

S.J. Rutkowski

Title: *Another Life: A Memoir of the Shoah*

Author: S.J. Rutkowski

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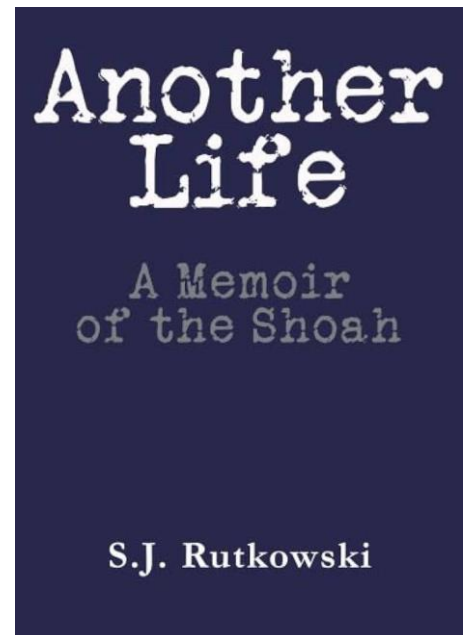
Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library, Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Sydney Jewish Museum and other public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: Poland: Krakow, Warsaw, Milanówek, Gliwice; Ukraine: Lwów (Lviv), Morszyn, Brzeżany (Berezhany); Australia: Sydney.

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which are most central to the narrative.

Genre: Memoir

Key events/experiences: ghetto; in-hiding.



Another Life is the 151-page account of Israel Djament's experiences in the Brzeżany ghetto and survival as a Polish Christian in Warsaw.

The memoir presents a ten-page prologue by the editors, Eve Drobot and Adam Rutkowski, summarizing their father's upbringing and family history. Pages 1-28 describe the onset of the war, the author's flight to Lwów and the Russian occupation. Pages 29-72 describe the Nazi invasion of the USSR in June 1941 and the occupation of Brzeżany. Pages 73-100 describe the author's escape from Brzeżany to Warsaw, where he remained in hiding until liberation in January 1945. Pages 101-14 recount his post-war life in Poland until his emigration in 1958 to Australia with his young family. Pages 115-51 detail the Holocaust experiences of friends and family. An appendix describes the Sobibor concentration camp, where the author's family perished, and reproduces his forged identity documents.

Stanislaw Julius Rutkowski was born Israel Djament on 17 May 1911 in Tarnów, Poland, the middle-child of Chave Sandhaus and Itzhak Djament. Israel had two older brothers, Abraham and Jozef, and twin younger brothers, Samuel and Jakob. He grew up in Krakow in a prosperous and assimilated family. In 1932, his father tragically died of a heart attack. In 1938, Israel moved to Warsaw where he began working as a resident engineer at a construction company. The author's childhood and education are not described, and the narrative begins with the onset of the war.

After the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany, Israel fled Warsaw to Lwów with his brothers. After six weeks, Israel was offered a job at a hotel resort in Morszyn, a town 80km south of Lwów. At the beginning of January 1940, his twin brothers left voluntarily for Russia. In September 1940, Soviet authorities dismissed Israel from his job and

ordered him to leave Morszyn. Luckily, he was able to return to Lwów and secure work in nearby Brzeżany.

In June 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and Brzeżany was raided by German bombers. Soon after, German troops occupied the town and established a Jewish council. Israel, a trained engineer, was appointed to the office of the Kreishauptmann (the highest-ranking German official in Brzeżany) as a civil engineer in the construction department. This life-saving role shielded him from more severe antisemitic measures.

On the eve of Yom Kippur in early October 1941, German forces launched the first *Aktion* against Brzeżany's Jews. All Jewish men were ordered to report to the marketplace, where around six hundred were detained and shot in the nearby village of Raj. A second major *Aktion* followed in mid-December 1941, during which approximately 1,000 people – mostly the elderly, women, and children – were rounded up and marched to Podhajce where they were executed. Israel was spared in both instances.

In early 1942, several German civilian architects were appointed to the construction office. They would later play a key role in Israel's survival, encouraging him to go into hiding and securing life-saving papers. As rumours of a ghetto being established spread, Jewish escapees brought news of the systematic extermination in surrounding regions. In July 1942, Israel received a message from his mother: his family – who had fled Kraków to Jasło – were being deported to the camps. They were never seen again.

Determined to escape, Israel began forging Aryan identity papers with the help of German colleagues and obtained the birth certificate of a deceased man, Stanisław Juliusz Rutkowski, through the Oberleder family – Jewish contacts hiding in Warsaw. In September 1942, a Jewish colleague was arrested by the Gestapo for possessing forged identity documents acquired by Israel. Fearing exposure, Israel fled Brzeżany, aided by his German colleagues and Polish friends.

He travelled by train to the township of Milanówek in Warsaw, where was sheltered by Mrs Oberleder and assumed the identity of Stanisław Rutkowski. In time, he fell in love with her daughter, Irena, and the couple married in a Catholic ceremony in April 1944 to dispel the suspicions of their Christians neighbours. Despite constant fear of discovery, Israel managed to live and work as a civil engineer in Milanówek, passing as a Polish Christian until liberation in January 1945. Two months later his son Adam was born. Their daughter Alice was born in 1952.

After the war, Israel was reunited with his brothers Samuel and Jakob and obtained construction work in Gliwice. They received a meagre wage, but their livelihood was subsidised by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). After two years, the family relocated to Warsaw for better work. In 1956, they obtained landing permits from an aunt in Australia. After finally securing the requisite papers, they obtained passage to Australia two years later with the assistance of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), arriving in Sydney in December 1958.

Another Life provides an overview of the author's wartime experiences, with a focus on his time in Brzeżany from 1941-42. It does not detail his pre-war life or his time in Australia. As acknowledged by the author, the narrative is not committed to a detailed chronology. Rather, he recounts memorable episodes and stories relayed to him by fellow survivors. The memoir was self-published and edited by the author's son Adam Rutkowski and niece Eve Drobot.