



This Is Your Life

John O'Farrell

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It's a big night at the London Palladium. Jimmy Conway is about to perform his stand-up comedy routine in front of two thousand invited guests and millions live on TV. He steps out blinking into the spotlights and waits for the applause to die down. He tries to appear confident but he can't help wondering whether he should have shared his little secret with someone by now. Jimmy has never performed anything before-ever. How did he get here? Following the death of a national celebrity, the under-achieving Jimmy convinces a naive journalist that he is the latest comedy phenomenon. He then embarks on a series of misadventures, bluffing and stumbling his way up the celebrity ladder, discovering as he goes that in their desperation to be associated with the next big thing, nobody has bothered to check his credentials. Quicker than you can say "flavor of the month," Jimmy Conway becomes a bogus celebrity, winning an award for something he never did, being photographed in magazines posing in someone else's house, and ultimately fooling, and making a fool of, the entire celebrity industry. Sharp, witty, and hilarious, This Is Your Life is a funny, stinging look at our celebrity-obsessed society.

This Is Your Life Details

Date :

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Author : John O'Farrell

Format :

Genre : Fiction, Humor, Comedy



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From Reader Review This Is Your Life for online ebook

Ben says

I read this book about a year after its 2002 publication, after I was given it as a present. It's light reading, and mildly amusing, and makes some good points about our celebrity culture and self-worth, but it didn't have much impact. Since then I have seen that O'Farrell has written a number of similar-looking novels (all with similar covers), as if he's trying to produce a little light-hearted and witty treatise on a range of issues facing our society today. This novel, however, isn't good enough to be the final word on the subject. It's diverting and makes some poignant observations, but it doesn't go further than that. Reading the Amazon review, though, reminds me that the non-existent 'fish routine', a running gag (or not, as it happens) in the book really is quite inspired. Also, I saw a comparison to *The Emperor's New Clothes*, which does add some interest. Certainly not a bad book but, unlike his protagonist and narrator in this story, I think O'Farrell would make a better stand-up than he does a novelist.

Jules says

A funny book is this one, but possibly more in the peculiar than the outright 'ha-ha' sense if you catch my drift.

Written in a typical 'everybroke' Hornby and/or Gayle – esque style, this novel questions concepts of fame, artificiality and life satisfaction in layman's terms. From the viewpoint of the ultimate Mr Average, middle of the road-Joe protagonist Jimmy Conway dares chance his way into the fame game and celeb status by sheer fakery and pretence. As his efforts to embrace fame are accepted by media establishments and fans resulting in enhanced status and material wealth, Conway becomes more contemptuous towards this easy and false society where he begins to lose faith in himself and the distorted sphere within which he lives. This becomes a bit like Big Brother turned on its side with the warts of the 'beautiful people' and their incestuous lives becoming more exposed as the narrative progresses.

This book isn't deep science, nor is it astrological physics. As a novel it serves a purpose in questioning a concept yet is it light, frothy and shallow and maybe too much of each. Theoretically, all these are acceptable in a humour book but, alas, it's just not that funny and any jokes seem too predictable rather than instant and/or laugh out loud. It's a shame.

I personally found that the second half (and especially the ending) of this book was an upturn where the protagonist starts to resolve his own issues with a bit of logic and sense for once. Other parts are too 'chick-litty' by far (and I won't even bother to reverse the gender in this statement here). Not my cup of expresso that's for sure.

I don't mind a bit of humour and lightness interspersed in my reading now and then but ultimately this has been a lame and unsatisfactory read for me. No key quotes. No memorable belly laughs and no inspiration from the reading journey. Yes, it's 'ok' in the general sense but am I relieved to have it off my bookshelves? Yes, yes and a resounding ... YES.

PS - Note to self - War and Peace - MUST READ NEXT!!!

Lucy says

Great stuff!

Mai-ana says

A book about fame and how it affects the common man, and the lengths people will go to to achieve their dreams of super stardom.

