of the American Brain Foundation. He's even spoken before Congress on the matter.

Despite his efforts to learn all he can regarding what's going in his mind and to preserve what's left, Utecht fears for what his future may hold. With that in mind, he wrote *Counting The Days While My Mind Slips Away*, what he calls "a love letter to my family" something tangible to capture his memories of the man he was in case his mind fails him. In these memories, readers are given an inside look at the questionable practices of the NFL regarding head trauma. Even within this text, several times Utecht admits that he had to refer to others to verify or remind him of what used to be some of his own memories. For instance, he discusses his experience with playing the Colts when they won the Super Bowl in 2006... he has pictures of him with the Lombardi trophy but in his mind it's like it never happened.

Utecht takes us back to the very beginning: his early days of growing up a preacher's kid. Like many a young boy, Utecht was introduced to football by his father, through many hours of tackles & tosses in the yard, even taking Ben (at age 11) to watch his first NFL training camp. As he says, "That's what I loved about the game...Football meant time with my dad." Utecht grew up big for his age, so by the time he started his school years, coaches took notice of his size and football seemed a natural path to take, as it also meant pretty much immediate social acceptance within school hierarchy. It doesn't read as intentional, but it's

almost like he was groomed for this as a career choice from the very beginning, being quietly guided by something on life's sidelines .

Almost immediately upon completing high school, Ben is offered a full ride football scholarship to University of Minnesota (which he accepts, naturally). Pretty much right out of college, he is signed to the Colts. By this time, Utecht's formidable size weighs in at 6'7", 250lbs. A reader may go into this book thinking they're in for pages full of descriptions of head trauma but dang, I was distracted by all the skeletal issues this guy was having over the years of his NFL career --- popped ribs, hip fractures, pelvic damage, separated shoulder, broken ankle.. that's not even all of it -- left me wondering if this guy was ever tested for some sort of skeletal disorder, bone deficiency, something?!

In one portion of the book, Utecht shares some entries from a journal he began to keep of symptoms he was noticing after head injuries, most excerpts focusing on 2009, his last year with the NFL... and it wasn't a planned retirement. There's a whole swirl of drama surrounding him being cut from the Bengals. He describes being "cut" while still on the IR (injured roster), which is technically not supposed to be allowed. A player is supposed to be cleared for play before they can be cut. Utecht comes to find out that the doctor who signed off on his being cleared wasn't even a medical doctor! Amazing how shady the NFL comes out in these memoirs I've been picking up lately!

Utecht's story is interesting, but not necessarily the most riveting stuff (though he does offer some comedic stories involving Peyton Manning). But I feel like in the case of CTE, it's important to get as many testimonies out there as possible if a true solution is ever to be found. In that respect, this remains an important read. It does have a heaaaavy Christian lean to it though, so just a heads up if that's not your thing. I don't mind it most times but some stuff he says here... even I was giving some of the pages some side eye.

If you've read other books on this subject, many of them are likely referenced here. Utecht cited League Of Denial many times and Bennet Omalu himself is blurbed on the back cover of this book. Utecht also covers some of the material that was discussed in Cindy Feasel's book, After The Cheering Stops (to clarify, he doesn't mention her book specifically, he just discusses similar topics).

Judith says

I was completely fascinated by the review on this true account of a football player who is suffering increasing dementia from concussions. I am very interested in how different people face declining health and he seems like a real sweetheart of a guy with a lovely family. But, he was going on and on about football and Jesus---two subjects sure to send me running for cover. The subtitle should have warned me too: I get someone wanting to praise his family: I appreciate it; it's admirable; the guy is a saint. But when authors do that, I always wonder, who, besides their immediate family is interested hearing that?

Regina Lindsey says

"I now understand that our existence as human beings lies in our ability to remember. Everything that matters about our identities - our very sense of self - comes from our memories. We may live in the present, but that doesn't last. Every moment quickly slips into the stream of short-term memory and journeys toward the ocean that is the long-term memory center of the brain. There our memories take root, shaping us, refining us, defining who we are. We are the culmination of all we have experienced, all we have thought and read and believed, all we have loved. We are living memories. Without memories we cease to be ourselves. In a very real way we cease to be." (Pg. 9)

Ben Utecht played five years in the NFL for not the Indianapolis Colts and the Cincinnati Bengals, winning a coveted ring Super Bowl in Super Bowl XLI. Yet throughout his college and professional career he suffered five documented concussions and untold undocumented ones, often referred to as "getting his bell rung." The concussions eventually took their toll and he now lives with permanent decreased memories and cognitive abilities.

If you are a football fan or the parent of a sports participant this is a must read. There has been a much more focused spotlight by the NFL and former players. But Ben brings a personal touch with the fullness of his story. It's a poignant memoir about faith, love, and appreciating each moment with with the ones you love.

A couple of items to note, however. I thought from the subtitle, "A Letter To My Family," is a bit misleading. I expected this to be structured as an epistolary form. The letter comes in the last chapter. Up until that point it is a recounting of his experience in football programs. Secondly, faith is at the core of Ben's life. If discussion of faith bothers you this is not the work for you. It isn't didactic in nature. In fact, while being a Christian myself I don't align with his interpretation of the manifestation of God's power in our lives, but it didn't take away from my appreciation of the story.
