from Unbroken

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BIOGRAPHY



NOTES

This version of the selection alternates original text with summarized passages. Dotted lines appear next to the summarized passages.

Chapter 15 Sharks and Bullets

This story takes place during Word War II. Three American soldiers, Louie, Mac, and Phil, are stranded on life rafts in the Pacific Ocean. They have been floating for twenty-seven days with little to eat or drink. The men have no protection from the sun, and sharks have been circling the raft. Suddenly, a bomber plane appears from the east. The soldiers discuss their options and decide the risk of wasting precious emergency supplies is worth taking. Louie fires two flares and empties a container of dye into the water around the rafts. Using a mirror, he directs a beam of sunlight at the plane. The plane passes them by but then circles back toward the rafts.

And then, all at once, the ocean erupted. There was a deafening noise, and the rafts began hopping and shuddering under the castaways. The gunners were firing at them.

Louie, Phil, and Mac clawed for the raft walls and threw themselves overboard. They swam under the rafts and huddled there, watching bullets tear through the rafts and cut bright slits in the water around them. Then the firing stopped.

Afraid of the sharks, the men hurry out of the water. Both Mac and Phil need Louie's help to get back into their rafts. Once above water, they sit exhausted and confused. Why had the Americans shot at unarmed men? As they gather their breath, the bomber plane loops back around. Louie hopes that the pilot has realized they are not Japanese soldiers and is coming to rescue them.

Flying about two hundred feet over the water, the bomber raced at them, following a path slightly parallel to the rafts, so that its side passed into view. All three men saw it at once. Behind the wing, painted over the waist, was a red circle. The bomber was Japanese.

Phil and Mac are too tired to dive back into the water. They curl themselves into balls in the raft while Louie jumps overboard. From under the raft, Louie watches as bullets dart through the water. Using the raft's cord, Louie attaches himself to the raft so the ocean current won't pull him away. He looks down and finds himself staring into the open mouth of a shark rushing at his legs. In a flash, Louie remembers the advice of one of his army trainers. The old man had taught Louie to make a threatening expression and then to punch the shark in its snout.

As the shark lunged for his head, Louie bared his teeth, widened his eyes, and rammed his palm into the tip of the shark's nose. The shark flinched, circled away, then swam back for a second pass. Louie waited until the shark was inches from him, then struck it in the nose again. Again, the shark peeled away.

Above water, the machine gun fire has stopped. Louie uses the cord to pull himself to the raft. Climbing abroad, Louie finds Mac and Phil still balled up next to each other. Both men have miraculously survived. The bomber returns once again. Again, Louie must dive into the ocean.

Four more times the Japanese strafed¹ them, sending Louie into the water to kick and punch at the sharks until the bomber had passed. Though he fought them to the point of exhaustion, he was not bitten. Every time he emerged from the water, he was certain that Phil and Mac would be dead. Impossibly, though there were bullet holes all the way around the men, even in the tiny spaces between them, not one bullet had hit either man.

The Japanese airmen make one last attack, dropping a bomb fifty feet from the rafts. Louie, Mac, and Phil brace themselves for the blast, but it never comes. Either the bomb has failed to work or the airmen have forgotten to load it with an explosive charge. The plane passes over them one last time, and this time, it does not return.

The men turn their attention to the damaged rafts. The bullets have completely shredded Phil's raft. Nearly all of their supplies have drifted off. Two men could fit comfortably in their remaining raft, but now all three must squeeze together. Their remaining raft is losing air. One shark after another approaches the raft. The men use oars to fight them off.

If the men didn't get air into the raft immediately, the sharks would take them. One pump had been lost in the strafing; only the one from Mac and Louie's raft remained. The men hooked it up to one of the two valves and took turns pumping as hard as they could. Air flowed into the chamber and seeped out through the bullet holes, but the men found that if they pumped very quickly, just enough air passed through the raft to lift it up in the water and keep it mostly inflated.

As Mac and Phil pump air and fight the sharks, Louie tries to patch the holes in the raft's air chambers. He grabs the patching kit but finds that water has damaged the sandpaper. As a replacement, he cuts grooves into the side of his mirror. He uses the mirror to roughen up the raft's material so that glue will stick to it. For each hole, he must lift the raft out of the water, glue a new piece of fabric over the hole, then wait for the sun to dry the glue. For hours, the men work. The sharks try to attack Louie while he is distracted, so Mac and Phil must be ready with their oars. When they are not battling the sharks, they are pumping air into the raft. Big waves regularly splash into the raft and force Louie to start over. All three of the soldiers are extremely important to the long process. If any of them fail at their duties, then the lives of every one of them would be in danger.

Finally, they could find no more holes to patch. Because bubbles kept coming up around the sides of the raft, they knew there were holes someplace where they couldn't reach. They had to live with them. The patches had slowed the air loss dramatically.

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^{1.} strafed (STRAYFD) v. attacked something with machine guns from low-flying planes.

^{2.} leviathan (lih VY uh thuhn) *n*. a very large aquatic creature.

The sharks lose interest in the inflated raft and swim away. For the first time in days, the men can sleep. They are, however, stuffed into the tiny raft. They have to sleep almost on top of each other. Moving around the raft requires each soldier to make room for the other. But the cramped situation provides an opportunity for Louie. He uses the deflated second raft to make a roof for the raft. It blocks the sun during the day and keeps them warm at night. What's more, the Japanese attack allows the men to guess their location in the Pacific Ocean.	NOTES
Estimating the bomber's cruising speed and range, they made rough calculations to arrive at how many hours the bomber could remain airborne after it left them, and thus how far they were from its base. They guessed that they were some 850 miles from the bomber's base. If this was correct, given that they had crashed about 2,000 miles east of the Marshalls and Gilberts, they had already traveled more than half the distance to those islands and were covering more than 40 miles per day.	
Using this information, Phil estimates that they'll arrive at the Marshall and Gilbert Islands in three weeks. These islands are home to Japanese military bases, but just the idea of dry land is enough to give Phil and Louie hope. Mac does not share their good spirits. He is showing the first signs of failing health.	
Chapter 16 Singing in the Clouds	
Later in the evening, Louie is only one awake on the raft. He watches the shark as they circle the raft. He remembers hearing that a shark's hide feels like sandpaper. Running his hand over one of the shark's fins, he experiences that exact feeling. <i>Beautiful</i> , he thinks.	
Moments later, the sharks seem to have disappeared altogether. When Louie leans over the raft's edge to look for them, a shark lunges at his face. He manages to push it back into the water, but a second shark thrusts itself at him. He batters it with an oar.	
Then the first shark lunged for him again. Louie was recoiling when he saw an oar swing past, sending the animals backward into the ocean. To Louie's surprise it wasn't Phil who had saved him. It was Mac. Louie had no time to thank him. One of the sharks jumped up again, followed by the other. Louie and Mac sat side by side, clubbing each shark as it lunged at them. Mac was a new man. A moment before, he had seemed almost comatose. Now he was infused with frantic energy.	
After several more assaults on the rafts, the sharks retreat. Louie and Mac collapse in exhaustion. Phil—awakened by the commotion—and Louie express their amazement and thankfulness toward Mac. Though his heroism seems to have taken all the energy Mac had left, he looks alive again.	
Encouraged by their victory, Louie hatches a plan to get the men something to eat. Using the leftovers from a captured bird as bait, Phil attracts one of the smaller sharks close to the raft. Once the shark swims over, Louie grabs his tail. The shark pulls Louie from the raft and escapes. Louie launches a second attempt at an even smaller shark. This time, he makes sure to pull the shark's tail out of the water. It works. With their few remaining tools, the men kill the shark. In his army training, Louie had learned that the	

liver was the only part of a shark that humans could eat.

Even with a knife, sharkskin is about as easy to cut as a coat of mail; with only the edge of a mirror to cut with, the labor was draining. After much sawing, Louie managed to break the skin. The flesh underneath stank of ammonia. Louie cut the liver out, and it was sizable. They ate it eagerly, giving Mac a larger portion, and for the first time since breakfast on May 27, they were all full.

The soldiers' good fortune does not last long. The small sharks seem to know not to approach the raft anymore. The men quickly become hungry again. Mac suffers worst of all. He can barely move, and the life seems to have drained from his eyes.

A few nights later, a massive crash wakes the men from sleep. Something huge has struck the bottom of the raft. The men peer over the side of the raft. This shark is nearly three times the length of the raft. It is much, much bigger than any of the sharks they've seen. It is a great white shark. The shark appears to play with the raft, using its tail to push huge waves crashing over its sides. The men are terrified and drenched in cold water. Finally, the shark moves on.

The next morning, Mac is so sick that he resembles a mummy. Louie and Phil catch a bird and feed Mac some of its meat and blood. His condition does not improve. The men have very little water left. Phil tells Mac that he only has enough left for himself, while Louie gives Mac a sip from his bottle.

That evening, Phil heard a small voice. It was Mac, asking Louie if he was going to die. Louie looked over at Mac, who was watching him. Louie thought it would be disrespectful to lie to Mac, who might have something to say or do before life left him. Louie told him that he thought he'd die that night. Mac had no reaction. Phil and Louie lay down, put their arms around Mac, and went to sleep.

Louie wakes up in time to hear Mac's last breath. When the soldiers had first been stranded on the raft, Mac had panicked and eaten most of their food. However, in his last days, Mac had been responsible for saving the lives of Louie and Phil. The two remaining soldiers wrap his body and send it into the ocean. Louie tries to remember funeral prayers. He asks God to save Phil and himself.

The raft floats on. Phil and Louie have set the record for the longest survival at sea. They do not, however, feel like celebrating. They are dangerously thin. Their beards are long and tangled. Their skin is covered in sores caused by being in the sun for so long.

One morning, the men awake and are surprised to find that the water around them is completely still. They have drifted into a region close to the equator where there is almost no wind. The men feel a strange mix of emotions. Phil and Louie know they are close to starvation, but the beauty of the ocean nevertheless amazes them. Despite the terrible state of his body, Louie's mind thrives in the still ocean. He can remember much more than he ever had before.

One day, trying to pinpoint his earliest memory, he saw a two-story building and, inside, a stairway broken into two parts of six steps each, with a landing in between. He was there in the image, a tiny child toddling along the stairs. As he crawled down the first set of steps and moved toward the edge of the landing, a tall yellow dog stepped in front of him to stop him

from tumbling off. It was his parents' dog, Askim, whom they had had in
Olean, when Louie was very little. Louie had never remembered him before. ³

The men have been at sea for 40 days. Suddenly, Louie shoots up in the raft. He can hear a choir. When asked, Phil says he hears nothing. Louie removes the roof of the raft and looks up. In the clouds, he sees the outlines of people singing. The song is beautiful. Though Louie knows that the singers cannot be real, his mind feels completely clear and reasonable. Louie listens for a while before the vision fades away.

On July 13, the forty-sixth day⁴ at sea, Louie eagerly waits for the sun to rise. Phil had predicted that this would be the day the men would arrive at land. A storm is brewing. Louie and Phil enjoy riding up and down the tall waves.

To the west, something appeared, so far away that it could be glimpsed only from the tops of the swells. It was a low, gray-green wiggle on the horizon. Phil and Louie would later disagree on who saw it first, but the moment the sea tossed them up, the horizon rolled westward, and their eyes grasped it, they knew what it was.

It was an island.

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^{3.} Askim (AS kim) the Zamperinis' thieving dog. The family lived above a grocery, and the dog often ran downstairs, snatched food, and ran away. His name was a clever joke: When people asked what the dog's name was, they were confused at the answer, which sounded like "Ask him."

^{4.} the forty-sixth day Since the men had floated across the international date line, the forty-sixth day was July 14.

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