The book would probably be a great holiday read, it is light and easy to read, what saves it from just being a holiday read is that you really start believing in the characters. They are real people who have ended up where they are almost by chance. It is also very funny. I laughed out loud many times while reading this book. I don't often laugh out loud while reading.

Angeligna says

Insospettabile. Oltre a essere spigliato e divertente, non avrei mai immaginato che fosse così ben scritto e strutturato e condito con inaspettate e interessanti riflessioni.

David Proffitt says

To anyone who is new to his work let me start by saying how delighted I was when he failed in his recent quest to become an MP; Westminster's loss is very much the literary world's gain as I am sure he would have thrown himself so completely into the role that he would have stopped writing, and that would never do.

In "This Is Your Life", John O'Farrell casts his critical eye over the cynical and shallow world of celebrity. We are led on the journey by would be comic, Jimmy Conway. As a spotty teenager, Jim had a dream that one day he would be a star, with all the riches and trappings that go with it. And to ensure that he keeps a sense of balance, young Jimmy writes his older self a series of letters giving advice on what he should and shouldn't be doing.

Fast forward 10 years. Jimmy is working as an English teacher in a sleepy seaside town, his earlier ambitions seemingly forgotten. Until, that is, the letters are discovered by his older brother who uses them to embarrass Jimmy in front of his friends.

With his dreams rekindled, Jimmy soon finds himself at the centre of a misunderstanding regarding his relationship with a local celebrity. But rather than correct the error, our hero builds on the lie, drawing him deeper and deeper into the glitzy world of showbiz.

But fame is not all it seems, particularly when you do not have the talent and experience you are claiming.

This is your life is something of a cautionary tale for anyone who has ambitions of stardom. It is also a very funny book, with O'Farrell's trademark insight into the weaknesses and foibles of men.

The believability and the absurdity of the plot kept me engrossed from start to finish. Whilst part of me found the story unbelievable fantasy, I couldn't help feeling that there is probably some truth in much of the observations O'Farrell makes about the world of celebrity.

A thoroughly good read.

Beth says

I love this book. I may have to give it 5 stars actually, but for now, since the feeling is still so new, I am trying to hold my enthusiasm back. I found it to be so funny.

"This Is Your Life" is a satirical look at the lengths one guy goes to in order to become famous. This book is hilarious, but not only in the sense that you will smile knowingly at clever statements. This book is hilarious in that I laughed out loud many times while reading it. I have already saved my favorite paragraphs. The writing style of the author is just something that I enjoyed. His use of language seems to flow very naturally, and his dialogue as well.

This character of his, Jimmy Conway, fakes his way into being famous. He pretends he knew a dead celebrity, pretends he is a well-known stand-up comic, and ends up having everyone believe him. His thoughts and silent observations are very funny. Like when he describes his neighbor Doreen.

This is a woman who loves miniature schnauzers. This was partly due to the fact that she sported a bright yellow badge, the size of a teaplate bearing the unequivocal declaration, 'I love miniature schnauzers'. But there was another clue that was hard to overlook: under her arms she was also holding a couple of panting miniature schnauzers - their moustachioed doggy heads were almost permanent features on either side of her colossal waist-high breasts. Doreen was a figure from Greek mythology with a human head and body but with two doggy heads coming out from under her arms. In case you were in any doubt as to her feelings about miniature schnauzers, the big badge was backed up with an extensive collection of further schnauzer insignia: another thirty or forty little metal badges in the shape of her favourite dog breed or boasting membership of the Miniature Schnauzer Club of Great Britain pinned all over the front of her green gilet.</i>

I loved this book, and never saw what was coming. John O'Farrell, I am definitely a big fan! This is a book I will read again. Funny, witty, touching, and an extremely entertaining look at the celebrity-obsessed world in which we live.

