

My Name is Daphne Fairfax by Arthur Smith.

Hutchinson 2009.

It's a bit of a surprise to read 'Funny, poignant, interesting and charming' on the cover of a memoir by the ultimate edgy stand-up and grumpy old man Arthur Smith. Funny – obviously, but the rest? Surely John O'Farrell was having a joke at his friend's expense?

My Name is Daphne Fairfax, is, however, all the things that O'Farrell sums it up to be, and more besides. Funny seems a poor description for the humour, which at times is hilarious, but the memoir as a whole provides a real, honest insight into a man whose wit is always entertaining, with whose grumpy opinions I always find myself in agreement, and whose life has been anything but one long laugh.

The Arthur Smith (and his real first name is actually Brian) that emerges from the pages of the book is a devoted son and brother, an enthusiastic lover of women and alcohol (though the latter no longer following a serious illness), a perceptive observer of the foibles of life, and the possessor of a sense of humour and of self that is sometimes highly anarchic.

Any fans of Arthur Smith will enjoy this book, whether they have known and admired him – as have I – from his stand-up days, or from his stints on Loose Ends or as an interviewer and travel writer, or as a professional grumpy old man. What I took away from the book, and was most deeply touched by, was his devotion to his father Syd, whom he clearly adored and respected.

The edgy comedian might not like being called 'interesting and charming' but the overall picture that emerges of Brian Smith is precisely that and more besides. Unlike many 'celebrity' memoirs this one, apart from being written by its subject rather than for him, is one that will endure in the mind long after it has been finished.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh