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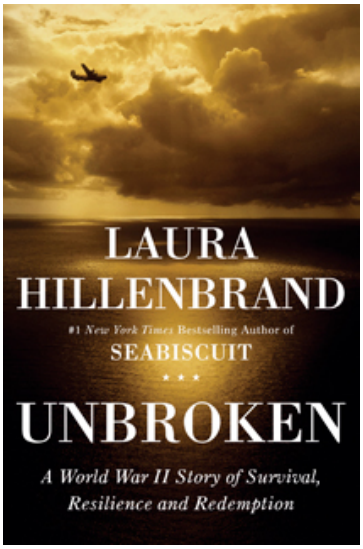
Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption



Unbroken [1] tells the amazing true story of Louie Zamperini, a rascally little boy who grows up in Southern California to Italian immigrant parents. As a child, Louie is constantly in trouble and has a restless energy. His saving grace is being introduced to long distance running by his older brother. Louie ends up running in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and is focused on the 4 minute mile and another chance at the 1940 Olympics.
Back home, he enrolls in USC and continues running when the War interrupts. Louie joins as a gunner in the Army Air Forces. He is eventually sent to the Pacific theater and after a few successful missions, his plane crashes in the Pacific during a search mission. Three members of the aircraft team make it to two small liferafts and his unbelieveable story continues. Louie's 40+ day survival on a life raft seems impossible. Then he is shot at and captured by the Japanese and unofficially is held in horrible war camps. Here too, his survival is seemingly impossible.

Louise does survive, his spirit is damaged, but also hopeful. Louie's story will stay with you. I kept thinking of him and his story well after I finished the book.

So this is where you try to separate the true story from the book, author and writing. But in this case I think it is a testament to Hillenbrand's writing that you don't make this separation. The writing is vivid, puts you in the situations, is well paced and has just the right tone. Her journalistic style matched with a blend of emotion, pain and love makes for some of the best narrative non-fiction writing.

I know this came out two years ago and might be old news to some more on-the-ball type readers, but I finally got around to reading it just recently. And I am so glad I did. Warning: this book is hard to read in some parts, the survival doesn't come easily. But I would still highly suggest this to many types of readers.

For the Love of Reading[2]Information, Answers & Reviews [3]American History [4]and redemption [5]Biography [6]Nonfiction [7]resilience [8]Unbroken : a World War II story of survival [9] World War II [10]

Posted by Sarah B. on Oct 24, 2012

- [11]
- [12]
- [13]

Links:
[1] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/view.aspx?cn=580114,%20583411,%20573001,%20573182,%20594444
[2] http://mcpl.info/bookblog
[3] http://mcpl.info/category/blogs/information-answers-reviews
[4] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/american-history
[5] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-titles/and-redemption
[6] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/biography
[7] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/nonfiction
[8] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-titles/resilience
[9] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-titles/unbroken-world-war-ii-story-survival
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