

[PDF] Unbroken

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Description:

: From Laura Hillenbrand, the bestselling author of , comes Unbroken, the inspiring true story of a man who lived through a series of catastrophes almost too incredible to be believed. In evocative, immediate descriptions, Hillenbrand unfurls the story of Louie Zamperini--a juvenile delinquent-turned-Olympic runner-turned-Army hero. During a routine search mission over the Pacific, Louie's plane crashed into the ocean, and what happened to him over the next three years of his life is a story that will keep you glued to the pages, eagerly awaiting the next turn in the story and fearing it at the same time. You'll cheer for the man who somehow maintained his selfhood and humanity despite the monumental degradations he suffered, and you'll want to share this book with everyone you know. --Juliet Disparte

The Story of Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand

Eight years ago, an old man told me a story that took my breath away. His name was

Louie Zamperini, and from the day I first spoke to him, his almost incomprehensibly dramatic life was my obsession.

It was a horse--the subject of my first book, --who led me to Louie. As I researched the Depression-era racehorse, I kept coming across stories about Louie, a 1930s track star who endured an amazing odyssey in World War II. I knew only a little about him then, but I couldn't shake him from my mind. After I finished *Seabiscuit*, I tracked Louie down, called him and asked about his life. For the next hour, he had me transfixed.

Growing up in California in the 1920s, Louie was a hellraiser, stealing everything edible that he could carry, staging elaborate pranks, getting in fistfights, and bedeviling the local police. But as a teenager, he emerged as one of the greatest runners America had ever seen, competing at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where he put on a sensational performance, crossed paths with Hitler, and stole a German flag right off the Reich Chancellery. He was preparing for the 1940 Olympics, and closing in on the fabled four-minute mile, when World War II began. Louie joined the Army Air Corps, becoming a bombardier. Stationed on Oahu, he survived harrowing combat, including an epic air battle that ended when his plane crash-landed, some six hundred holes in its fuselage and half the crew seriously wounded.

On a May afternoon in 1943, Louie took off on a search mission for a lost plane. Somewhere over the Pacific, the engines on his bomber failed. The plane plummeted into the sea, leaving Louie and two other men stranded on a tiny raft. Drifting for weeks and thousands of miles, they endured starvation and desperate thirst, sharks that leapt aboard the raft, trying to drag them off, a machine-gun attack from a Japanese bomber, and a typhoon with waves some forty feet high. At last, they spotted an island. As they rowed toward it, unbeknownst to them, a Japanese military boat was lurking nearby. Louie's journey had only just begun.

That first conversation with Louie was a pivot point in my life. Fascinated by his experiences, and the mystery of how a man could overcome so much, I began a seven-year journey through his story. I found it in diaries, letters and unpublished memoirs; in the memories of his family and friends, fellow Olympians, former American airmen and Japanese veterans; in forgotten papers in archives as far-flung as Oslo and Canberra. Along the way, there were staggering surprises, and Louie's unlikely, inspiring story came alive for me. It is a tale of daring, defiance, persistence, ingenuity, and the ferocious will of a man who refused to be broken.

The culmination of my journey is my new book, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. I hope you are as spellbound by Louie's life as I am.

From Publishers Weekly Starred Review. From the 1936 Olympics to WWII Japan's most brutal POW camps, Hillenbrand's heart-wrenching new book is thousands of miles and a world away from the racing circuit of her bestselling *Seabiscuit*. But it's just as much a page-turner, and its hero, Louie Zamperini, is just as loveable: a disciplined champion racer who ran in the Berlin Olympics, he's a wit, a prankster, and a reformed juvenile delinquent who put his thieving skills to good use in the POW camps. In other words, Louie is a total charmer, a lover of life--whose will to live is cruelly tested when he becomes an Army Air Corps bombardier in 1941. The young Italian-American from Torrance, Calif., was expected to be the first to run a four-minute mile. After an astonishing but losing race at the 1936 Olympics, Louie was hoping for gold in the 1940 games. But war ended those dreams forever. In May 1943 his B-24 crashed into the Pacific. After a record-breaking 47 days adrift on a shark-encircled life raft with his

pal and pilot, Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips, they were captured by the Japanese. In the "theater of cruelty" that was the Japanese POW camp network, Louie landed in the cruelest theaters of all: Omori and Naoetsu, under the control of Corp. Mutsuhiro Watanabe, a pathologically brutal sadist (called the Bird by camp inmates) who never killed his victims outright--his pleasure came from their slow, unending torment. After one beating, as Watanabe left Louie's cell, Louie saw on his face a "soft languor.... It was an expression of sexual rapture." And Louie, with his defiant and unbreakable spirit, was Watanabe's victim of choice. By war's end, Louie was near death. When Naoetsu was liberated in mid-August 1945, a depleted Louie's only thought was "I'm free! I'm free! I'm free!" But as Hillenbrand shows, Louie was not yet free. Even as, returning stateside, he impulsively married the beautiful Cynthia Applewhite and tried to build a life, Louie remained in the Bird's clutches, haunted in his dreams, drinking to forget, and obsessed with vengeance. In one of several sections where Hillenbrand steps back for a larger view, she writes movingly of the thousands of postwar Pacific PTSD sufferers. With no help for their as yet unrecognized illness, Hillenbrand says, "there was no one right way to peace; each man had to find his own path...." The book's final section is the story of how, with Cynthia's help, Louie found his path. It is impossible to condense the rich, granular detail of Hillenbrand's narrative of the atrocities committed (one man was exhibited naked in a Tokyo zoo for the Japanese to "gawk at his filthy, sore-encrusted body") against American POWs in Japan, and the courage of Louie and his fellow POWs, who made attempts on Watanabe's life, committed sabotage, and risked their own lives to save others. Hillenbrand's triumph is that in telling Louie's story (he's now in his 90s), she tells the stories of thousands whose suffering has been mostly forgotten. She restores to our collective memory this tale of heroism, cruelty, life, death, joy, suffering, remorselessness, and redemption.

(Nov.) -Reviewed by Sarah F. Gold

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