

UNBROKEN

PATH TO REDEMPTION

THE LEGACY OF LOUIS ZAMPERINI: MY FATHER

By **Luke Zamperini** with Kenneth Kemp



UNBROKEN: PATH TO REDEMPTION brings the story of Louis Zamperini full circle. *Unbroken* was a spellbinding, bestselling biography by acclaimed author Laura Hillenbrand. The book led to UNBROKEN, a major motion picture directed by Angelina Jolie. My dad, the old World War II hero, became a household name in the 21st Century.

If you read the book, you know that the first theatrical film only told part of Louis' story. There was more. Much more.

UNBROKEN: PATH TO REDEMPTION picks up where the first film left off. Even if you missed the book and that film, this movie tells a powerful, compelling human story on its own.



I'm blessed to have this opportunity to share my version of my father's story. His story has shaped my life. And once you've seen **UNBROKEN: PATH TO REDEMPTION**, it could help shape yours. I'd encourage you to contemplate what you see and hear in this story—find a place and time to dig deeper.

Making this film has been transformational for me. It's our prayer that your experience with this movie will trigger a new level of commitment to serve, to give ... and perhaps to forgive on levels you didn't think possible.

DON'T GIVE UP, DON'T GIVE IN

My father earned the right to travel to Germany to compete in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games with the likes of Jesse Owens and the Boys in the Boat (the eight-man rowing team from the University of Washington). That experience exploded the world of the young runner.

In the 5,000-meter race, Louis, at age 19, finished a respectable eighth place, first among the other Americans. But it was on the final lap that Louis turned on the speed, breaking the world record for a single lap in the long-distance race: 56 seconds. An astonished Adolph Hitler was among the crowd that took notice of the young phenomenon. All the experts, including Louis himself, predicted he would be a favored gold-medal contender in the next Olympics, scheduled for Tokyo in 1940. But those games would never be. The outbreak of World War II canceled those games. Louis, who had trained and matured as a distance runner, saw his dreams of Olympic Gold shattered by war.

Hitler's unbridled expansionism and then Japan's brutal assault on Pearl Harbor were both a call to arms. Like most of his contemporaries, Louis answered the call to join the fight. He became a bombardier. Assigned to the Pacific Theater, he emerged as an essential member of the flight squad. Missions over vast expanses of water were a daily routine. Overwhelmed, maintenance crews tried to keep the armada of twin and quadruple radial engine aircraft in the air to make their regular bombing runs. But the mechanics were often short of time and parts.

One fateful morning, Louis was assigned to fly over the ocean on a rescue mission. His B-24, The Green Hornet, just simply gave out. Metal fatigue meant engine failure; one of the four engines quit and then another in a rumble of backfires and flameouts. As Louis recalls, the old airplane, held together by duct tape and bailing wire, fell into the sea like a rock.

In that tragic moment, a man who knew the glories of cheering throngs and held expectations of fame and fortune, went from the relative comforts of an American airbase—square meals and a mattress with clean

sheets—to forty-seven days on a raft enduring the baking sun, stormy seas, and shark-infested water with no food to eat or water to drink.

And then, after miraculously surviving at sea ... he was captured on the shores of the mid-Pacific Marshall Islands by the Japanese and spent twenty-seven months in a brutal prison camp.

Near the end of his life, my dad sat down with author David Rensin to write his last book: *Don't Give Up, Don't Give In*. As Louis contemplated the course of his full life, he understood this phrase captured the theme that kept him alive, and brought him such abundance in life.

"SHELL SHOCK" AND "BATTLE FATIGUE"

When my dad came home to his family after those terrible years in the POW camp, he suffered relentless, acute nightmares and attacks of rage. For years, he endured the unimaginable cruelties of Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe and his battalion of prison guards.

At war's end, he rejoined his family and the comforts of home. There, the former Olympic athlete was confronted with a whole new collection of tormenting demons. Celebrated as a hero as a featured speaker on the circuit raising money for War Bonds, alcohol became Louis' refuge; heavy drinking numbed the pain and blurred the menacing memories of torture, isolation, rat infestations, and hunger.

As he toured the country representing GIs as a war hero, he met and quickly married a delightful, intelligent, irresistible Florida debutante, Cynthia Applewhite. With Cynthia by his side, Louis launched the post-war American veteran life he hoped for and dreamed of during all those years of confinement. But night-sweats and terrifying recollections of beatings, starvation, and despair invaded his idyllic world. He was experiencing what we now call classic Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Back in the late 1940s, they called it "battle fatigue" or "shell shock." There were no treatments. Soldiers were expected to "buck-up" and "shake it off." Louis tried.

By outward appearances, Louis had it all: a loving family; a beautiful, bright, attentive wife. But unrelenting, involuntary visions of The Bird drove him into a new kind of prison. It was the confinement of a tormented mind and heart, obsessed with revenge and hate toward those who had severely abused him and mercilessly killed too many of his buddies.

Without understanding why, he targeted his rage at his lovely wife. Their young marriage nearly broke.

THE CIRCUS TENT ON WASHINGTON AND HILL STREETS

Louis' journey took him from Torrance High School to the University of Southern California to the Berlin Olympic Games to the Pacific Theater of WWII, to a Japanese concentration camp, and finally back to the USA as an American hero, touring the country as a miracle survivor and victor. He joined all those who served in the global fight with the Allied nations, triumphant against the dark forces of both East and West: Hitler's Nazi regime and Japan's emperor.

From those formative years in Torrance, California, Louis went from one life-changing event to the next. But the most significant event of all occurred when he walked into a big tent at Washington and Hill Streets in Los Angeles one October night in 1949.

Louis listened to a young evangelist, Billy Graham, and he accepted the preacher's challenge to receive the forgiveness of God through Christ. After a deep battle that included an imaginary visit from The Bird, Louis knelt down in that tent and gave his heart to Jesus.

The anger, hate, and self-loathing came to a radical end, dissipating into the night air like a vapor. The transformation filled him with love and hope and compassion—a rebirth of the spirit. The drinking and the nightmares stopped, never to return again. His marriage was not only saved, but it endured as a happy, winsome partnership for the remainder of their lives.

My childhood is one to be envied. I was blessed with loving, caring parents. Of course, if my dad had refused to go with my mom to hear Dr. Graham that night, my life would have been much different. Come to think of it, I may not have even existed.

The world knows Louis Zamperini as a survivor and war hero. I knew him as my dad. Growing up, we all reveled in his friendship with Billy Graham. My mother spoke fondly of that life-altering night when my dad committed his life to Christ in that big tent in Los Angeles.



THE LOST BOYS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Dad had a huge heart for young lost kids. Before he ran competitively at Torrance High School, the local police considered him a “juvenile delinquent.” He was known as a smart aleck, quick to snatch goods from the local stores and then quick to make his escape. It was his older brother Pete who encouraged him to run on the track team. No one could catch him, not even the cops.

With the transformation that came from knowing God and experiencing His love and forgiveness, my dad formed a ministry called Victory Boys Camps in 1952. The head of the California Youth Authority asked him to speak with teenagers who had been incarcerated. He would address young men who had been arrested and convicted of all sorts of crimes—several for homicide.

He would take me with him to meet some of the toughest kids in the region—guys sent to juvenile detention facilities. I’ll never forget watching those hardened guys who were outcasts: feared; kicked out of school; caught shoplifting, assaulting others, dealing in drugs or firing weapons. I listened in from the back row as my dad would tell his story: he understood them. He connected profoundly with them through love, acceptance, and understanding. Lives were changed. Those weekends had a powerful effect on those boys ... and me too.

A COMMUNITY OF FAITH—THE COMPANY OF VISIONARIES

Mom and Dad became a part of the Hollywood Presbyterian Church, near their home. There they met one of the most influential Christian women of the Post-War era, Henrietta Mears. Ms. Mears had a powerful

vision for reaching the world. She developed a huge ministry to college students. Her great energy and enthusiasm influenced a legion of young people to pursue a life of service all over the world. Among them were Bill Bright (who went on to launch Campus Crusade for Christ) and Louis Evans, Jr. (of Bel Air Presbyterian Church, where Ronald and Nancy Reagan found their church home).

Ms. Mears was a principal in organizing and programming a conference center in the San Bernardino Mountains at Forest Home. Billy Graham made a career-altering commitment to trust and proclaim the Bible as God's Word right there on that mountain at that center. Henrietta was a central player in planning the big tent for the revival meetings in 1949 featuring that young preacher, Billy Graham. She heavily influenced Richard Halverson, who later became the longtime, beloved Chaplain of the United State Senate.

Attendance for Sunday school at Hollywood Pres grew from 450 students when she began her work to more than 4,000. She started a publishing company called Gospel Light, producing curricula for Sunday Schools across the nation. The all-American UCLA football star, Donn Moomaw, under her influence, became an influential pastor.

Jim Ferguson, Ms. Mears' associate youth pastor, became a lifelong friend of my dad. As Louis found himself in the company of these visionaries, he wanted to be part of the action. He reflected on his own journey: the moments of defeat and despair, loss and disappointment; contrasted by the moments of heady successes and unimaginable glory. He considered those early days fighting off bullies and running from the law. Then he went on to perform as an exceptional athlete breaking records, becoming a hometown hero.

VICTORY BOYS CAMPS

Louis told his pastor friend Jim Ferguson that he had a real concern for throwaway boys. Kids who grew up without parents, on the mean streets of the city where rules get broken, theft a way of life, where gangs control the neighborhood, and the intrusion of the law leads to incarceration and separation. Felonies can mean a loss of rights and community standing.

"We have the message of hope," he told Jim.

And that message began when Louis simply shared his story. He spoke of those early days in Torrance when he committed crimes of his own and eluded capture. It was an intense high—an adrenaline rush. He identified as one of the lost boys—a regular guy just trying to survive. He would describe those escapes from the store manager, from the school officials, from the police. His quickness, agility, and sheer speed got him out of the snare of trouble and consequence, and filled him with a false sense of confidence and invincibility.

The boys would laugh and elbow each other; "this guy gets it."

Then Dad would tell them about the crash at sea, the weeks on the raft and the years in the prison camp. The boys were entranced. In ways the Youth Authority leaders could not reach them, my dad had them. They opened up like a book, eager for more.

That's when Dad grasped and understood his calling. He started Victory Boys Camps that same year.

He understood that these boys—labeled as "criminals" just as their lives were starting—were really adrenaline junkies. Excitement was their passion and without alternatives, that addiction drove them toward criminal behavior like a magnet draws iron.

"Let's give them some real excitement," my dad would say. So, he raised the money and developed the connections to get the boys up out of those tough neighborhoods and into the mountains. Along with two other Olympians, skiers Keith and Paul Wegeman, Louis secured four cabins on an abandoned campsite along the Angeles Crest Highway. There, they launched a ministry to kids that would affect thousands of lives.

Along with the cooperation of the California Youth Authority, they would put thirty to forty boys into a school bus and head off to the high country. Louis would take them off into the wilderness. For many, it was a first time away from the city. In winter, up to the snow, climbing glaciers. In the summer, up the steep rocks, repelling down a cliff and summiting the peaks.

On the trail, the boys would pour out their lives and troubles and at night by the fire, laugh and reminisce and confess. My dad would share his own experience and identify what he called the "root cause" that drove one to commit crimes. Then he would open up the Bible and speak of forgiveness: God's forgiveness that enables us to forgive ourselves and then forgive others who have taken advantage or neglected or abused or violated us.

FORGIVING THE BIRD

But my dad still had some personal work to do.

The words of Jesus, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," hit him like a lightning bolt from Heaven. He reveled in God's forgiveness, which was also expressed by his beloved Cynthia. She had been more than ready to walk out: the excessive drinking, the contempt. The verbal abuse drove her to seek escape from a relationship that went from intense, giddy romance to deep anguish and dark despair.

My mom forgave my dad, forgave him for all of that and more. She believed in the sincerity of his commitment. And she had faith in the gospel message that changed him.

Now, Louis Zamperini was challenged to "love your enemies." How does that work?

In his new community of faith, many of his friends were becoming missionaries to the far corners of the earth. In response to Jesus' challenge, Louis considered becoming a missionary to the Japanese. He thought about those prison guards, and what might happen if they encountered the same offer of life and forgiveness that he found in that Los Angeles circus tent. He felt God's call to travel there and speak to his captors.

In 1950, he went back to Sugamo Prison. It was a stunning moment in time. There they were, seated quietly in rows on the floor; a gathering of the same guards who stood as sentries during Louis' imprisonment.

My dad asked specifically that The Bird, Mutsuhiro Watanabe, be present. At first, he was told that his tormentor was dead—that he committed suicide (Harakiri, a Samurai honor ritual). At the war's end, General McArthur compiled a list of the forty top Japanese war criminals for prosecution. The Bird made that list. Many were tried and found guilty, some executed. Watanabe instead escaped into hiding. By the time of my dad's visit to Japan, the man who had appeared in those awful nightmares was nowhere to be found.

It took a lot for Louis Zamperini to stand before the scores of guards in that bleak hot room on the prison grounds where he had been beaten, starved, openly humiliated, and threatened with beheading over and over again. All of that frightful emotion overwhelmed him like a rising tide.

But at the same time, an inexplicable peace that passes understanding filled him with compassion. He knew those men had been caught in an ugly war under a savage, sadistic regime. They were prisoners too, just “doing their job,” believing it was right and noble. Now they had to live with the memories, just like Louis. Add to that, they also lived with that blinding guilt and shame.

Louis came knowing first-hand the power of forgiveness. He shared it with the men. As he did, the beauty of reconciliation filled the room. Tears flowed. Later, my dad wrote a letter to The Bird.

“... As a result of my prisoner of war experience under your unwarranted and unreasonable punishment, my post-war life became a nightmare. It was not so much due to the pain and suffering as it was the tension of stress and humiliation that caused me to hate with a vengeance.

“... The post-war nightmares caused my life to crumble, but thanks to a confrontation with God through the evangelist Billy Graham, I committed my life to Christ. Love has replaced the hate I had for you. Christ said, ‘Forgive your enemies and pray for them.’

“[I met with the prison guards at Sugamo Prison] ... At that moment, like the others, I also forgave you and now would hope that you would also become a Christian.”



SAN FRANCISCO, 1958

By 1958, Billy Graham became an internationally known powerhouse preacher, sharing the gospel in stadiums in major cities all over the world. He launched a movement that crossed religious and denominational lines bringing people back to a simple message of a second chance. Those audiences were often filled with the veterans of a global war that wreaked havoc all over the planet—leaving death and destruction in its wake. The senseless loss of sons and husbands and fathers and families, cities left in ruins all over Europe and Asia and the Pacific, countless casualties: these were the fruits of war. There was plenty of guilt and blame and shame to go around.

Billy Graham simply pointed a hurting world in a new direction: to recover the vision of a God who welcomes the prodigal home. There we find welcome, forgiveness, mercy, love, and grace. It was a message the world was eager to hear. Presidents, kings and queens, and heads of state welcomed this confident, joyful messenger with open arms.

To be sure, there were plenty of skeptics, including my father—until, that is, he tasted that grace for himself.

In San Francisco in 1958, Billy Graham took to the microphone and addressed a packed house at the Cow Palace, filled to its capacity with 16,000 attendees. Graham openly admitted that some of his critics had a point. He understood that not everyone who would come forward at an event like this was sincere. Some people who would come to God went on as though nothing happened, unchanged. But, Billy Graham went on to say, there were three individuals in attendance who had made commitments of faith at an earlier crusade. They were there to share openly the powerful transformation that had changed their lives.

One of those three was my dad, Louis Zamperini.

It was a big deal for him to stand before that massive crowd and briefly tell the story of his conversion nine years before. He opened with the story of coming home with a pocket full of cash—money from back-pay owed to him from the years in the POW camp and the proceeds of a life insurance policy paid out “because I was dead.” But full of pride and foolish ambition, he wasted it all away, and lost everything he had, and almost lost his wife and my sister, Cissy.

Louis continued, telling about hearing the Gospel message from Billy Graham that night in 1949 in Los Angeles. It changed everything. It restored his health. His marriage. His life. “Since then,” he said, “I’ve had the unquenchable joy of working with wayward boys” and sharing the same Gospel he heard nine years before.



LOUIS ZAMPERINI YOUTH MINISTRIES

The youth work Louis Zamperini started in 1952 continues to this day. What began as Victory Boys’ Camps now lives on as Louis Zamperini Youth Ministries, and the primary focus remains—bringing the Gospel message of hope and renewal to a new generation of misled youth, with the singular goal of transforming “high-risk of failure” into “highly likely to succeed.”

My wife, Lisa Zamperini, has enthusiastically taken the role of Executive Director of the Ministry, tirelessly devoting herself to ensuring that Louis’ life-lessons and the Gospel of Jesus Christ be made available to all young hearts, bringing a flickering flame of hope to downtrodden children.

Louis’ only grandchild, our son Clay, stepped up to carry on this legacy after his grandfather’s passing in 2014. Inspired by his close friendship with his grandfather and personal witness to the powerful effect that Louis’ message has on those who hear it, Clay committed himself to keeping the ministry alive, forming critical relationships and developing the tools that have allowed our family to continue my father’s crusade of hope and forgiveness.

The Louis Zamperini Youth Ministries (LouisZamperiniFoundation.org) partners with other high-impact organizations that know my dad's story and share his vision.

THE SUPER-HUMAN DAD

Not long ago, I was asked on camera what it was like to be raised by a "super-human" dad. The world knows him as a hero, the interviewer added. The question caught me by surprise, but I understood immediately what he was after.

