

Valley View Middle School
181 Viking Drive
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

March 9, 2017

Mr. Ralph Samuel
Jewish Family and Children's Services
Holocaust Center
2245 Post Street
P. O. Box 159004
San Francisco, CA 94115

Dear Mr. Samuel:

Shalom! My name is [REDACTED]. To be able to hear about the Holocaust from a primary source, was just plain phenomenal. It was incredible to hear about one of the many lives that was affected by the disastrous tragedy of the Holocaust. I am actually Jewish myself and I have watched many films about the Holocaust and have studied its impacts on Jewish life in my Sunday School at a congregation in Walnut Creek. On the day of your presentation at Valley View, I went to the Jewish Film Festival in Downtown Pleasant Hill. I watched the film, *Fanny's Journey*, and it inspired me. I thought of you and your inspirational journey through life. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to be able to hear from a Holocaust survivor, so I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Your life story is so incredible and meaningful. I don't think many kids today can relate to the amount of stress and tragedy you must have endured in your childhood. It must have been hard to leave your family behind and be adopted into a new family without a clue of what was happening in reality. I remember when you showed us the before and after pictures of your home, Dresden. It was especially awful to see what one force can do to an entire population. I can't comprehend the amount of grief and dreadfulness Jews must have been feeling during this time period. It was a comfort to know that you reunited with your mother and you had some piece of family left. The subject that was most interesting to me was when you said you were like a "shipment", when you had the cardboard necklace with your name on it, looking for your new family. All of the memories you shared really did impact me.

It's hard to imagine what my life would be like if I was in your place, 80 years ago. I can't tell you how grateful and sincere I am to you for coming to our school and sharing your life story with us. It is really brave of you to go to schools around the world, talking about your griefs, memories, and joys. You really show kids all around the world that no matter what life throws at you, life goes on. You're a perfect role model to anyone dealing with a rough patch in their life. Your story really opened up my eyes to my Jewish heritage and the persecution and struggles Jews have gone through. Once again, thank you so much for coming to our school and sharing your life with us.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

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Dear Mr. Samuel:

I know you're going to get many letters, and they will all say thank you. But, I would like to say you have impacted me, and I don't think a simple two word appreciation is enough. I don't think all of the thank yous are enough, but, I'm going to say thank you because I'm so extremely grateful. I've read many, many books about the Holocaust, and heard all about the torture, the pain, and the agony. Yet, when I heard your story it hurt more than anything in the world. Hearing someone who has personally been impacted by something so awful almost brought me to tears. So, thank you.

As I stated, you have impacted me in unexpected ways. I remember you specifically talking about moving and how you were lucky to be taken in by the Epsteins, to have a family, and even though there were rough times, you got through it. That's truly amazing. The part that touched me was the pictures, they were truly extravagant. One of the things you talked about was your mom coming. I was too shy to ask during the presentation but, if you have the time, what was that like? Knowing your mother was safe? What was it like to see her? To hear her voice? It would be lovely to hear back from you.

After the experience of listening to your presentation, the influence that it took on my life was actually very heart breaking. I've thought about the Holocaust, but never really felt like I wanted to know someone's story. I was scared that it would hurt you by talking about it, which scared me. However, now I want to know more. I want to hear more. So, thank you. I hope the rest of your life is amazing and free of sorrow.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted Address]

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Dear Mr. Samuel:

Thank you so much for coming to Valley View to talk about your your life. The presentation was very interesting, I found out a lot of information about the Holocaust I did not know before. We appreciate that you took time out of your day to come to Valley View. My peers and I thought your presentation was very important. Thank you for coming to Valley View.

During your presentation some of the topics you spoke about stood out to me. One that stood out to me the most was when you told us how Brian was calling you names. This stood out to me the most because last year there was this girl that was saying awful things to me and I understood what it is like. Another thing that stood out to me was the only way of communication with your father was by letter, something that stood out about this topic was that the letter could only be twenty-five words long. Something else that stood out to me was the picture that you showed us in the beginning of the presentation with the 8 kids in front of the apartment building, it shocked me that only three of them lived. Those are a couple of topics that stood out to me during the presentation.

Your presentation impacted me in many ways. One thing that impacted me was when you told us that they stamped your passport paper with a red "J". Another section from your presentation that impacted me was when you told me that you don't have any siblings. This impacted me because I have three sisters and I don't know what life without them would be like. Once again, thank you so much for coming to Valley View and speaking to us.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area of the letter.

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Dear Mr. Samuel:

Thank you so much for coming to our school. Not a lot of people get to hear a Holocaust survivor speak in person, so I thank you. Your life has inspired me because even though you had a hard life, you still managed to make the most of it and turn it into something great. So many people want to have a chance to speak with you so I am so glad you came and shared your story with me and my fellow eighth graders. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity so I am really thankful.

During your presentation, you mentioned having to put a red "J" on your exit form. I do not think that was right. You should not be treated differently because of who you are or what your ethnicity is. Also, you said that you had to fly to England without your parents. That must have been awful for you because you were seven and a half years old. We need our family's support and guidance when we are that young. Once you got there, not knowing the language and people must have been so difficult. I can relate to you because when I was going into third grade, I had to transfer schools. I did not know anyone and it was really hard to leave my old life and friends behind. It was even harder to create something new. It was probably more difficult for you though because you had much harder problems.

Your presentation left me feeling sad and and a little bit angry. It impacted the way I thought of humanity. How could people murder so many innocent people and not even blink an eye? Some day humans will die out because we will be so busy killing ourselves and others to notice what we are causing. Like being impaled by our own sword. Furthermore, making a little boy change his life in such a drastic way is cruel and unfair. It makes all of my problems seem so small in comparison. Anyway, I thank you so much for coming to our school and talking about your life. I really appreciate it and you have enlightened my views of the world so much. Thanks again!

Sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the student.