Kim says

A highly entertaining satire on our celebrity-obsessed culture - Jimmy Conway lives in a run-down seaside town on the South Coast: single, teaching English as a second language to reluctant students but has always dreamed of being famous. So, when local celebrity and famous comedian, Billy Scrivens, collapses and dies of a heart attack, Jimmy is for once in the right place at the right time to tell TV reporters of his feelings at this sad event. Telling them that he was a good friend of Billy sets off a chain of events that results in Jimmy being mistaken as a celebrity stand-up comedian and Jimmy gets carried away by the runaway train that is 'media hype'.

Great read - funny but with a serious message for today's celebrity-obsessed society. 8/10.

Oliver says

After posing as close friend and running partner of recently-deceased comedy legend Billy Scrivens, nondescript, underachieving Jimmy Conway procures himself an invitation to the high-profile funeral, where he convinces a gullible journalist that he is the latest underground comedy sensation, when, in fact, he has never done standup in his life.

Jimmy inexplicably becomes an overnight celebrity and soon finds himself buried in bluffs and outright lies told to protect his deep, dark secret. *This Is Your Life* is a side-splittingly hilarious leap up the rungs of fame at a quip-a-minute. It may even have you biting your nails each time Jimmy talks himself into corner after corner, and further alienates his real friends. In between the lines are not-so-nonchalant jabs at society's obsession with and the hollowness of celebrityhood and the resilience of friendship, making it as smart and touching as it is funny.

Jim says

The book begins as Jimmy Conway is about to go on stage to do his stand-up routine before a live TV audience. There has been a lot of "buzz" generated over Jimmy, Britain's best new comic talent. He does have one problem: he has never done stand-up comedy before.

Jimmy always wanted to be famous. Instead, he is a teacher in a language school in a run-down seaside village. He manages to go to the funeral of a TV star and is mistaken for a famous person, himself. Because Jimmy is supposed to be famous, everyone claims to have heard of him, even to have seen his non-existent comedy act. As commercial endorsements follow magazine features, things get out of control, and Jimmy realizes he needs some talent, quickly.

This is a deft satire on celebrity and the way so many figures of the popular culture are famous merely for being famous. John O'Farrell shows how, so often, people are able to become famous without actually having any talent and that obsession with celebrity can crowd out genuine human feeling. Typical of O'Farrell's writing, it is full of wit and humor, delighting in the way everyday life is often awful and funny at the same time.

Anthony says

John O'Farroll (2002) THIS IS YOUR LIFE

London. Black Swan

??? 3 out of 5 stars

The sleeve reads, "Doesn't everybody want to be famous? Jimmy Conway certainly does. He's just a frustrated nobody from nowhere town who wants a better life. And then he stumbles on the perfect way to achieve this - he cheats. He invents an entire celebrity career for himself, even writing his own fantastic reviews. And soon Jimmy discovers that a show-business industry, desperate not to miss the Next Big Thing, isn't particularly bothered about checking that this new name actually deserves to become famous..."

Very funny in very many places though this is nowhere near the funniness that is "May Contain Nuts". Great premise. I grew up watching Michael Aspel walking out of nowhere to greet a (usually) British celeb with a red book in one hand, a mic in the other and proclaiming, "So-and-so this is your life!" so the reference this book makes was not lost on me.

Can't go without drawing attention to the letter that James writes to his 13-year-old self at the beginning of Chapter 11 (the book's final chapter)... It's the kind of simple yet profound letter we should all read and then write to our younger selves. IMO

#JohnOFarrell #ThisIsYourLife #JohnOFarrellThisIsYourLife #Book #Books #Read #Reads #Reading #BookShelf #Library

Octavia says

This is the 2nd book I've read of John O'Farrell and I was a little trepidatious because I thought nothing could be as good as "May Contain Nuts". Boy was I wrong. Flat. out. hilarious. I laughed and laughed and then... much to my surprise I cried in the end. I love nothing more than characters that lie themselves into a horrible situation they can't seem to get out of. This book did that along with making me take a look at the way I view fame and those that are famous. Great book, a light-hearted read with real depth. Side note: I did still like "May Contain Nuts" better.

