

# USC Honor Students' Reflections Upon Reading "We Survived The Holocaust"

On Monday September 16, 2024, Professor Doyle Stevick asked if I would speak to his class (while he was out of town). His Honor College students, enrolled in "Engaging in the Legacies of Anne Frank," had all read *"We Survived The Holocaust: The Bluma & Felix Goldberg Story."* After much discussion and questions, I requested that they put their reactions and thoughts in writing. With their permission, here they are:

Dear Mr. Baker,

Good afternoon! I hope this email finds you well. I am one of Professor Stevick's students, and I wanted to thank you for taking the time to speak to us yesterday. I also wanted to email you with my thoughts about your book, *We Survived the Holocaust*. I believe education plays a crucial role in shaping how young students understand and engage with history, especially events as significant as World War II and the Holocaust. I believe the format of this graphic novel makes the content digestible, especially for younger readers, while still unpacking the complex history. I believe it also does an amazing job of humanizing the individuals who survived the Holocaust, as it shows readers that history is not just a series of events but a collection of actual human lives and emotions. I think it is crucial for students to have access to resources like this. Shielding students from history does not protect them—it deprives them of the opportunity to learn, reflect, and grow from the lessons it offers.

Please feel free to use my name if needed for any of these comments. Thank you for all you do!

Best,

Thrisha Mote

**Saithrishareddy Mote (she/her)**

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Mr. Baker,

Thank you again for visiting our class and sharing your work with us. I wanted to take a moment to reflect on your graphic novel. In elementary school I took a class on the Holocaust, but the experience consisted of reading straight from a textbook and listening to lectures. Your graphic novel offered a profoundly different experience. The way you conveyed both Felix and Bluma's experiences and small, poignant details such as Felix's harrowing task of carrying bodies out of the mine and his secret he revealed to his son was extremely impactful. I found your storytelling to be both educational and moving, and I greatly admire the courage and dedication it must have taken to bring this family's story to light. Your novel has not only enhanced my understanding but also has left a lasting impression on me. Thank you again! Best of luck with all your future endeavors.

Best regards,

Edie

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Edie Violi

University of South Carolina Honors College '25

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Hello!

It was wonderful getting to meet you! I just wanted to send over my thoughts about your book!

My name is Natalie Deal, and I am currently a Senior here at Carolina, but originally from Scranton, PA. Back home, there are a lot of political uprisings which stem from the lack of education. It disgusts me to see the confederate flags and hate signs and flags across my hometown, but in reality, they do not even know what the confederate flag stands for. Although it is not always true, there is this false belief that our government can never be overthrown because we are not structured like other countries. However, little do they know Germany had a democratic system before WW2 but yet Hitler still rose to power.

Personally, in a time now than ever I think it is critical to not only learn about the Holocaust, but also educate on how

Hitler earned his power. I did not realize that who background information on his rise until I took a Holocaust class last semester. I think that is horrible, because this is the most critical part to our society today! There are a ton of red flags or signs that are going on in our democracy that could lead to giving someone in particular too much power!!

In order to prevent future generations with the lack of knowledge on this subject, we need more teachers to be teaching and using Holocaust Resources in the classrooms. It needs time to be dedicated towards it, because with my experience in history classes, we have to rush through WW2 in a week because it's the end of the year. This needs to stop happening, but rather maybe some other department, such as English can teach a unit on the Holocaust. After reading your book, I was greatly inspired how a comic book can still be so touching even more than a novel. I think this would be a great book to be implemented into younger classroom because students do not need a high reading level to read this comic book. Despite the attempt to ban this book , this is for younger aged students for sure! Not that I agree with any of the book banning, I think it goes to show how scared moms are of your book because they know how powerful, meaningful, and impactful it can be. I think that is a true compliment. Thank you for highlighting the Goldbergs story in such a well written and unique way. I am so thankful that we got to meet!

Best,

Natalie Deal

Class of 2025

Honors College Student

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Dear Mr. Baker,

It was great meeting you last week, and I really appreciate you taking a moment to speak with us about your graphic novel, "We Survived the Holocaust." I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed this graphic novel, as it was incredibly moving and insightful.

What stood out to me the most was how the narrative extended

beyond the moment of Felix's liberation. Many stories about the Holocaust often end with that moment of freedom, but your choice to continue the story by showing Felix and Bluma's transition back into society made the experience feel so much more real and authentic. It's easy to imagine a "Hollywood ending" at the point of liberation, but by including the challenges and adjustments they faced afterward, you offered a genuine portrayal of what life was like for survivors as they tried to rebuild and find their place in the world again.

The way you captured this part of their journey made the impact of the story even stronger, reminding me that the struggle didn't simply end when the camps were liberated. It was a powerful reminder of the resilience and strength of those who survived, and I appreciate how you brought that to life so vividly.

