

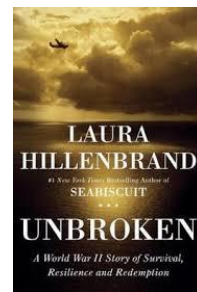
Name _____ ELA 8 – Excerpts from Ch. 2

Date _____ **Unbroken** by Laura Hillenbrand

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Excerpts from Chapter 2 “Run Like Mad”

Louie’s Change of Heart



THE REHABILITATION OF LOUIE ZAMPERINI BEGAN IN 1931, with a key. Fourteen-year-old Louie was in a locksmith shop when he heard someone say that if you put any key in any lock, it has a one-in-fifty chance of fitting. Inspired, Louie began collecting keys and trying locks. He had no luck until he tried his house key on the back door of the Torrance High gym. When basketball season began, there was an inexplicable discrepancy between the number of ten-cent tickets sold and the considerably larger number of kids in the bleachers. In late 1931, someone caught on, and Louie was hauled to the principal’s office for the umpteenth time. In California, winter-born students entered new grades in January, so Louie was about to start ninth grade. The principal punished him by making him ineligible for athletic and social activities. Louie, who never joined anything, was indifferent.

When Pete learned what had happened, he headed straight to the principal’s office. Though his mother didn’t yet speak much English, he towed her along to give his presentation weight. He told the principal that Louie craved attention but had never won it in the form of praise, so he sought it in the form of punishment. If Louie were recognized for doing something right, Pete argued, he’d turn his life around. He asked the principal to allow Louie to join a sport. When the principal balked, Pete asked him if he could live with allowing Louie to fail. It was a cheeky thing for a sixteen-year-old to say to his principal, but Pete was the one kid in Torrance who could get away with such a remark, and make it persuasive. Louie was made eligible for athletics for 1932.

Pete had big plans for Louie. A senior in 1931–32, he would graduate with ten varsity letters, including three in basketball and three in baseball. But it was track, in which he earned four varsity letters, tied the school half-mile record, and set its mile record of 5:06, that was his true forte. Looking at Louie, whose getaway speed was his saving grace, Pete thought he saw the same incipient talent.

As it turned out, it wasn’t Pete who got Louie onto a track for the first time. It was Louie’s weakness for girls. In February, the ninth-grade girls began assembling a team for an interclass track meet, and in a class with only four boys, Louie was the only male who looked like he could run. The girls worked their charms, and Louie found himself standing on the track, barefoot, for a 660-yard race. When everyone ran, he followed, churning along with jimmying elbows and dropping far behind. As he labored home last, he heard tittering. Gasping and humiliated, he ran straight off the track and hid under the bleachers. The coach muttered something about how that kid belonged anywhere but in a footrace. “He’s my brother,” Pete replied.

From that day on, Pete was all over Louie, forcing him to train, then dragging him to the track to run in a second meet. Urged on by kids in the stands, Louie put in just enough effort to beat one boy and finish third. He hated running, but the applause was intoxicating, and the prospect of more was just enough

incentive to keep him marginally compliant. Pete herded him out to train every day and rode his bicycle behind him, whacking him with a stick. Louie dragged his feet, bellyached, and quit at the first sign of fatigue. Pete made him get up and keep going. Louie started winning. At the season's end, he became the first Torrance kid to make the All City Finals. He finished fifth.

Pete had been right about Louie's talent. But to Louie, training felt like one more constraint. At night he listened to the whistles of passing trains, and one day in the summer of '32, he couldn't bear it any longer.

