

Breaking Ground – Adventures in Life and Architecture by Daniel Libeskind with Sarah Crichton.
John Murray 2005.

As might be expected, this autobiography of one of the world's greatest living architects is beautifully type set and presented. The text is highly engaging and even though it doesn't serve to make its subject lovable it certainly renders him comprehensible.

Daniel Libeskind's life was shaped by the key events of the 20th century – the Holocaust and Communism – and one of the most poignant moments in the book is when he returns as an adult to his Polish birthplace, but his adult life, and the vast majority of the book, is concerned with his career as an architect, originally theoretical and academic but now established as the creator of some of the most inspirational buildings in the world.

Libeskind talks engagingly about the ideas that underpinned his designs, and what he tries to achieve with his buildings, notably with the Jewish museum in Berlin, which ranks for many as his finest creation to date. Unfortunately a great deal of the rest of the book is preoccupied with his travails in connection with the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site following 9/11.

This has been a highly controversial issue in New York and Libeskind has clearly made many enemies whose portrayal in the book is, unsurprisingly, far from flattering, and it will remain to be seen how much of his original plans reach fruition.

Overall, however, this is an autobiography that is well worth reading, and a solid representation of a man who is challenging, in terms of both his persona and his artistic vision.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh