

# Heartbreaking Unbroken

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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Angelina Jolie's not-to-be-missed epic drama *Unbroken* brings to the big screen Louie Zamperini's unbelievable and inspiring true story about triumph over tribulation and the resilient power of the human spirit.

Telling the incredible life of Olympian and war hero Louis "Louie" Zamperini, it follows in the tradition of films like *The Railway Man*, and celebrates the unbreakable fortitude of the human spirit.

It's a remarkable film that is best experienced cold, not knowing too much about the story. Unfortunately, it is a story that is well known, adapted from Laura Hillenbrand's (*Seabiscuit: An American Legend*) enormously popular book *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*, and the trailer has many spoilers. Still, if you can, try to watch it without knowing too much, as it is a story that will draw you into its power until the final moments.



## Superb performances

The cast delivers superb performances, with Jack O'Connell as 'Louie' Zamperini and Domhnall Gleeson (*Harry Potter* series) and Finn Wittrock (HBO's *The Normal Heart*) play Captain Russell Allen 'Phil' Phillips and Sergeant Francis 'Mac' McNamara-the airmen with whom Zamperini endured perilous weeks adrift in the open Pacific.

Other notable performances are delivered by Jai Courtney (*Divergent*) as Hugh 'Cup' Cuppernell, John Magaro (*The Box*) as Frank Tinker, Luke Treadaway (*Clash of the Titans*) as Miller and Ross Anderson (*The Silent Storm*) as Blackie, with Japanese actor Miyavi making his impressive English-language feature debut.



## In search of a good story

"When I first met Louie Zamperini, on a telephone call on a sun-spilled afternoon more than a decade ago, I was in search of a good story. As he recounted the many years of his monumentally eventful and unlikely life, I knew I'd found no mere good story; I'd found perhaps the most extraordinary life history I'd ever heard," says Laura Hillenbrand.

"As I hung up the phone that day, the first of innumerable days I would spend in Louie's company, there was something that resonated even more deeply than the story I'd heard. It was the man who'd lived it. What made Louie truly singular, and what made his life relevant to all of us, was not the series of events that comprised his life, but the way in which he met them, summoning strength amid suffering, joy amid loss, forgiveness in the face of cruelty, hope that knew no master. To him, his odyssey was a gift, a lesson he could teach in how to endure the bruises of life and emerge in happiness. His laughter was irrepressible because he looked about him and saw only blessings. The loveliest thing about this wondrous man was that he wished for all of us to see in our own lives what he saw in his. His story was his gift to us."

Angelina Jolie's first feature-film directorial effort, 2011's *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, came about as the natural evolution of her having written a screenplay, a private exercise that stemmed from her humanitarian work.



## Immediately taken

When producer Baer introduced Jolie to the *Unbroken* working script in 2012, she was immediately taken by Zamperini's tale. "I was intrigued by the draft I read, but it was after I read Laura's book that I knew I wanted to direct the film," Jolie says. "Like the millions of readers who find themselves unable to put down the book once they start it, I was drawn into the incredible story of Louie's journey and Laura's brilliant re-creation and rich documentation of pivotal events that shape the last century.

"Louie's generation came out of The Depression," Jolie continues. "They were tough, strong, worked hard and had a sense of family and community that sustained them through tremendous adversity. When they were called on to serve their country they were such young boys, but they went. They did such a service for us, no matter how frightened they were, no matter how far from home."

The filmmaker admits that the themes that Hillenbrand explored moved her as much as Louie's life itself did: "There's so much pain in the world. I feel that we need stories like this today-the journey of a man finding his way through darkness and into the light-stories that can help us, inspire us, show us something remarkable and make us feel positive about life."

It was during this process of Jolie discovering Louie's story that Baer told her that Louie was her neighbour. "Louie could actually see the roof of my house from his living-room window," she laughs. "Little did I know that he'd been right there all the time - all the while I was trying to figure out what to do next with my life."

## No easy task

This confluence of events lit a fire inside of Jolie; she felt she had to helm *Unbroken*, but she would learn that winning this coveted directorship would not be an easy task. "I had to fight to get the job," she shares. "I had to fight very hard, not only prove to the studio I could do it, but later, to prove it to myself. And I also had to prove it to Louie, which took some time."

Zamperini's story has been magnificently for the big screen adapted by Oscar winners Joel Coen and Ethan Coen (*No Country for Old Men*, *True Grit*) and Richard LaGravenese (HBO's *Behind the Candelabra*, *Water for Elephants*) and William Nicholson (*Les Misérables*, *Gladiator*).

When he passed away on 2 July, 2014, at the age of 97, Louie Zamperini wasn't quietly mourned; he was victoriously celebrated as a true American hero. This former Olympian, whose long, incredible and inspiring life has been described as one of the greatest stories of triumph in the 20th century, lived through and beyond what most could comprehend. His tale of crippling despair trumped by indomitable will and redemption continues to serve as a message of hope for the millions who have been affected and inspired by his journey.

And it all began almost a century ago.

Read more about *Unbroken* and other films opening this week at [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Derksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

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