

Hilda Stern Cohen
Words that Burn Within Me
Faith, Values, Survival

Edited by Werner V. Cohen, Gail Rosen, William Gilcher.
German translations by Elborg Forster.

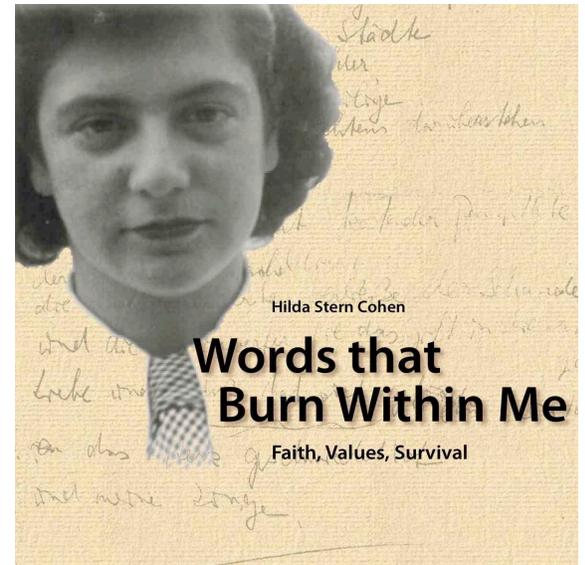
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Words that Burn Within Me brings together the remarkable German poetry and prose that Hilda Stern wrote in the four years of her imprisonment by Nazi Germany in the Lodz Ghetto in Poland and the Auschwitz death camp. Then in January 1945, the Germans evacuated her from Auschwitz on one of the infamous death marches that ended in a camp near Berlin. Three weeks after she arrived there, in May 1945, she was liberated by American soldiers.

Living for a year as a displaced person in Austria, Hilda wrote down again much of the poetry she had created during her imprisonment and that, of course, had been lost, as well as new work that gave voice to life as a displaced person. Driven by a sense of responsibility to bear witness, her writing centers on the terror that people lived with every day without relief.

Hilda emigrated to the United States in July 1946 — two years later she married Werner Cohen, also originally from Germany. Her life as a wife and mother of three daughters, her lifelong avocation as a teacher of Jewish religion, and her abandonment of her native language kept her from realizing her ambition to become a professional writer. While she gave extensive interviews about her life to story-teller Gail Rosen in 1996, she did not reveal the existence of the German notebooks.

Her husband only discovered the notebooks a half century later, in 1997, after Hilda's death. He transcribed the poems and prose and then brought the manuscript to the attention of the Goethe-Institut. The Research Center for Holocaust Literature at the University of Giessen published her complete works in German in 2003. For *Words that Burn Within Me*, Elborg Forster has accomplished a marvelous literary translation of much of this work.

The narrative of *Words that Burn Within Me* is based on the recorded interviews Hilda Stern Cohen did with Rosen, who has been giving performances of Hilda's work and life throughout the U.S. as well as in Germany, Austria, Poland, and Israel. Rosen's performance, which includes music as well, has been recorded on location and will be released as a DVD in Fall 2008. For more about these performances, see www.HildaStory.org.

The Goethe-Institut has developed a comprehensive website about Hilda Stern Cohen's life and work that also includes educational guides that Professor Marilya Veteto, Northern Arizona University, developed for use in North American high-school classrooms where German is taught as a foreign language. See www.HildaSternCohen.org — the site also includes various translations of a number of Hilda Stern Cohen's poems.