An Jewish Italian survivor of the Nazi death camps, whose story inspired the Oscar-winning film Life Is Beautiful, has died at the age of 91 in Rome.

Rubino Romeo Salmoni was one of only a handful of Italian Jews who managed to survive being sent to the extermination and labour camps and return home after the war. His two brothers were less fortunate - both died in the camps.

He recounted his horrific experiences in a book, 'In the End, I Beat Hitler', employing flashes of irony and dark humour to describe conditions in Auschwitz, where he was sent.

The book inspired the Italian actor Roberto Benigni to write the script for Life Is Beautiful, in which he starred as an Italian Jewish man trying to shield his son from the worst horrors of camp life by turning the experience into a game.

Mr Salmoni evaded the first round-up of Jews in Rome's Ghetto area in October 1943, but he was arrested by Italian fascist police in April 1944.

He was held first in a prison in Rome and then transferred, on what he later described as the start of "the long road towards death", to an internment camp at Fossoli near Modena in northern Italy.

He arrived at Auschwitz at the age of 24. "At Auschwitz I was no longer Rubino Romeo Salmoni, but Jew number A15810, to be exterminated," he later wrote.

Put to work as a forced labourer, he managed to survive until the camp was liberated by the Allies in 1945.

In the decades after the war, he retold his story many times, often during visits to schools and colleges, determined that the Holocaust should not be forgotten.

He described life in the concentration camp as "hellish", a constant struggle against hunger, cold and exhaustion in which inmates were treated savagely by the guards. Morning roll calls by the camp commandant could last for hours as prisoners shivered barefoot in the snow, he recalled.
He saw his survival as a triumph against Nazism. "I'm still here, hale and hearty. I came out of Auschwitz alive, I have a wonderful family, I celebrated my golden wedding anniversary, I have 12 splendid grandchildren - I think I can say I ruined Hitler's plan for me."

Tributes poured in from Jewish groups in Italy and overseas, while Gianni Alemanno, the mayor of Rome, hailed him as "a great man who with his courage and determination managed to save himself from the hell of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Romeo was an example for young people and for the whole of Rome."