Hope Barnhart

Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life by William Finnegan

This book is about William and his past experiences surfing in a variety of different places throughout the world such as California, Hawaii, and Indonesia. In the novel we meet his friends, family, girlfriends, and many people he met along during his journey. The book begins during William’s childhood and his school experiences with bullies and being one of the only white people at the school. This is one of the main parts of the book I was unable to relate to. In all my years of schooling I have never attended a school where I was one of the only white people. This is one of the reasons I decided to keep reading because I could not believe so early into the book, I was already getting an opinion.

Throughout the book there were two characteristics about William I truly admired, how brave and determined he was. He always was in search for new adventures no matter what the cost. He lived his life how he wanted and became the person he wanted to be without conforming to what his parents wanted. I know how difficult it is to try to go against what your parents want, and I know it does not always end up in our favor. But even with being away from his family, he still chose to explore the world in search of the best surfing spots. He was so determined in finding places to surf that he took random jobs wherever he was just to try to pay for gas in the car and repairs on his board. Even after Bryan told him he would be leaving, William decided he was still going to go on. This was interesting to read because in today’s society, less people are putting in the work and determination for things. Many people put in the bare minimum with the expectation they will win at least something.

My favorite scene in this entire book is when Surf magazine revealed the surfing at Tavarua. This was a secret spot William and Bryan had found and now it was being publicized to the whole world. As if revealing the location wasn’t enough damage, some California surfers had bought the land and were letting people to pay to surf there. William did an amazing job portraying the betrayal and disgust he and Bryan felt about the situation. Bryan’s response was my favorite because I can relate to writing a letter to someone higher up about your feelings. My mother does it all the time. I loved how Bryan compared themselves to dogs in a manger because he knew how the surfers were now going to act towards the island and there was no way they would be able to go back there and surf those waves again without fighting other surfers.

The reason I chose this book was because I was interested in surfing and how to surf. I learned much more throughout this book than that. I learned the hardships surfers face and how dangerous the sport actually is. I realized that surfers all will encourage you no matter what when you’re all out in the water together. I have participated in other sports but that was never the case with them. It was all about winning and not encouraging each other to be the best they could be. The book truly depicts the rough aspects of being a surfer rather than all the good things people think about surfing. Before reading this book, I thought surfing was all fun and sometimes people got hurt when a big wave came that threw them around a bit. I did not realize some of the hardship’s surfers go through or how hard some surfers work to have the opportunity to surf.

Overall, this book is a great read and I would highly recommend it to anyone who wants to read about someone being passionate and determined for what they want. One day I hope to be as passionate and adventurous as William was.