Kiwiflora says

Nothing wrong with dreaming big in life, planning your future from a young age, writing letters to yourself

to be read when you become a grown up and are actually famous. There is only a problem of course when you don't become famous, when you don't achieve that greatness that you know you were destined to achieve. Instead you become a lowly teacher of English as a second language in an English backwater town, leading a pretty down at heel sort of wasted life. Single, broke, bored, disillusioned.

Poor Jimmy Conway, life was supposed to be such a different kettle of fish! And now his life has amounted to very little. He still harbours the desire to be a world famous stand up comic, the novel opening with him about to do a routine at the Royal Variety Performance, his childhood dream about to come true. But oh dear, it is all a lie, the result of a huge fabrication that Jimmy has himself created, aided and abetted by those who should know better. Bizarrely he becomes a victim of his own success!

And how did this peculiar set of circumstances come about? How does a nobody find himself in the wings of the Royal Albert Hall, petrified out of his wits, the fool playing to the fooled? Through a chance encounter with a famous stand up comic who promptly dies of a heart attack, Jimmy finds himself plunged into the world of the rich and famous, his reckless joke making taking on a life of its own.

As much a satire on the game of fame, as well as a serious commentary on the price of fame, this is a novel that could so easily have spiralled out of control, yet remains totally held. Jimmy is actually very funny, and I am surprised he never has made it as a comic, because he is funny on paper! See, even I am beginning to think Jimmy is a real stand up comedian. A bit like The Emperor's New Clothes, Jimmy the Stand Up Comic is a complete fabrication. The joy of the novel is how he gets out of his potential fall from grace, how he loses friends and wins them again and best of all finds joy in his life, peace and contentment.

Kirsty Hoggons says

This book is all about one man's quest to become famous. I feel like a lot of people can relate to this because how many of us haven't wanted to become famous? It is something that a lot of people can relate to. It also made me think about the lengths that people will go to become famous and to live a certain lifestyle. It can be scary to think that people are willing to do almost anything to get recognised by others. In this book the main character, Jimmy, also doesn't actually do anything to become famous and yet gets recognised.

If I can just go off topic here for a second - This book also made me wonder about how many people we put on pedestals like this when they haven't actually done anything to be put there. Having said that, why is it that only people who are "famous" should get recognition? Surely ordinary people who do ordinary jobs in an extraordinary way also deserve to be recognised?

This book is quick and easy to read. I really enjoyed it. The story line was something different and didn't follow the usual pattern that a lot of books seem to follow these days. Having said that however, I must say that although this book wasn't always predictable (a lot of the time it was actually quite the opposite) there were certain things that I felt were a bit too predictable. That is not a criticism, merely an observation. I really enjoyed this book and I would recommend it to anyone who is looking for something different and something that is relatable and overall a very good read.

Blog post: <http://kirstyhoggons.wordpress.com/2013/07/10/john-o-farrell/>

Kenny says

When I read this in....HIGH SCHOOL (just for the record, what an odd high schooler I was....getting into all these random British books that nobody else was probably reading anywhere else...), well, here is the journal entry from all the way back then.

Sun. Mar. 13, 2005

3:16am

OK, Kenny,

I just finished this book by John O'Farrell called This is Your Life and it was very entertaining and revealed a lot about Celebrity-ism and how obsessed we are of the famous (me, included). Anyway, the thing I liked about the book was the fact it was about this washed-up wannabe (sort of like myself) who wrote these journals when he was younger that laid out his aspirations. Well, I'm not going to do that (although, I would love to be a Supreme Court Justice/ Law Professor of some prestigious university/ international relations major in college/ learn Chinese, visit China and the European Union and Australia/ do a ton of other things. Anyway, I definitely want to travel because the United States essentially sucks.