In the summer of 1932, Louie did almost nothing but run. On the invitation of a friend, he went to stay at a cabin on the Cahuilla Indian Reservation, in southern California's high desert. Each morning, he rose with the sun, picked up his rifle, and jogged into the sagebrush. He ran up and down hills, over the desert, through gullies. He chased bands of horses, darting into the swirling herds and trying in vain to snatch a fistful of mane and swing aboard. He swam in a sulfur spring, watched over by Cahuilla women scrubbing clothes on the rocks, and stretched out to dry himself in the sun. On his run back to the cabin each afternoon, he shot a rabbit for supper. Each evening, he climbed atop the cabin and lay back, reading Zane Grey novels. When the sun sank and the words faded, he gazed over the landscape, moved by its beauty, watching it slip from gray to purple before darkness blended land and sky. In the morning he rose to run again. He didn't run from something or to something, not for anyone or in spite of anyone; he ran because it was what his body wished to do. The restiveness, the self-consciousness, and the need to oppose disappeared. All he felt was peace.

He came home with a mania for running. All of the effort that he'd once put into thieving he threw into track. On Pete's instruction, he ran his entire paper route for the Torrance Herald, to and from school, and to the beach and back. He rarely stayed on the sidewalk, veering onto neighbors' lawns to hurdle bushes. He gave up drinking and smoking. To expand his lung capacity, he ran to the public pool at Redondo Beach, dove to the bottom, grabbed the drain plug, and just floated there, hanging on a little longer each time. Eventually, he could stay underwater for three minutes and forty-five seconds. People kept jumping in to save him.

In the fall of 1932, Pete began his studies at Compton, a tuition-free junior college, where he became a star runner. Nearly every afternoon, he commuted home to coach Louie, running alongside him, subduing the jimmying elbows and teaching him strategy. Louie had a rare biomechanical advantage, hips that rolled as he ran; when one leg reached forward, the corresponding hip swung forward with it, giving Louie an exceptionally efficient, seven-foot stride. After watching him from the Torrance High fence, cheerleader Toots Bowersox needed only one word to describe him: "Smoooooth." Pete thought that the sprints in which Louie had been running were too short. He'd be a miler, just like Glenn Cunningham.

In January 1933, Louie began tenth grade. As he lost his aloof, thorny manner, he was welcomed by the fashionable crowd. They invited him to weenie bakes in front of Kellow's Hamburg Stand, where Louie would join ukulele sing-alongs and touch football games played with a knotted towel, contests that inevitably ended with a cheerleader being wedged into a trash can. Capitalizing on his sudden

popularity, Louie ran for class president and won, borrowing the speech that Pete had used to win his class presidency at Compton. Best of all, girls suddenly found him dreamy. While walking alone on his sixteenth birthday, Louie was ambushed by a giggling gaggle of cheerleaders. One girl sat on Louie while the rest gave him sixteen whacks on the rear, plus one to grow on.

When the school track season began in February, Louie set out to see what training had done for him. His transformation was stunning. Competing in black silk shorts that his mother had sewn from the fabric of a skirt, he won an 880-yard race, breaking the school record, co-held by Pete, by more than two seconds. A week later, he ran a field of milers off their feet, stopping the watches in 5:03, three seconds faster than Pete's record. At another meet, he clocked a mile in 4:58. Three weeks later, he set a state record of 4:50.6. By early April, he was down to 4:46; by late April, 4:42. "Boy! oh boy! oh boy!" read a local paper. "Can that guy fly? Yes, this means that Zamperini guy!"

Almost every week, Louie ran the mile, streaking through the season unbeaten and untested. When he ran out of high school kids to whip, he took on Pete and thirteen other college runners in a two-mile race at Compton. Though he was only sixteen and had never even trained at the distance, he won by fifty yards. Next he tried the two-mile in UCLA's Southern California Cross Country meet. Running so effortlessly that he couldn't feel his feet touching the ground, he took the lead and kept pulling away. At the halfway point, he was an eighth of a mile ahead, and observers began speculating on when the boy in the black shorts was going to collapse. Louie didn't collapse. After he flew past the finish, rewriting the course record, he looked back up the long straightaway. Not one of the other runners was even in view. Louie had won by more than a quarter of a mile.

He felt as if he would faint, but it wasn't from the exertion. It was from the realization of what he was.