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# Unbroken: A World War II Story Of Survival, Resilience, And Redemption



## Synopsis

On a May afternoon in 1943, an Army Air Forces bomber crashed into the Pacific Ocean and disappeared, leaving only a spray of debris and a slick of oil, gasoline, and blood. Then, on the ocean surface, a face appeared. It was that of a young lieutenant, the plane's bombardier, who was struggling to a life raft and pulling himself aboard. So began one of the most extraordinary odysseys of the Second World War. The lieutenant's name was Louis Zamperini. In boyhood, he'd been a cunning and incorrigible delinquent, breaking into houses, brawling, and fleeing his home to ride the rails. As a teenager, he had channeled his defiance into running, discovering a prodigious talent that had carried him to the Berlin Olympics and within sight of the four-minute mile. But when war had come, the athlete had become an airman, embarking on a journey that led to his doomed flight, a tiny raft, and a drift into the unknown. Ahead of Zamperini lay thousands of miles of open ocean, leaping sharks, a foundering raft, thirst and starvation, enemy aircraft, and, beyond, a trial even greater. Driven to the limits of endurance, Zamperini would answer desperation with ingenuity; suffering with hope, resolve, and humor; brutality with rebellion. His fate, whether triumph or tragedy, would be suspended on the fraying wire of his will. In her long-awaited new book, Laura Hillenbrand writes with the same rich and vivid narrative voice she displayed in *Seabiscuit*. Telling an unforgettable story of a man's journey into extremity, *Unbroken* is a testament to the resilience of the human mind, body, and spirit.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I read this book in two days flat and I know that, had I had the time, I would have read it in one sitting. This is a book that grips you, draws you in and leaves you feeling a slightly better person for having read it. The story is that of Louie Zamperini - a track and field star of the 1930's, who participated in the Berlin olympics, was part of the US air force in WWII, was shot down over the ocean, was adrift in the Pacific for over a month, was held as a POW by the Japanese forces and finally made it back to his life and has had the courage to live it to its fullest. Hillenbrand is a marvellous author. I was never tempted to read *Seabiscuit* and this was my first introduction to her work. She is one of a few authors who can write a non fiction story in the most gripping and vivid way imaginable. Instead of being flowery or overly embellished her prose relies squarely on research and on witness accounts and yet manages to never be dull. The swiftly moving story takes the reader from Zamperini's early beginnings, his swift rise to track star, the Berlin olympics and then to the World War. This is where the story really blooms. Hillenbrand settles in for the long haul here and we get to see the air force and the B24 bombers through the words of the men who actually flew them. The sequences where Zamperini and his friend Phil are adrift at sea are vivid and strangely beautifully described. The horrors that await them at the Japanese prison camps are not glossed over but neither does Hillenbrand wallow in the gore and violence as some authors may be tempted to do. There is always a strong sense of the respect the author holds for the men whose story she is being allowed to tell.

Louis Zamperini? Who is he? Laura Hillenbrand's near 500-page reply will answer the question not only once, but for all. He is the California boy who was a kleptomaniac. He is the running prodigy who competed at Hitler's Berlin Olympics, shook hands with the Fuhrer, and was almost shot by Nazi guards for stealing a Nazi souvenir. He is the American serviceman who entered the Pacific theater, crashed into the sea, and spent a harrowing forty-odd days floating on a disintegrating raft circled by aggressive sharks, scorched by a relentless sun, and gnawed to the bone by an inescapable hunger. Who is Louis Zamperini? He is a man who overcame all THAT only to be "rescued" by the wrong side -- the Japanese. He is the man who went from being a prisoner of starvation and sharks that actually leaped up and tried to snatch him out of the foundering raft to being a prisoner of Japanese guards who were every bit as predatory as the great white of the seas. He is the man who was beaten every day by a particular Japanese corporal named Mutsuhiro Watanabe, a.k.a. "the Bird." He is, in short, the Unbroken One -- the man who kept getting up, coming back, rebounding, and holding on to the tenuous thread that connected him with life and hope, past any duration that any of us could possibly imagine. And, as YOU can imagine, his story

is compelling. In fact, in the capable hands of Laura Hillenbrand, author of SEABISCUIT, it reads like a thriller, a page-turner, a fictional product of a keenly talented mind -- proving once again that truth can trump fiction when it comes to stories and mankind's love of hearing them. When you reach the end of this man's incredible journey, you will be awed by the scope of Hillenbrand's writing.

No one can accuse Laura Hillenbrand, author of Seabiscuit: An American Legend, of ever doing a half-effort job of research when she writes narrative nonfiction. Spending seven years on this effort, the Author has produced one of the most detailed stories of an American POW being held by the Japanese during World War II that I have ever read. With the many interviews with the subject during her research, along with interviews of family members, other POW's and their families, reading over unpublished memoirs, personal letters, and military documents, it would have been easy for this book to have become a long drawn-out and sterile narrative that would read like a text book. Instead we're treated to a captivating and at times heart-wrenching story that takes a group of unknowns and present them in a way that you truly come to know them. The subject of the book is Louis Zamperini, whose life would have been an interesting read even before the events during WWII. A relatively trouble child who stole everything in sight, he grows up to become one of the greatest track stars of his time, shattering the national high school record in the mile and becoming one of the youngest members of the U.S. Olympic team in 1936. Many felt that Zamperini would become the first person to break the four minute mile. With the onset of the war, he was drafted into the Army Air Force and became a bombardier assigned to the semi-unreliable B-24. After surviving a number of bombing missions against Japanese targets his plane goes down in the middle of the ocean while searching for another downed plane.

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