

The Greatest Generation. We are losing them at a rate some say is 3,000 a day. Historians gave the generation of the 1930's and 1940's this name for good reason, and it is essential to preserve their contributions to American society. Laura Hillenbrand's non-fiction novel, *Unbroken*, serves to prove the truth behind the name, as well as revere those whom so truly earned the highest respect imaginable. *Unbroken*, is by far one of the most riveting books I have ever had the pleasure of reading. As a historian, I found Hillenbrand's latest work to contain amazing description and detail regarding the experiences of many POW's in Japan during World War II. As an educator, I discovered that Hillenbrand's book will be a terrific tool for classroom enhancement, as it provides a compelling story of an extraordinary man and the people he encountered, yet simultaneously connects their experiences to the larger events of World War II. As a reader, I found *Unbroken* to be both heartbreaking and uplifting. After reading *Unbroken*, I firmly feel that The Greatest Generation deserves the highest respect that exists, because this same generation who suffered so greatly at the hands of the Japanese also taught us the greatest lesson: how to forgive.

Hillenbrand's novel focuses around the biography of Louie Zamparini, the son of Italian immigrants from Torrance, California. Zamparini, during the Depression, was on a path to nowhere. Known as a "hoodlum" and "con-artist", Zamparini finds salvation in competitive track. Zamparini will eventually succeed to the point where he made placement in the 1938 Olympics. Zamparini encounters Jessie Owens, who actually tried to be a guardian for Zamparini. Zamparini will actually win the bronze in the 500 meter race, and will meet Hitler himself. Hillenbrand provides vivid detail in her description of the Munich Olympics, and then provides even more detail with primary accounts provided by Zamparini. After being unsatisfied with his performance in Munich, Zamparini vows to get the gold in the 1940 Olympics.

Unfortunately, Zamparini never makes it to the 1940 Olympics because WWII breaks out in Europe after Germany Invades Poland. Zamparini will be drafted into the Army Air Corps, where he will eventually serve as a rear gunner on a B-24. While stationed at Hawaii, it is said but not proven, that Zamparini was the first man in American history to run the four minute mile. Zamparini fought in the Christmas battle at Wake in 1942 as well as in Midway. Shortly after, Zamparini's B-24 will be shot down, with only 3 survivors. The three surviving men floated at sea for over 45 days (beating the world record) only to fight sun and starvation during the day, and hungry sharks at night. Zamparini and his best friend Phil survive the elements, only to be shot at by American planes. To the reader's relief the men are rescued. However, to the readers dismay, the men are rescued by the Japanese!

Just as the reader begins to find the story unbelievable, it gets more astonishing. Hillenbrand tells the story of the two men and their experiences in several POW camps in Japan. Just as the story seems as if it couldn't get any worse, it gets more horrifying. The men will eventually be separated with Phil going to a camp where often there is 14 feet of snow on the ground, and Zamparini going to camps only to be followed by the cruel and vicious camp Lieutenant: The Bird. The bird is . The men spend 3 years enduring the camps.