You shared the story of Bluma and Felix Goldberg in such a compelling, thoughtful, and creative way, and I'm very grateful to have been able to read it. Thanks again!

Best,

Aidan Roberts

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**Aidan Roberts**

**Finance | Data Analytics**

Carolina Finance Scholar, *University of South Carolina*

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Hello Frank,

I hope you are doing well, thanks again for visiting us and further developing the discussion of our class with your book. It was really interesting to gain knowledge into another perspective on the holocaust and how it affected those before, during, and after the war. I thought you, along with all others involved in the book did a fantastic job of outlining the story in a clear and easy to follow way. The dates along with the graphics and textboxes strengthened my knowledge on all the events occurring at the time.

I hope that you and the family find a way to continue to get this book to as many people as possible!

Have a great day,

**Richard "Clay" Best**

**University of South Carolina Honors Student | Class of 2025**

**Darla Moore School of Business**

**Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity Philanthropy Chair**

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I thought the graphic novel was an innovative approach to

telling a difficult story. I appreciated how the theme of hope was sewn throughout the story while still focusing on the weight of the history being told. I think this is a great way to share a story of this magnitude with younger generations.

I was not familiar with both the process of writing as well as the value of graphic novels. I thought Frank's book was quite engaging and valuable for younger learners who might not be able to read a full-length novel quite yet. I liked how he talked about how he preserved the truth of the struggle and history of those living in the Holocaust, but added some details that served to make the narrative more relatable/interesting. I also liked how he added personal life details in the midst of the historical synopsis. It made the novel both engaging and informative.

I found Frank Baker's book extremely helpful in visualizing the stories of Holocaust survivors, something that can be difficult considering there are so many parts to these stories. The graphic novel medium was perfect in helping me learn and remember details about the Holocaust that are traditionally harder for me to remember. This concept is especially important for kids, as drawn-out pictures and less text are much more digestible for kids. Hopefully when they read this story, they will be able to really understand what they are reading. Finally. I think it this story is especially important to the Columbia community. It is valuable to hear stories of survivors who are local to you, so that the story doesn't seem like some far-off fairytale.

Good morning Frank,

I hope you are doing well. I really enjoyed reading your graphic novel *We Survived the Holocaust: The Bluma and Felix Goldberg Story*. Not only did the drawings make me feel more immersed in the story, It was illuminating to see these were local heroes from Columbia, SC. Being from Columbia, oftentimes when I hear stories, they are at major cities such

as Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago. This book made me recognize how strong of a community Columbia is and how prevalent issues such as the Holocaust still impacts local communities like our today.

“I was instantly drawn in by the detailed and immersive imagery that the graphic novel afforded. These images made the story feel more accessible and relatable for a younger generation, which makes sense hearing about the integration of the book into middle school classrooms. When reading this book, the pictures helped aid my memory. This would be another asset when assigning this reading to middle schoolers. I’m thankful Frank W. Baker was so passionate about getting this story out. It needs to be heard!”

- Courtney Tsakanikas

Please congratulate Frank Baker in an amazing novel. As said previously in class, I thought that the ratio between images and words was so well done. It made the reading experience both easier and much more enjoyable. The images provided in the novel were so full of detail and expertise. Moreover, focusing both on the family’s history as well as the background history of what was going on at the time, made this book a very interesting and exciting way of learning the historical context. As said in during class, I enjoyed so much how the beginning and ending of the story tied together with the Mezuzah. This gave me the idea of a full loop and made the story extraordinary! Great job, Mr. Baker!

To start, writing the story as a graphic novel was such an excellent and well-thought idea. It’s getting harder and harder to reach the minds of today’s youths, who use applications such as TikTok, that causes their attention span to really suffer. They can no longer sit through long lectures

or read long chapter of books, they just don't have the willpower for it. Making such an important story into a graphic novel appeal to middle schoolers so much more because they can understand the points of the story more, but there's also images and drawings to go along with the story. It's such a novel idea, especially in today's day and age, and I applaud you for shaping the story in such a way.

We talked about this in class, but the use of the mezuzah in the beginning and end of the story was such a beautiful full circle moment that shows how the stories of Holocaust survivors lives on in their children, in their faith, and just gives a message of hope and resilience.

- Frank Baker's graphic novel, "We Survived the Holocaust" was an excellent way to experience the life stories of two local holocaust survivors. I found the novel unique in its focus not only on Frank and Bluma's fight to survive horrific oppression, but on the richness of their lives before and after the Holocaust. Because of this, I feel like I got to know Frank and Bluma through the novel and appreciate the roles they played in their community. Thoughts on visit: Frank was an excellent speaker, and I really appreciate him taking the time to come and speak with us! It was interesting to talk with him about book banning and other subjects.
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