"Well ... to me, well, he was my hero," I answered. The interviewer laughed in affirmation.

"The world now knows my dad," I continued. "What you have all seen through the movies and books, well, what you see is for real. He simply is who he is."

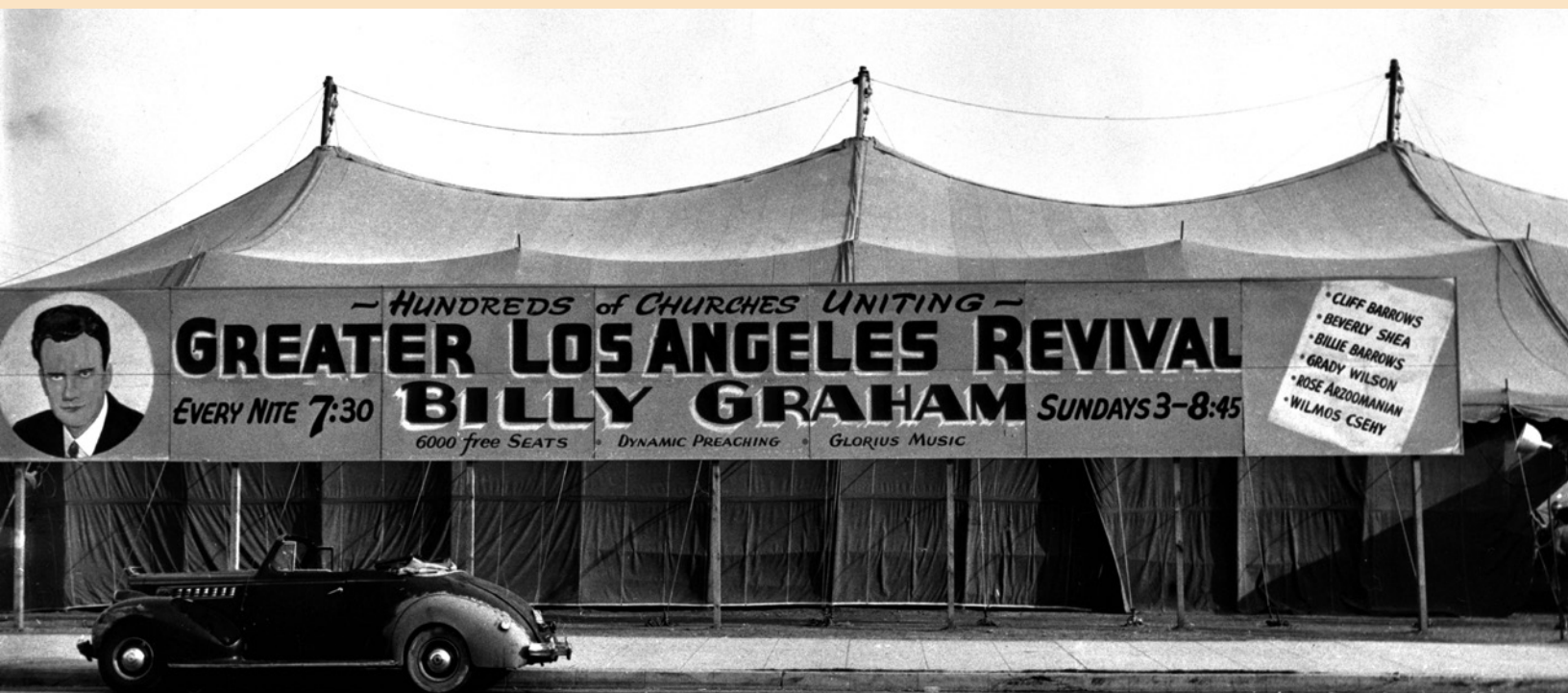
I went on from there to explain I never knew the drunken, angry man. The dad I knew all my life was loving, winsome, and affirming. He took me with him. I watched him connect with troubled kids who were older than me. And frankly, at first, they were intimidating. But my dad and I climbed mountains together. We built things. There was nothing he couldn't fix. He helped me through my own growing-up years. He loved his family. He never panicked. Ever. He was fearless.

Like everyone else, I had to figure out things for myself. But I understand, perhaps now more than ever, that my dad, Louis Zamperini, was living proof that the Gospel is real. God is the God of second chances. Broken lives can be restored. God's grace is sufficient for all.

The door is open.

It's open for you.

Wide open.





UNBROKEN

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IN THEATERS OCTOBER 5

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