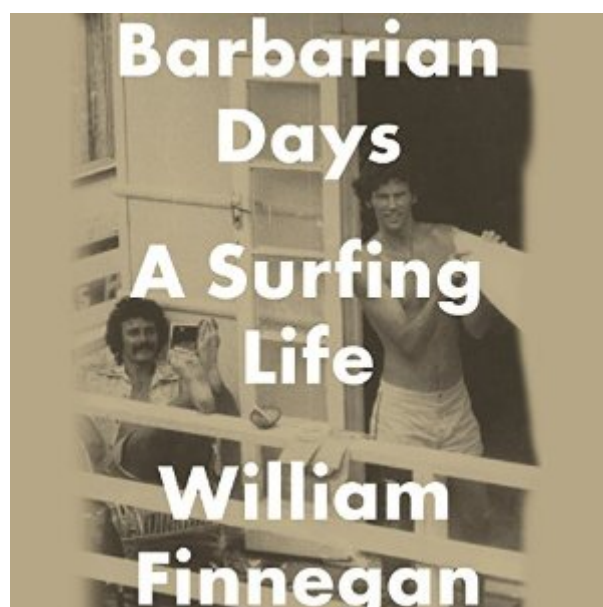


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# Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life



## Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize, Biography, 2016 A deeply rendered self-portrait of a lifelong surfer by the acclaimed New Yorker writer. *Barbarian Days* is William Finnegan's memoir of an obsession, a complex enchantment. Surfing only looks like a sport. To initiate it is something else entirely: 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 listener in the edgy camaraderie of close male friendships annealed in challenging waves. Finnegan shares stories of life in a whites-only gang in a tough school in Honolulu even while his closest friend was a Hawaiian surfer. 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. Youthful folly - he drops LSD while riding huge Honolua Bay on Maui - is served up with rueful humor. He and a buddy, their knapsacks crammed with reef charts, bushwhack through Polynesia. They discover, while camping on an uninhabited island in Fiji, one of the world's greatest waves. As Finnegan's travels take him ever farther afield, he becomes an improbable anthropologist: unpicking the picturesque simplicity of a Samoan fishing village, dissecting the sexual politics of Tongan interactions with Americans and Japanese, navigating the Indonesian black market while nearly succumbing to malaria. Throughout, he surfs, carrying listeners with him on rides of harrowing, unprecedented lucidity.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 18 hours and 8 minutes

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Whispersync for Voice: Ready

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## Customer Reviews

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. "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.

God, did I want to love this book. I read Finnegan's surfing trilogy in the New Yorker about 10 years ago. It has always stuck with me as one of the great pieces of writing ever. The tone, balance, and expression are extraordinary. In sum, they are perfect jewels, the like of which I have never read since. I read everything I could find by Finnegan afterwards: none quite matched up. I concluded that the singularity of the New Yorker pieces was the way Finnegan wove the intensity of life into the waves while somehow conveying something profound about how we all deal with the struggle for life and death in day to day life. It was also just a damn good read. So, when this book came along, I expected the same. Foolish me. Clearly, surfing and the author are bound closely: both professionally and recreationally. He loves the sport and made his name from it. That this

autobiography is called "a surfing life" is surely not accidental. Finnegan made a splash with the trilogy and he is known for it and because of it. This book, however, does not approach the heights of the New Yorker pieces. It is as if the Beatles had done a concept album based on "A Day in the Life" ten years after the song. Structurally, the main difference is that Finnegan was essentially a somewhat removed observer in the articles. The main character was an asthmatic doctor who overcame his condition because he had to surf to live and vice versa; the author is opaque; like Ross McDonald's P.I.'s he has no back story: he just is. In the book, it's all about Finnegan. And this is the problem. A more honest title would be "My Life Including Surfing". There is far too much detail about the author's family, friends, and habits. Much of it is boring.

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