



LOUIS ZAMPERINI

☆☆☆☆



There are not many people in life more courageous than **Louis Zamperini**. From professional athletics to wartime heroics, Zamperini's life is a **testament** to the incredible capacity of the human spirit for hope, integrity, and bravery.

Zamperini was born in Olean, New York on January 26th, 1917, to Catholic parents Anthony and Louise, both of whom **emigrated** from northern Italy. When he was two, Louis moved to Torrance, California, with his family, where he lived for the rest of his childhood and young adulthood. Because of the Zamperinis' strong Italian roots, Louis did not speak any English at home, which made him a target for bullies growing up. In order to learn how to defend himself, his father taught him to box, and his older brother Pete got him involved in the local high school track team when he was old enough.

Louis took to running with **alacrity**; through his last three years of racing in high school, Zamperini remained undefeated. In 1934, he won the California State Championships with a 1-mile time of 4 minutes and 27.8 seconds, which was good enough to secure him a track scholarship at the University of Southern California. From there, Louis decided to try out for the Olympics, even though no one really believed he was good enough to make it. With the help of his local community, which **amassed** funds for his travel expenses, Zamperini traveled cross-country to New York and ran the 5,000-meter race during an infamous heat wave, tying for first place and automatically qualifying for the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany.

At the Olympics, Louis finished 8th in the 5,000-meter event and even shook hands with Hitler. No one could know that, only a few years later, Zamperini would enlist in the United States Army Air Corps and would be fighting against Hitler's troops in World War II.

In 1941, 2nd Lieutenant Zamperini was stationed at the Pacific Island of Funafuti as a bombardier (member of a bomber airplane crew) on the plane entitled the *Super Man*. He quickly proved himself a courageous soldier by saving the lives of two crew members, as well as administering first aid to five others who were injured during an air raid. However, during the battle, his plane *The Super Man* was **irreparably** damaged, and he and the remaining healthy crew members were **reallocated** to Hawaii to conduct search-and-rescue missions for lost aircraft.

It was on May 27th, 1943, while on one of these missions that Zamperini's plane, *The Green Hornet* was **beset** by mechanical difficulties, forcing the bomber to crash-land into the ocean. Louis and two other men survived the crash, but they were 850 miles south of Hawaii in the middle of the ocean with little food and no water. With great **ingenuity**, the men survived by drinking rainwater and eating small fish and birds, but life soon became very hard. In addition to battling starvation and dehydration, the men had to combat vicious shark attacks, treacherous storms that threatened to **capsize** their rafts, and **blistering** heat that **exacerbated** their struggles. After 47 days afloat, Louis and Francis McNamara, the one other surviving crew member, washed up on the Marshall Islands, where they were immediately captured by the occupying Japanese forces and made prisoners of war (POWs).

If Louis thought his time **adrift** on the ocean was going to be the biggest challenge to his nerve, he was wrong; he was held in captivity by the Japanese for more than two years, throughout which he was severely beaten and mistreated. At first, Louis was held at a southern island called Kwajalein Atoll, but after a little over a month, he was transferred to the Japanese POW camp Ōfuna. One of the most horrifying elements of this was that soldiers who were sent to Ōfuna were not registered officially as prisoners of war, so there was no one to hold them **accountable** for the treatment of their captives. Additionally, as there was no record of his having survived the plane crash, Louis was officially declared lost at sea by the military and then, a year and a day after his disappearance, this designation was changed to “killed in action,” at which point a condolence letter was sent by President Roosevelt to his parents.

As if his situation could not get any **bleaker**, Louis was then transferred to Naoetsu POW camp in northern Japan, where he was tortured by the **notorious** prison guard Mutsuhiro “The Bird” Watanabe. Watanabe’s methods were so cruel and dishonorable that he was included in General Douglas MacArthur’s list of the 40 most-wanted criminals in Japan. Because of Louis’ fame as an Olympic runner, the Japanese prison guard gave him special attention, which almost caused him to **expire** on numerous occasions. Despite this **inhumane** treatment, Zamperini never gave in to despair, but kept his own hopes up, and those of his fellow prisoners, by reciting Italian food recipes from his childhood and telling stories.

Finally, on September 5th, 1945, following the Japanese surrender, Zamperini was officially released and allowed to return to the United States. It took him a month to do so, but he eventually made it home and surprised his **incredulous** family, who thought he had been dead for more than a year, by walking through their front door.

Zamperini spent the remainder of his days living life to the fullest. In addition to marrying and having two children, Louis **reconverted** to Christianity, becoming an international evangelist. Just before his 81st birthday in 1998, in one of his most powerful statements, Zamperini ran a leg of the Olympic Torch relay for the winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan, just a few miles from the POW camp where he had been tortured and imprisoned. While there, he also visited Sugamo Prison in Tokyo, where many Japanese war criminals were being held, and expressed forgiveness to them for what they had done to him and other American prisoners during the War. Zamperini tried to obtain a meeting with his former jailor Watanabe, but the man refused; however, Louis did manage to send him a letter, wherein he forgave the guard for his mistreatment.

Louis Zamperini passed away on July 2nd, 2014, just a few months before a major motion picture about his inspirational life was released.

As almost everyone learns as they grow up, life can be incredibly challenging; there are dark times, setbacks, mistakes, tragedies, injustices, and more. While not everyone will experience the incredible hardships that Louis Zamperini did, his heroic story proves that, with a courageous spirit, a passion for life, and mental **fortitude**, we can overcome anything.



