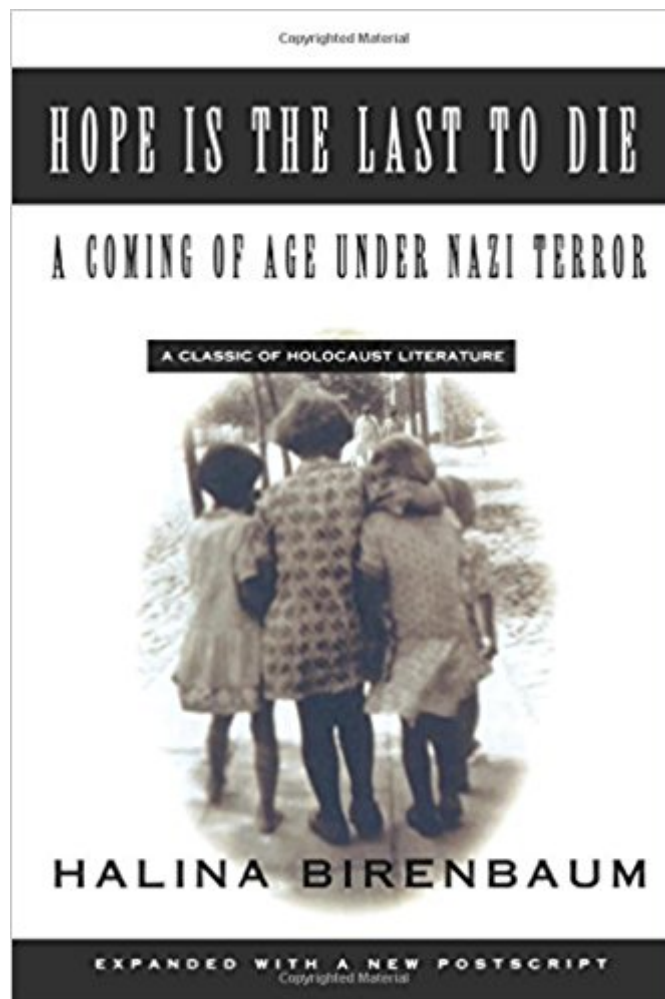




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Hope Is The Last To Die: A Coming Of Age Under Nazi Terror



Synopsis

This book is an important work in Holocaust literature and was originally published in Poland in 1967. Covering the years 1939-1945, it is the author's account of her experience growing up in the Warsaw ghetto and her eventual deportation to, imprisonment in, and survival of the Majdanek, Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, and Neustadt-Glewe camps. Since the old, the weak, and children were summarily executed by the Nazis in these camps, Mrs Birenbaum's survival and coming of age is all the more remarkable. Her story is told with simplicity and clarity and the new edition contains revisions made by the author to the original English translation, and is expanded with a new epilogue and postscripts that bring the story up to date and complete the circle of Mrs Birenbaum's experiences.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Polish --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Hope is the Last to Die is the Holocaust experience of Halina Birenbaum. She was born in Warsaw, Poland and was only ten years old when the Germans invaded Poland, thus changing her life for ever. Halina and her family suffered the hell of the Warsaw Ghetto, were captured by the Germans and sent to Majdanek in 1942. Halina lost her beloved mother in Majdanek, having already lost her father in the ghetto. She was sent to be gassed at Majdanek, surviving only because that night they had run out of gas. From Majdanek, she was sent to Auschwitz, eventually surviving two more camps after Auschwitz. On January 1, 1945, she was shot by a German in the arm which became

paralyzed, requiring surgery. At the end of the war, only Halina and one brother survived. I honestly don't know how Halina survived all that she did, she must have had such a strong will to live. As much as I liked this book, I felt like I was kind of left hanging with what had happened after the war. There was no mention of what happened to her paralyzed arm which needed more surgery. I do know she married and had at least two children, but I would have liked to know more about how her future worked out. That was why I gave the book four stars. Overall though, an excellent book with a very strong message about survival.

Good

I purchased the book at a book store when leaving the camp march 2012. The person working at the store informed me that the author that wrote the book autographed the book. After touring the camps and were on our way back to Geneva I was reading the book at the airport and noticed a lady looking at me before we boarded the plane. When we boarded the plane she sat in the seat across from us. She asked me if it was a good book and told me she talked to the lady that wrote the book that day. My wife and me read the book and I have loaned it to several others to read. It is hard to believe that people were treated in such a matter and could only hope it does not happen again. I would recommend the book to anyone. Dale

I have read many books and seen many movies about the Holocaust; have visited Auschwitz and Dachau, but I have never felt the horror of the camps as I did while reading this book. The reader is there with Ms. Birenbaum, feeling the cold, the hunger, the constant terror and rage. It is unimaginable that this woman survived 6 years of inhuman treatment--but she did. Because Ms. Birenbaum describes her own experiences as a Polish Jew coming of age during the Third Reich, she has much to teach us. The author expresses her emotions so simply and beautifully that the reader feels joy at her triumphs and while crying at her losses, emotional pain and humiliation. This remarkable woman, who was a child (between 9 and 15 years of age during the war), was wise, strong, resourceful and brave beyond all expectations. She watched almost all those she loved disappear. While standing in line at a "selection" at the Majdanek Camp, she turned around to talk to her beloved mother who had for years emotionally sheltered her young daughter from the inevitable (a la "Life is Beautiful"), and found her gone. She never saw her again, never said good-bye. In the camps she created new families for herself, only to lose these people, as well. Most touching was Ms. Birenbaum's first experience of falling in love and the loss of that man. And

through all this, she was never able to mourn. Emotions had to be pushed deep inside because the focus had to be on survival. On several occasions, the author expressed her need for dignity and self-respect by standing up to her captors and, unbelievably, was not shot for her defiance. She describes her indifference to the pain of others as a way of coping with the near certainty that she would lose them, while also expressing her longing to be touched and held and by someone. After reading this book, I think about all the little annoyances of daily living, and how meaningless they are. I wonder how many of us, in our pre-teens, could have dealt with the protracted horror of the ghetto and camps as Ms. Birenbaum did. How many of us would have had the will and fortitude to live through the experiences described in this book? Ms. Birenbaum, you were a remarkable child and are a courageous woman!

Imagine trying to survive 3,153,600 minutes of hell, with each minute seeming as if it was a year long. That's what Helena Birenbaum describes in her autobiography about surviving the holocaust, *Hope is the Last to Die*. The book and its author are remarkable, as Joan Martorelli, notes in her review on .com (June 15, 2003). Going over the descriptive passion Helena writes with, Ms. Martorelli introduces ideas about how an everyday person could cope with the Holocaust and also looks back on times she visited concentration camps. One point that Ms. Martorelli makes in this review is that her descriptions of the trauma, the joy, and the anger are so vivid and expressive that they simply draw you in and make you feel as though you are almost there with her as she goes through the manic changes of emotion. I completely agree with this. I also think (though the writer of this review doesn't contradict this) that it would be impossible to fully experience any pain Helena went through just by reading a book about the troubles. But acknowledging that brings us one step closer to comprehending. Helena did not get a chance to grieve about a lot of the loss faced. She was not able to sit down and cry even for a minute because it would jeopardize her chances of survival. In the loss of both her dear mother and of her first love, she isn't able to say goodbye. They are both taken so suddenly and forcefully. She had to tune out her urges to mourn. If she had not done that, I believe she would have died along side the millions of other persecuted. A book so filled with love, character, hope, and that's so easy to follow and get caught up in should not be kept off your bookshelf. *Hope is the Last to Die* fits that description perfectly, and I recommend this book to everyone. Grand Rapids, MI

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