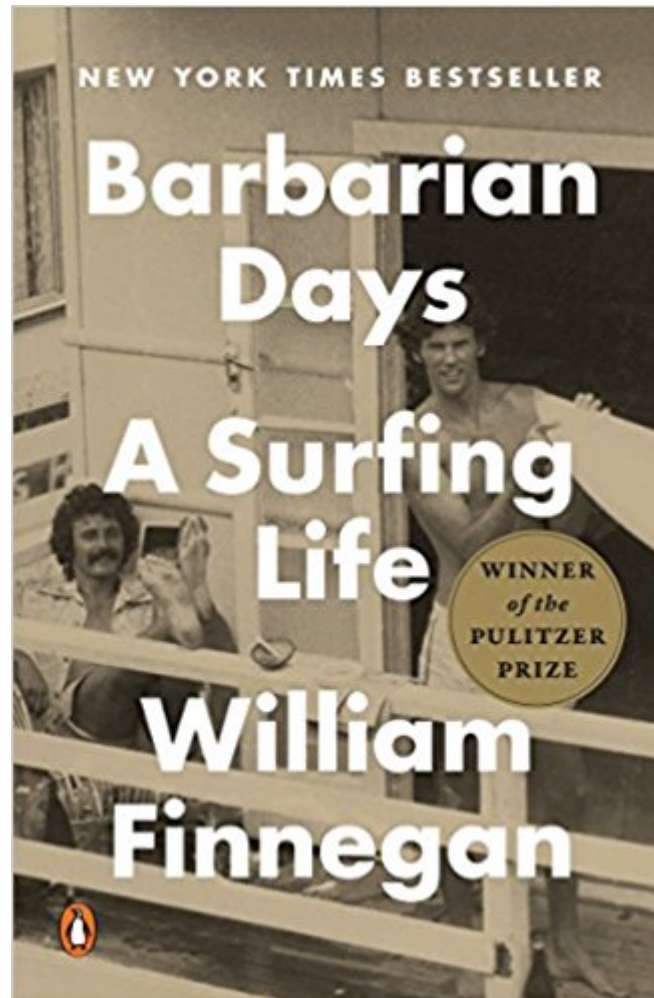




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Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life



Synopsis

****Winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Autobiography**** “Reading this guy on the subject of waves and water is like reading Hemingway on bullfighting; William Burroughs on controlled substances; Updike on adultery. . . . a coming-of-age story, seen through the gloss resin coat of a surfboard.” —*Sports Illustrated* Included in President Obama’s 2016 Summer Reading List *Barbarian Days* is William Finnegan’s memoir of an obsession, a complex enchantment. Surfing only looks like a sport. To initiates, it is something else: a beautiful addiction, a demanding course of study, a morally dangerous pastime, a way of life. Raised in California and Hawaii, Finnegan started surfing as a child. He has chased waves all over the world, wandering for years through the South Pacific, Australia, Asia, Africa. A bookish boy, and then an excessively adventurous young man, he went on to become a distinguished writer and war reporter. *Barbarian Days* takes us deep into unfamiliar worlds, some of them right under our noses—off the coasts of New York and San Francisco. It immerses the reader in the edgy camaraderie of close male friendships forged in challenging waves. Finnegan shares stories of life in a whites-only gang in a tough school in Honolulu. He shows us a world turned upside down for kids and adults alike by the social upheavals of the 1960s. He details the intricacies of famous waves and his own apprenticeships to them. Youthfully, he drops LSD while riding huge Honolua Bay, on Maui—is served up with rueful humor. As Finnegan’s travels take him ever farther afield, he discovers the picturesque simplicity of a Samoan fishing village, dissects the sexual politics of Tongan interactions with Americans and Japanese, and navigates the Indonesian black market while nearly succumbing to malaria. Throughout, he surfs, carrying readers with him on rides of harrowing, unprecedented lucidity. *Barbarian Days* is an old-school adventure story, an intellectual autobiography, a social history, a literary road movie, and an extraordinary exploration of the gradual mastering of an exacting, little-understood art. Praise for *Barbarian Days*: “Without a doubt, the finest surf book I’ve ever read . . . But on a more fundamental level, *Barbarian Days* offers a clear-eyed vision of American boyhood. Like Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild*, it is a sympathetic examination of what happens when literary ideas of freedom and purity take hold of a young mind and fling his body out into the far reaches of the world.” —*The New York Times Magazine* “Incandescent . . . I’d sooner press this book upon on a nonsurfer, in part because nothing I’ve read so accurately describes the feeling of being stoked or the despair of being held under. . . . [But] it’s also about a writer’s life and, even more generally, a quester’s life,

more carefully observed and precisely rendered than any I've read in a long time. — Los Angeles Times

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Customer Reviews

“How many ways can you describe a wave? You’ll never get tired of watching Finnegan do it. A staff writer at The New Yorker, he leads a counterlife as an obsessive surfer, traveling around the world, throwing his vulnerable, merely human body into line after line of waves in search of transient moments of grace. It’s an occupation that has never before been described with this tenderness and deftness. — TIME Magazine, Top 10 Nonfiction Books of 2015

“A hefty masterpiece. — Geoff Dyer, The Guardian

“Terrific. Elegantly written and structured, it’s a riveting adventure story, an intellectual autobiography, and a restless, searching meditation on love, friendship and family. A writer of rare subtlety and observational gifts, Finnegan explores every aspect of the sport — its mechanics and intoxicating thrills, its culture and arcane tribal codes — in a way that should resonate with surfers and non-surfers alike. His descriptions of some of the world’s most powerful and unforgiving waves are hauntingly beautiful. Finnegan displays an honesty that is evident throughout the book, parts of which have a searing, unvarnished intensity that reminded me of Stop Time, the classic coming-of-age memoir by Frank Conroy. — Washington Post

“The kind of book that makes you squirm in your seat on the subway, gaze out the window at work, and Google Map the quickest route to the beach. In other words, it is, like Jon Krakauer’s Into the Wild, a

semi-dangerous book, one that persuades young men to trade in their office jobs in order to roam the world, to feel the ocean's power, and chase the waves. The Paris Review Daily "Fans of [Finnegan's] writing have been waiting eagerly for his surfing memoir. Well, *Barbarian Days* is here. And it's even better than one could have imagined. This is Finnegan's gift. He's observant and expressive but shows careful restraint in his zeal. He says only what needs to be said, enough to create a vivid picture for the reader while masterfully giving that picture a kind of movement. Honolulu Star-Advertiser "That surfing life is [Finnegan's], and it's a remarkably adventurous one sure to induce wanderlust in anyone who follows along, surfer or not. Lyrical but not overbaked, exciting but always self-effacing. It captures the moments of joy and terror Finnegan's lifelong passion has brought him, as well as his occasional ambivalence about the tenacious hold it has on him. It's easily the best book ever written about surfing. It's not even close. Florida Times-Union "An engrossing read, part treatise on wave physics, part thrill ride, part cultural study, with a soupçon of near-death events. Even for those who've never paddled out, Finnegan's imagery is as vividly rendered as a film, his explanation of wave mastery a triumph of language. For surfers, the book is *The Endless Summer* writ smarter and larger, touching down at every iconic break. Los Angeles Magazine "Vivid and propulsive. Finnegan has seen things from the tops of ocean peaks that would disturb most surfers' dreams for weeks. (I happily include myself among that number.) A lyrical and enormously rewarding read. Finnegan's enchantment takes us to some luminous and unsettling places on both the edge of the ocean, and the frontiers of the surfing life. San Diego Union-Tribune "Barbarian Days gleams with precise, often lyrical recollections of the most memorable waves [Finnegan has] encountered. He carefully mines his surfing exploits for broader, hard-won insights on his childhood, his most intense friendships and romances, his political education, his career. He's always attuned to his surroundings, and his reflections are often tinged with self-effacing wit. Chicago Reader "Extraordinary [Barbarian Days] is in many ways, and for the first time, a surfer in full. And it is cause for throwing your wet-suit hoods in the air. If the book has a flaw, it lies in the envy helplessly induced in the armchair surf-traveler by so many lusty affairs with waves that are the supermodels of the surf world. Still, Finnegan considerably shows himself paying the price of admission in a few near drownings, and these are among the most electrifying moments in