SECTION 1: COMPREHENSION



I. Factual Identification: Answer the following questions based on your reading:

1. Louis Zamperini's birth century and country: _____
2. Who was Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe?

3. What were the circumstances under which Zamperini met Hitler?

4. Where are these places located: Funafuti, Nagano, and the Marshall Islands?

5. When did Zamperini represent his country in the Olympics?

6. Why did Louis end up as a Japanese prisoner-of-war?

II. Chronological Order: Arrange these events chronologically by placing the numbers 1-5 in the correct boxes. In the empty space, write a biographical event that fits in the chronological sequence.

◆ Zamperini wins the California State championships.	
◆ Louis attends the Olympics.	
◆ Zamperini survives in the ocean for 47 days.	
◆	4
◆ Louis returns home from the war.	

III. Hierarchical Order: What are the three most significant points in Louis Zamperini's life? Write them in order below, starting with the most important.

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____



SECTION 2: VOCABULARY



I. Definitions:

Fill in the chart with the missing synonyms and antonyms (one word for each):

WORD	DEFINITION	SYNONYM	ANTONYM
accountable	required to justify actions or decisions	responsible	
adrift	drifting without being moored or steered		stationary
alacrity	brisk and cheerful readiness	swiftness	sluggishness
amass	to gather together or accumulate over a period of time		distribute
beset	to trouble or threaten persistently	afflict	support
bleak	feeling or appearing isolated and depressed	dreary	
blistering	extremely or intensely hot		freezing
capsize	to upend in the water	overturn	right
emigrate	to leave one's own country to settle in another permanently	relocate	remain
exacerbate	to make a problem, situation, or feeling worse	aggravate	soothe
expire	to die or come to an end	perish	
fortitude	endurance or courage in the face of pain or adversity		weakness
incredulous	unwilling or unable to believe something	unbelieving	convinced
ingenuity	the quality of being clever, original, and inventive	cleverness	dullness
inhumane	without compassion for misery or suffering; cold-hearted	cruel	
irreparable	impossible to rectify or repair	irreversible	fixable
notorious	well-known for some bad quality or deed	disreputable	
reallocate	to distribute again for a particular purpose		gather
reconvert	to convert back to a former state	restore	remain
testament	something that serves as a sign of a specific fact, event, or quality	evidence	---

II. Multiple Choice:

Circle the word which most closely matches the given definition.

1. the opposite of weakness	notorious	testament	bleak	fortitude
2. collect over time	reallocate	amass	capsize	beset
3. evidence of a fact or event	ingenuity	expire	testament	bleak
4. extremely hot	fortitude	adrift	blistering	incredulous
5. famous for bad reasons	reconvert	notorious	exacerbate	inhumane
6. required to justify decisions	ingenuity	expire	alacrity	accountable
7. overturn	irreparable	capsize	emigrate	beset
8. reassign	reallocate	emigrate	reconvert	irreparable
9. not sympathetic	alacrity	accountable	inhumane	adrift
10. to make worse	amass	incredulous	blistering	exacerbate

III. Word Choice: Circle the bolded word which correctly completes the sentence.

1. I thought it would be a little warm at the beach, but in actuality it was [**blistering** / **bleak**].
2. The number of flowers you received at the hospital is a [**testament** / **fortitude**] to your winning personality.
3. Over the course of the game, I [**reallocated** / **amassed**] the most points by far.
4. The [**notorious** / **expired**] criminal was wanted in more than 20 states.
5. I tried to [**reallocate** / **reconvert**] the PDF into a document, but I could not restore it.
6. She surprised us with the [**fortitude** / **alacrity**] she displayed, since she was not known for her courage.
7. While many doctors are sympathetic, mine was so cold he almost seemed [**irreparable** / **inhumane**].
8. My grandparents [**emigrated** / **reconverted**] from Turkey when they were in their early teens.
9. If you don't stop standing and throwing rocks, our canoe is going to [**irreparable** / **capsize**]!
10. The groundskeeper didn't want to [**exacerbate** / **expire**] his allergies, but the grass needed to be cut.

IV. Sentence Completion: Complete the following sentences with the correct vocabulary word.

1. Only you can be held _____ for breaking that statue; the rest of us are blameless.
2. The administrators were able to _____ money from the chemistry budget to the orchestra.
3. I left the kayak _____ in the small pond, since I knew it couldn't go anywhere.
4. His statement made me _____, and it took a while before I was convinced that it was a good plan.
5. As we began to run, I was _____ by many difficulties, including shortness of breath and cramps.
6. My dog did _____ damage to my homework; he ate most it, and the rest is scattered on the ground.
7. At the knock on the door, my father jumped up with _____ and ran over to open it.
8. With great _____, he found a way to make a hammock out of a blanket.
9. The writer described a _____ picture of suburban life, but he was probably not far from the truth.
10. If we don't get out of this traffic in the next hour, I feel like I'm going to _____!

V. Writing Concisely: Express the thought of each of the following sentences in five or fewer words.

1. The boat was drifting about without being tied down.	
2. The student's qualities of being inventive and clever were clear.	
3. We stayed in the house until our lease came to an end.	
4. Our cousins left their country to settle here permanently.	
5. The island seemed isolated and depressing.	

VI. Sentence Construction: Write original sentences using the following vocabulary words:

alacrity, beset, incredulous, irreparable, reconvert

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



SECTION 3: APPLICATION



I. Short Answers:

Answer each question in two to four sentences.

1. Why is Louis Zamperini considered a hero?

2. Describe the mental courage Zamperini exhibited during his time as a POW.

3. When people are not held accountable for their actions, they tend to do atrocious things. How different do you think Louis' experience at the POW camp would have been if the captors had been held accountable for their treatment of the prisoners?

II. Personal Application:

Answer each question in two to four sentences.

1. What aspect of Louis' path to heroism resonates the most with you and why?

2. What do you know about the role of Japan in World War II?
