



# When We Were Saints

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Archibald Caswell could never please his domineering granddaddy Silas. Now with Granddaddy gone, Archie finds himself lost, confused, and wondering what his grandfather could have possibly meant by his dying words: "Young man, you are a saint!"

Clare Simpson knows *exactly* what Silas meant. She convinces Archie to dedicate his life to God, give up his possessions, steal his granddaddy's truck, and head north to the Cloisters in New York, where she and Archie secretly live after museum hours. For Clare the journey is a return to the only place where she has felt happy and loved. For Archie, the pilgrimage leads him to a closer relationship with God--and a burning desire for home.

*Includes a reader's guide and an interview with the author.*

## **When We Were Saints Details**

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Author : Han Nolan

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## From Reader Review When We Were Saints for online ebook

### Louisa George says

I liked how the book ended. Because this book brought about confusing, extreme spiritual circumstances (and because it was introducing this to a teen audience) I was glad that at the end of the novel it concluded in a non-confusing way and left the reader with little phrases of truth to hold on to and feel good about. I really think this is an excellent book for blowing teen's minds about religion and God and faith. It didn't shake my beliefs too much, maybe because I wasn't fighting with myself on whether Clare was ultimately right or not. I understood what she said and did that was right and what was wrong. It's true though that some situations made you wonder if she was ultimately in the right (the sandwich from the boy and how they were led to the old man), however in the end I decided that perhaps God was still looking out for Archie, and maybe it wasn't because Clare's mission was right. Anyway, I thought this book was fascinating and presented an original story with thought provoking messages. I enjoyed it a lot and would gladly suggest it to my friends, teen and non-teens.

Violence = 2, two boys shove Clare against a tree, Archie beats them up

Language = 1, very few swear words here and there

Sex = 1, two boys almost rape Clare

Alcohol/Drugs = 2, In the beginning of the novel Archie and his friend build a still in his grandpa's basement. Archie's grandad drinks.

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### Rachel says

This book frustrated me. Claire was slightly annoying because she never worried about actually DOING anything about her faith. True, her faith must have been pretty strong, but her works were few. Alright, maybe that isn't completely accurate because she DID do a lot of good for others by simply lightening them up a bit and encouraging them to do the things they wished they did or wished that they could return to. I guess the part that frustrated me most was that Archie would simply follow her without doing what he felt was right. I think that his faith, even if it was less glamorous than Claire's, was probably more in the direction of what religion should be. I think that God provides so much for us, but it is important for us to accept what He provides, and to try to further provide for ourselves by planning, for example, our next meal. True, fasting can make one closer to God; however, I think that Claire took many of these ideas too far. In the end, I wasn't sure if she was crazy or if she was just caught up, but I do know that it seemed more disturbing than enlightening and happy. On the other hand though, who ever said that everything about the gospel is supposed to be happy? Though I do think that gospel truths and spirits should be uplifting in many cases, which is why I question her mental state of health. This was an interesting read, but it was a bit too strange for me.

#### Warnings:

Violence--There is one particular scene of violence, and some the of the thing Claire does to her body/that happen to her are somewhat violent.

Drugs/Alcohol--Archie and his friend, both teenagers, brew some alcohol in Archie's grandparents' basement. Archie's grandfather was also an alcoholic.

Language--If I remember correctly, there was a bit a language in this book, but I don't think it was too bad.

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### **Julie says**

I don't know where to even begin. The author pushed the story farther than I thought possible. The plot kept taking unexpected turns and of the worst kind. Throughout the entire book I wanted to knock sense into Archie. Scream at him to think for himself for once, that he was a follower, and needed to wake up and meet reality! Worst, by the time he realizes what is happening, it seems too late....

When We Were Saints is a brilliant piece of writing. I'd put this novel as a psychological thriller. The main character Archie and his "soul mate" Clare keep you guessing as to what is reality and what is imagined. From the moment I began reading, the "gotta" Stephen King mentions in his novel Misery gripped me. It's that need to know. You think, "Just a few more pages" then you say, "One more chapter" and before you know it, you've read the entire book.

Recommended.

Warnings:

Sex 0 Nothing to worry about in this book, in fact, the main character Archie begins to think its a sin just to think about kissing.

Drugs and Alcohol 3 Though there are no drugs, Archie and his friend Armory make their own brew of alcohol in the basement.

Violence 6 When Clare is in a bad situation with a couple guys up to no good, Archie acts in her defense. However, his actions lean a little too close to murderous intent...

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### **Christine Grabowski says**

Very well developed characters. In fact reading this book was a homework assignment for my Developing Characters writing class.

As an adult, I enjoyed the story but it was definitely geared towards a tween or young, young adult with a 14 year old boy and 15 year old girl as the main characters. I believe a boy would find this as interesting as a girl as it was narrated by the boy. The story revolved around two teens becoming closer to God. I found it fascinating and I believe any young adult exploring their spiritual side would be intrigued. However, there are some kids where this may be a turnoff as this is not a jam packed action book like many geared for boys.

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### **Janelle says**

I was very frustrated throughout reading this entire book. I wasn't grabbed and sucked in immediately like I expected to be and then when I was sucked in I was frustrated with Clare. I wanted her to listen to Archie. At times I was a little creeped out by what was happening, especially when Clare acquired the marks of Christ (I

can't remember what they were called).

I felt the ending made up for all those frustrations. I was a fantastic ending and I was left with a stunned look on my face. It actually increased my own faith in a way. Clare's loving persona made me want to be more understanding and loving. She made me question if I would have the faith to do certain things. I loved that Archie points out at the end that faith has to be an action and that we can just wait to be acted upon by God. I thought this book had some great themes and points. It raised really good questions and I am glad that they were discussed in this novel.

overall great book.

violence: I don't know if it would be considered violence, but there are some parts to the book that are uncomfortable and unsettling.

Sex: talks about being celibate.

Drugs/Alcohol: talks of medication (not in an abusive way) and mentions quite a bit about alcohol and Archie makes a still.

language: not much if any

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## **Preeti says**

Being a YA book, it's a fairly easy read; I finished in a few hours. I picked up the book because it was religiously themed. I didn't see the cover illustration of stigmata until I actually sat down to read it. I remember watching the movie Stigmata and having been intrigued by the concept ever since.

The book makes you think about a lot of different things. For me, it made me question beliefs, perceptions, and the power of being able to "read" people simply through body language and their actions.

It also made me wonder if we believe less today, or if they believed too much ages ago (Middle Ages and prior). Today, anyone claiming to know God, or to have talked with or seen anything having to do with God is very quickly billed crazy. Was it the same way ages and ages ago? The rapture and bliss felt by the saints - would we have simply called it hallucinations or seizures had they lived in our times?

We don't believe in miracles anymore, we need proof of everything, we are running out of faith.

It makes me wonder, is our knowledge of the world, of the universe, moving us away from God?

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## **Cami Beath says**

When We Were Saints

By Han Nolan

I was lucky enough to have an entire afternoon to devote to this book. I HATED having to put it down! I wanted to just go and go and go. I kept trying to figure out what was really going on, I was sure there would be a killer twist. In fact, in most of my theories Clare really was a killer. Even though I was WAY off, this book definitely filled my mystery need. I loved trying to read into all the little "clues" and try to create a reason for everything in my head.

One of the coolest parts of this book is that after you're done you STILL don't know who to believe. There were some lines about faith that made me so mad. I had to scribble a great big "NO!" in the margin next to the worst ones. This book makes you really reexamine everything you believe in (so good). I wished it was even weirder though. The fact that it didn't go completely over the line (Okay, it tried to.....but I was expecting some serious crazy) just added to the ambiguity of it all. This was a wonderful way to spend an afternoon!

Violence: Oh yeah

Sex: None

Drugs and Alcohol: Nope

Language: I don't remember

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### **Nikki (Wicked Awesome Books) says**

*When We Were Saints* is the story of Archibald Lee Caswell, your everyday, average 14 year old boy, who goes on a pilgrimage to become a saint. Archie's life drastically changes the day his grandfather Silas, an old prophet, dies and tells Archie he is a saint. The day of the funeral, a young girl comes up to Archie and hands him a card that basically says the same thing. Clare Simpson, the girl from the funeral is a very religious 15 year old who convinces Archie that he truly is saintly and that the two of them are soul mates. From there, Archie goes on a journey to find God and become the saint he believes he is destined to be.