the book. There are too many breathtaking, original things in *Barbarian Days* to do more than mention here. observations about surfing that have simply never been made before, or certainly never so well. The New York Times Book Review "Without a doubt, the finest surf book I've ever read. All this technical mastery and precise description goes hand in hand with an unabashed, infectious earnestness. Finnegan has certainly written a surfing book for surfers, but on a more fundamental level, *Barbarian Days* offers a clear-eyed vision of American boyhood. Like Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, it is a sympathetic examination of what happens when literary ideas of freedom and purity take hold of a young mind and fling his body out into the far reaches of the world. The New York Times Magazine "Which is precisely what makes the propulsive precision of Finnegan's writing so surprising and revelatory. Finnegan's treatment of surfing never feels like performance. Through the sheer intensity of his descriptive powers and the undeniable ways in which surfing has shaped his life, *Barbarian Days* is an utterly convincing study in the joy of treating seriously an unserious thing. As Finnegan demonstrates, surfing, like good writing, is an act of vigilant noticing. The New York Review of Books "Finnegan is an excellent surfer; at some point he became an even better writer. That pairing makes *Barbarian Days* exceptional in the notoriously foamy genre of surf lit: a hefty, heavyweight tour de force, overbrimming with sublime lyrical passages that Finnegan drops as effortlessly as he executed his signature drop-knee cutback in the breaks off Waikiki. Reading this guy on the subject of waves and water is like reading Hemingway on bullfighting; William Burroughs on controlled substances; Updike on adultery. Finnegan is a virtuoso wordsmith, but the juice propelling this memoir is wrung from the quest that shaped him. A piscine, picaresque coming-of-age story, seen through the gloss resin coat of a surfboard. Sports Illustrated "Overflowing with vivid descriptions of waves caught and waves missed, of disappointments and ecstasies and gargantuan curling tubes that encircle riders like cathedrals of pure stained glass. These paragraphs, with their mix of personal remembrance and subcultural taxonomies, tend to be as elegant and pellucid as the breakers they immortalize. This memoir is one you can ride all the way to shore. • Entertainment Weekly "[A] sweeping, glorious memoir. Oh, the rides, they are incandescent. I'd sooner press this book upon on a nonsurfer, in part because nothing I've read so accurately describes the feeling of being stoked or the despair of being held under. But also because while it is a book about A Surfing

Life. It's also about a writer's life and, even more generally, a quester's life, more carefully observed and precisely rendered than any I've read in a long time. —Los Angeles Times —“Gorgeously written and intensely felt. With Mr. Finnegan's bravura memoir, the surfing bookshelf is dramatically enriched. It's not only a volume for followers of the sport. Non-surfers, too, will be treated to a travelogue head-scratchingly rich in obscure, sharply observed destinations. Dare I say that we all need Mr. Finnegan as a role model for a life fully, thrillingly, lived.” —Wall Street Journal —“An evocative, profound and deeply moving memoir. The proof is in the sentences. Were I given unlimited space to review this book, I would simply reproduce it here, with a quotation mark at the beginning and another at the end. While surfers have a reputation for being inarticulate, there is actually a fair amount of overlap between what makes a good surfer and a good writer. A smooth style, an ability to stay close to the source of the energy, humility before the task, and, once you're done, not claiming your ride. In other words, making something exceedingly difficult look easy. The gift for writing a clean line is rare, and the gift for riding one even rarer. Finnegan possesses both.” —San Francisco Chronicle —“Finnegan writes so engagingly that you paddle alongside, eager for him to take you to the next wave. It is a wet and wild run. He makes surfing seem as foreign and simultaneously as intimate a sport as possible. Surfing is the backbone of the book, but Finnegan's relationships to people, not waves, form its flesh. [A] deep blue story of one man's lifelong enchantment.” —Boston Globe —“Finnegan's epic adventure, beautifully told, is much more than the story of a boy and his wave, even if surfing serves as the thumping heartbeat of his life.” —Dallas Morning News —“That's always Finnegan's M.O.: examining the ways in which surfing intertwines with anthropology, economics, politics, and, of course, writing. Finnegan is a sober, straightforward author, but the level of detail, emotion, and insight he achieves is unparalleled. A must-read for all surfers — not just because of its unblinking prose and subtle wit, but because it's the only book that properly details what it's like to cultivate both an award-winning career and a dedicated surfing life.” —Eastern Surf Magazine —“Finnegan describes, with shimmering detail, his adventures riding waves on five continents. Surfing has taken him places he'd never otherwise have thought to go, but it also buoyed him through a career reporting on the politics of intense scarcity, limitless cruelty, and unimaginable suffering. It's a book about travel and growing up, and the power of a pastime when it becomes an obsession.” —Men's Journal —“With a

compelling storyline and masterful prose, Finnegan's A beautiful memoir is sure to resonate. • The New York Observer "Fearless and full of grace. • Outside Magazine "Irresistible. • O, The Oprah Magazine "It's always fabulous when an incredible writer happens to also have a memoir-worthy life; A Barbarian Days bodes well. • GQ.com "A demonstration of gratitude and mastery. [Finnegan] uses these words to describe the wave, but they might as well apply to the book. In a sense, A Barbarian Days functions as a 450-page thank you letter, masterfully crafted, to his parents, friends, wife, enemies, ex-girlfriends, townsfolk, daughter • everyone who tolerated and even encouraged his lifelong obsession. It's a way to help them and us understand what drives him to keep paddling out half a century after first picking up a board. • NPR.org "[A] lyrical, intellectual memoir. The author touches on love, on responsibility, on politics, individuality and morality, as well as on the lesser-known aspects of surfing: the toll it takes on the body, the weird lingo, the whacky community. Finnegan's world is as dazzling and deep as any ocean. It's a pleasure to paddle into and makes for a hell of a ride. • The Millions "As it progresses the whole book turns into a portal | It's tempting to say that Barbarian Days will bring readers as close as they'll get to the surf, short of actual surfing. But I had a stronger reaction: The book brought me closer than I'd ever been, or expected to get, to the real, unfathomable ocean. • Bookforum "A dream of a book by a masterful writer long immersed in surfing culture. Finnegan recaptures the waves lost and found, the euphoria, the danger | the allure. • BBC.com "Panoramic and fascinating | The core of the book is a surfing chronicle, and Finnegan possesses impeccable short-board bona fides | A revealing and magisterial account of a beautiful addiction. • Publishers Weekly (starred review) "Like that powerful, glassy wave, great books on surfing come few and far between. This summer, New Yorker writer Finnegan recalls his teenage years in the California and Hawaii of the 1960s • when surfing was an escape for loners and outcasts. A delightful storyteller, Finnegan takes readers on a journey from Hawaii to Australia, Fiji, and South Africa, where finding those waves is as challenging as riding them. • Publishers Weekly's Best Summer Books of the Summer "A fascinating look inside the mind of a man terminally in love with a magnificent obsession. A lyrical and intense memoir. • Kirkus "An up-close and personal homage to the surfing lifestyle through the author's journey as a lifelong surfer. Finnegan's writing is polished and bold | [A] high-caliber memoir. • Library Journal From

the Hardcover edition.

WILLIAM FINNEGAN is the author of *Cold New World*, *A Complicated War*, *Dateline Soweto*, and *Crossing the Line*. He has twice been a National Magazine Award finalist and has won numerous journalism awards, including two Overseas Press Club awards since 2009. *Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life* received the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Autobiography. A staff writer at *The New Yorker* since 1987, he lives in Manhattan. From the Hardcover edition.

The unusual title of this book might lead a prospective reader to think the author is going to talk about the dark side of the people who surf. We have come to associate the word "barbarian" with hordes of less civilized people who sack cities and carry off fair maidens. But, a visit to Webster's Dictionary will provide you with a meaning more relevant to William Finnegan's book about the surfing life. Per Webster's Dictionary, "barbarian" refers to a "culture or people alien to, and usually believed to be inferior to another people or culture." A Barbarian might be seen as lacking refinement, learning, or artistic or literary culture. *Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life* can be viewed as a memoir of some fifty years of William Finnegan's life as a family member, a surfing fanatic, a writer, a world traveler and a Quixotic searcher of new and near perfect waves in remote places around the world; places like Indonesia, Fiji, Bali, and Madeira. But, Finnegan also finds exciting waves in California, New Jersey, New York and other less exotic locations. He also discovers highly talented artists, craftspeople, ocean experts, and business people who chose to devote their energy to surfing as a life style, sport, source of income, or all of the above. Finnegan makes friends and a few enemies along his path through life. For those of us who surf, the book will bring special meaning covering as it does the history of surfing, evolution of surfboard designs and transition from the long board to the agile short board and on to tow in surfing to enable a rider to catch a wave fifty feet high, waves that could not be surfed before tow in technique was developed. For the reader who has tried surfing or body surfing and felt the power of the ocean then decided not to take up surfing, this book will still hold much meaning as a story about the zone where ocean meets land, where people try to co-exist with the power of the surf and where a life style built around surfing continues to evolve. The author delves into personalities, territorial claims on the waves themselves, human pecking orders and power struggles, life on the cheap, and the struggle to survive on very little while chasing bigger and

better waves in distant, hard to reach locations. Finnegan discusses his family life and the turmoil and rip tides in the zones where family needs and surfing demands often conflict and hard choices about values and love must be made. The story begins in his boyhood years then progresses all the way through his teenage years and into an extended maybe twenty year period of delayed maturity as he chases the waves to exclusion of other aspects of growing up. The sport of surfing changes during his own years of growth. Corporations and Big Media enter the surfing world with an eye to making lots of money as millions of youth around the world are reeled in by the images and attraction of this looser way of life. Hard-core surfers and action junkies get into surfing waves generated by cold, winter storms and by hurricane winds. Finnegan knows and shares their stories. I discovered a lot I didn't know as I read the book and will enjoy my trips to Hawaii and California a lot more now that I have a better idea of what goes on out in the surf and how the surfer lifestyle operates. The book is more enjoyable if the reader views video of the special breaks and waves and locations described by the author. Photos in the book add substance to the text. A great ride even if you do not surf.

I'm sure he is a great war correspondent, but that doesn't seem to translate well to a memoir. His voice was inconsistent. Most of the writing was simple and conversational, then suddenly, he would throw in a big or obscure word as if he was trying to impress the reader with his vocabulary. He also struggled with writing a sentence not thick with clauses. In the middle of a sentence, he would tangent off, and by the time he circled around, I lost his point. It was just clunky writing which I did not enjoy. As for the author, I never connected with him nor cared about him as a character. Times when I thought we were getting close to a connection, he hurried past the moment and left me cold. If you're going to spend 500+ pages writing about yourself, you need to be more than a bland and forgettable man with a thesaurus.

Amazing, I am a grandmother, I don't even swim---I loved this book. I bought it for my husband who used to surf, I picked it up and kept reading. I liked everything about it. I liked that Finnegan is smart and into literature. His references to books added to the story. It is Finnegan's great powers of observation that makes this book unique, and also his writing skill. I felt wet and chilled after reading about one of his washouts. His recall and descriptions of the places visited, small villages, dirt roads, and wild scenery is thrilling. He is "a people person" and we share his encounters with hundreds of unforgettable people. Some of his friends we will know intimately as they move throughout the book. His on again off again relationship with his family----- and his worry about the relationship is insight

into his character. I found Finnegan to be a warm, caring, and thoughtful person. He would be the first to say awww not really. In his later life we share in his many writing assignments. We observe his joy in fatherhood and his recognition of his declining skills as a surfer. We are privileged to peep into the early teen years, ride the waves of his youth and watch Finnegan make the choices of a mature man. What a ride---don't miss it.

I was a little apprehensive at first, expecting some sort of macho, ethnocentric, self aggrandizing autobiography, but this was the complete opposite. Finnegan is a surfer, for sure, and beautifully captures the multifaceted emotions related to the ocean and surfing. More than a surfer, though, Finnegan is a true writer with an impressive career at the New Yorker and constant references to Proust, Cormac McCarthy, Joyce, etc. through his stories. For surfers and non-surfers, there is so much depth here. I started dreading the end as I knew I was getting towards the finish of his autobiography. I almost yearn for a sequel in another twenty years!

as a surfer, pretty much of the author's generation, this book masterfully evoked all our lives, through the lens of 'one eye on the ocean'. What surprised me was the depth of his literary skill. surfers tend to live lives of obsession, never popping their heads out the sand very often, therefore lacking the focus to gain the masterful journalistic skills contained herein., But this book encapsulated so very skilfully the life of travel to far away places, at the time extremely exotic, which we were privileged to share with very few others. it seems the crowd have arrived now, and this book shares the lament. We will never again get to surf Noosa, Rincon, or the hundreds of breaks now packed out from before dawn till the last light of the day, in the lovely isolation described in these pages., Superbly written and well worth 5 stars

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