

MY LIFE STARTED FROM THE END

BY HALINA BIRENBAUM



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.

my life started from the end
first I have known death,
then - birth
I was growing amidst hatred, in the kingdom of destruction
only to learn later about creation
breathing bleakness, fires, deterioration of feeling
this was the atmosphere of my childhood
only then I have seen the light
only then I have flourished.
I have always known love
even when it was terrible or worse!
love was there even in hell
I have encountered it!
my life began from the end and just then
everything returned to the beginning,
I was resurrected.
it was all not in vain, not in vain,
because goodness is not less powerful than evil
in me is strength too
I am the proof

How does Birenbaum's poem symbolize survivors' "return to life"?

CONSIDER

- What places or times in the poet's life represent her "death" and "birth"?
- What is the cause of her "resurrection" or rebirth?
- How does she make meaning from her suffering?
- How is she able to reenter the living world despite painful memories?
- What is her view of human nature?

ABOUT THE POET

Halina Birenbaum was born 1929 in Warsaw, Poland and grew up in an area that would be enclosed by the Jewish ghetto in 1940. Halina's parents were murdered in Nazi extermination camps. Halina survived her years in the camps and the forced evacuation and Death March from Auschwitz in 1945. She was liberated by the Red Army in May 1945. In 1947, she emigrated to Israel and eventually married and had two sons. Her writing, in Polish and Hebrew, explores life and death during the German occupation of Poland and Polish Jewry in the ghettos and extermination camps.