This book was a rollercoaster of a ride for me. There isn't a lot of action or crazy things happening, but it truly made me think. Archie's journey to sainthood is moving and made me think about religion in an entirely different way. That being said, this book is filled with the Catholic religion. I think that alone may make a lot of readers pass on this. I'm not particularly religious, but I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

Nolan has created an unforgettable character in Archie. He is your average boy, but unique in the so many ways. His devotion to Clare is startling at times, but almost understandable. Clare herself is a startling character. Her complete, unwavering devotion to God is incredible and terrifying. Archie wants what she has and almost loses himself to find it. Their pilgrimage moved me to tears.

I couldn't even put the book down towards the end because I was so connected to Archie and I needed to know what was going to happen to him. It's impossible not to care for him. Archie is so young and naïve and he has so much love pouring out of him that I instantly felt connected with him. I never really felt that way with Clare, but I don't think the reader is supposed to. Clare is the catalyst for the pilgrimage and Archie's reason for wanting to be closer to God, but she does so much more than that for him. Their journey isn't just about finding God, it is about finding the goodness in humankind and becoming saintly in ways that aren't even related to religion.

*When We Were Saints* isn't a love story and it isn't necessarily a story about finding God either. It is a story about a boy finding himself. Archie goes on a pilgrimage to be closer to God, but he actually discovers the person he is and the person he wants to be. It is a moving, emotional journey that will stay with me for a long time.

Opening line: Archibald Lee Caswell had named the still he and his best friend, Armory Mitchell, had built in the basement of his grandparents' home The Last Hurrah, in honor of Armory, who was moving with his

family to Washington, D.C.

Favorite line: Maybe that's all it really takes to be a saint – those simple acts of kindness.

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### **Erin says**

Weird. Clare reminded me of that woman who went on the vitamin D diet thinking that she could survive off of sunlight. Well, she died. Shocker. Glad that Archie got a backbone before that happened. In Clare's search for sainthood, I think she did have some good, cogent points, but she also most definitely had mental issues. It bothered me that Archie just followed her, but that's who he was, a follower. He struggle at the end, while bothersome, makes sense for a 14-year old. When I was young (waaaay younger) I remember hesitating to cross the street because I was unsure when a car would crest the hill, and if they would see me and stop. I would wait, and wait....and wait. Just for something to change so I could cross the street. At the end of the book, I felt that's what Archie was doing. Just going along with everything, waiting for *something*.

I will never read this book again--wasn't much of a fan--and that is A.O.K.

It questions religious ideas while addressing adolescent rebellion, self-discovery, and family issues. Just figuring out where we stand with everything, and what is "crazy"?

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### **Katie says**

I was searching really hard while reading this book for something that would really catch my interest, but I neared the last pages and never found it. The whole time I was reading it, I was getting annoyed at the fact that the same thing kept happening over and over again. Archie would follow Clare, then he would change his mind and realize that she perhaps didn't know what she was doing and he would change his mind, but then a few lines later he would be following her again. This happened so many times throughout the story, it was so repetitious. I will say that I did in fact like the ending, only because Archie finally stood up for what he knew was right and called Clare's parents and asked them for help. Archie finally realized that what might have been what Clare wanted, wasn't what he wanted and it was okay to have differing views. It didn't mean that he didn't have God in his life, it was just that everyone is different and needs different things.

Ratings are from 1-10:

Violence:4-I would only put it as a 4 because there was a lot of violence done to the body itself, not eating, not sleeping--things like that.

Sexual Content:1- Since this whole book is about becoming a Saint, there weren't any instances in where this category was present in the book, except one minor time when Archie thought of Clare in a way that he soon became ashamed of and that was the end of it.

Drugs/Alcohol:2-Archie's grandfather, Silas died because he was an alcoholic.

Language:0

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### **Cory Hernandez says**

Wow. This pretty sums up what this book is. I wouldn't say that I loved it, but I would say that I liked it. It's a book that really made me think about my life and what I believe in. It posed questions to me such as "Am I crazy for what I believe? Can I be crazy and still be respected for what I believe? How far is too far with religion?" These three questions are just a few to the many that came up when I read the book. Even though I didn't particularly like the characters very much and I thought it was a little hard to believe, it still raised these questions and this is what really made this book worth reading. Also, for some strange reason, I thought the book would be much more graphic than it really was; that was kind of cool. It's a clean book and it's still incredibly deep. I think I would recommend this book to young adults who are between the ages of 14 and 18 and those who are trying to find what they are searching for. The book can really help students ask these questions and more to themselves without getting too much heckling from administrators or parents. However, I would still be careful in how I thought the book.

Scale 1-5

Violence:1 Minimal; nothing serious

Sex:1 References to sex but nothing graphic

Drugs/Alcohol:0 Nothing

Language:0 Nothing

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### **Michelle Starrs says**

Oh man. Get ready to freak and and possible re-examine what it means to be a person of faith.

We follow Archibald and post trauma-inducing-death-of-grandfather. Archibald blames himself for his grandfathers death. With his last breath he calls Archibald a Saint. Not knowing what to do with this message and being a very easy to sway, Archibald grabs on to the strange ideas of Clare. Clare is a girl from town with severe dedication to her faith. She and Archibald will literally pray for hours, saying the same prayer again and again. Archibald will follow Clare anywhere. Which he literally does when she states they must take a pilgrimage. It soon becomes apparrant that Clare might be taking things too far and Archibald has to decide what is right and what could kill them.

My thoughts? This book is insane. But I think it's good. I don't really know. My brain feels like it's going to explode when I try to think about it too hard for too long. Which of course makes it an excellent piece of work. Nolan looks writes about faith and mental illness. But we're never really told what to think. So much of the storyline is left up to us to decide. It also left me pondering my own faith. I'm happy to say it only strengthened my faith and resolve of what I believe is right... but I like that the book made me examine myself.

Warnings

language: not that I remember?

Sexual content: nope

Violence: yep.

drugs: the grandpa drinks... and they are trying to make a still at the start of the book. But it's pretty mild and not a big part of the book.

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### **McNeil Inksmudge says**

I initially hated this book, and still hate the entire second third. But it really is a good book for anyone

religious to read. And probably only ammo for someone non-religious. The point of the book is to say that zeal and passion is great, but some people with both can be real charmers, and set the ground for cultism. It's a warning. At first you feel like it's a born-again work, meant to baptize you. It seems like that for most of it. There is one sober part halfway through when you feel clarity, and a glimmer of hope, but you stay confused like the protagonist -- and this is intentional. The author did a good job writing this, and particularly at writing it for young readers. They need to know this lesson more than others, as a healthy dose of skepticism is good at that age.

For what it's good at, it gets three stars. For entertaining, it doesn't get four. The most entertainment I got was hoping in tense situations that the antagonist would be murdered.

#### Warnings:

Sex - an attempted rape, but it doesn't get further than a torn sleeve

Violence - see above, and add the protagonist's defense of the girl. Stigmata, which is bloody, also occurs.

Drugs - alcohol is made in a basement but the younguns are punished for it. You'll wish that the antagonist is under the influence to justify her actions, but sadly, she's (spoiler) not.

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### **Samantha Lawson says**

This is a good book. This book is mostly about this kid named Archibald (Archie). His grandfather (Silas) passed away. When Silas was dying, his last words to Archie were, "Young man, you are a saint." Soon after his grandfather passed, Archie was lost, confused, and wondering why his grandfather said those words to him. Archie dedicates his life to God. Later in the book, Archie's relationship with God was closer. I recommend this book to anyone. It's such a good, heartwarming book.

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### **Bethany Eliason says**

Ever since I have read this book, I have really tried to love it, but I cannot get past the character of Claire. She messes with my brain because I don't know if she is some deceived, crazy person or this person who is divinely inspired or a little bit of both. And I don't like not knowing that. I hate it actually. I hate her, but I also feel sorry for her because she does not see all the love that she has surrounding her everyday.

I loved Archie though. His growth throughout the book was amazing and really inspiring. My favorite parts were when he finally remembered everything about his grandfather in the church in New York and then when he finally realized what Claire's true intentions were and took control of the situation. He finally realized that he did not have to go against the feelings he was having and follow everything Claire does. He is linked to God like we all are and we know when something might feel right or when it feels wrong.

So I really had a hard time with this book, but I did really like the message it gave. It made me think a lot about my life and my religion.

Violence: 3

Language: 2

Sex: mentions rape

Drugs: 0

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