



# Lost in the Funhouse: The Life and Mind of Andy Kaufman

*Bill Zehme*

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From Bill Zehme, renowned journalist and author of the "New York Times" bestseller *The Way You Wear Your Hat: Frank Sinatra and the Lost Art of Livin'*, comes this masterful biography of the late comic genius Andy Kaufman.

Based on six years of research, Andy's own unpublished, never-before-seen writings, and hundreds of interviews with family members, friends, and colleagues, *Lost in the Funhouse* takes us through the maze of Kaufman's mind to see, firsthand, the fanciful landscape that was his life.

Andy Kaufman was often a mystery even to his closest friends. Remote, aloof, impossible to know, his internal world was a kaleidoscope of characters fighting for time on the outside. He was as much Andy Kaufman as he was Foreign Man (tenk you veddy much), who became the lovably dithering Latka on the hit TV series *"Taxi."* He was a contradiction, a paradox on every level, an artist in every sense of the word. In *Lost in the Funhouse*, Bill Zehme sorts through a life of misinformation put forth by a master of deception to uncover the man behind the legend. Magically entertaining, it is a singular biography matched only by its singular subject.

## **Lost in the Funhouse: The Life and Mind of Andy Kaufman Details**

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Author : Bill Zehme

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## **From Reader Review Lost in the Funhouse: The Life and Mind of Andy Kaufman for online ebook**

### **Nicole Cushing says**

The best thing about Zehme's book is its encyclopedic level of detail. While that got a little tiresome in the early going (I could have used LESS detail about Andy's childhood), it was an approach that really worked well once it got into Andy's career.

The author takes a "creative nonfiction" stylistic tone that wears a little thin in places, but it doesn't detract much from my overall opinion of this book as the go-to resource for all things Andy.

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### **Tabitha says**

Generally when I read a biography, I feel a little distance from the subject of the book, perhaps a little coldness as I watch their life replayed for me. This book wasn't even remotely like that. I was thrilled when after the first few pages I could hear Andy Kaufman describing his life.

It's a really odd style choice, to write with the mannerisms of your subject, but constantly remind your audience that you're not him. I'm not sure too many authors/biographers could pull it off, but Bill Zehme managed with great elegance. I feel like Mr. Zehme taught me far more about Andy Kaufman using this tone than anyone else could have in any way; short of Andy Kaufman himself.

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### **Doug Brunell says**

Far from the standard biography, this is written in such a way as to get you as close to Kaufman as possible ... or one of his many variations.

And it works.

Kaufman fascinated me as a child. His manipulation of reality and the public's reaction to it is something that interests me (and influences me, if truth be told). Bill Zehme's book helps explain how and why it happened. It is about as close as one can get to him, too.

If you missed the excitement that was Kaufman, this will help fill you in. It is even-handed and thoughtful. More importantly, it is interesting, and you won't want it to end.

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### **Rebecca says**

Written from Kaufman's point of view, I was brought into his world, from childhood to his death. Though we may never totally understand what he did, I have a better understanding of his artistic progression and what made him get into certain areas (the wrestling thing is obvious to me!). He was a trickster in a way, and a lunatic to be sure, but I admire his commitment to being himself behind many many layers of characters and

insanity. Brilliant.

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### **Ray Dunsmore says**

This book truly, for better and for worse (the worst point being the almost-unreadable first chapter about his early childhood) gets you into the pathologically unknowable mind of legendary anti-comic Andy Kaufman. For those looking for sordidly entertaining stories about his bizarre exploits, you're definitely in the right place (though to be honest, Bob Zmuda's memoir, *Andy Kaufman Revealed!*, is a much better choice). For those attempting to get a grip on what possessed him to do this remarkably ridiculous shit all the time, well, if you're anything like me, you'll end the book thinking that Kaufman was a seriously deranged individual with a rather creepy, overwhelming desire to retain a childlike innocence about him (although that never stopped him from fucking as many women as he possibly could, thanks to his wrestling and frequent trips to brothels). Like most of the people who worked with him, you're never sure where the put-on begins or ends with him (or if there were ever barriers between fantasy and reality anyways), and you're always cringing a bit wondering how far he's willing to go down (as far as it takes, always).

And for the record, I think he's dead, but would've wanted everyone to doubt that regardless. Considering the reason I found out about him was stumbling across an *Andy Kaufman Lives* conspiracy website in junior high, it's probably the single best thing that ever happened to his career.

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### **Harrison Rip says**

I barely remember this book and I read it last year.

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### **David says**

biographies are generally straight forward research bits. not so much here. takes a while to get inside the voice, but he genuinely tries to get as close to kaufman's head as possible. makes kaufman an interesting construct, allows you to hate and love him, shifts time forward and backward to the point where you're not sure where you are in the timeline...and ultimately i shed some subway tears as he recounted his death.

still leaves me with questions: how did people not like tony clifton (brilliant)? and the wrestling (brillianter)? those bits are amazing. like all good bios, there's plenty to be unsure about: the interview with elayne boosler on his tv show was/is painful. the fact that he largely played the same material from age 14 to 34 (foreign man, mighty mouse, elvis, crying man, old macdonald) is a bit sad. (though sadder perhaps is that this wouldn't fly today. the internet would kill him, that is if his frequent stays in brothels didn't run him into a case of the HIV.)

it would have been great to see andy kaufman have to age as a performer. he found characters to voice all his innocence and all his petulance, and it doesn't seem like anyone, including kaufman himself could resolve it all in one being.

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## **Pim says**

to be honest, i wasn't really sure to expect of this book. none of the kaufman books seems to be the authoritative one, or so i think.

but this is not only - very likely - the best book about andy kaufman, it's one of the best biographies i've ever read. it's really well-written, funny, insightful - and zehme manages the balance between fandom and critical analysis really well. i would definitely read more of his. highly recommended.

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## **Ron says**

I used to sometimes wonder whether Andy Kaufman was truly crazy, or if some part was really just an act. Its nice to have closure on this little nagging question.

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## **Mervyn S Whyte says**

The right book for its subject. I was particularly struck by the passive-aggressive style of kaufman's humour. Was it driven more by anger than innocence? I enjoyed Breakfast with Blassie very much. Ahead of its time.

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## **Collin O'Donnell says**

"Here was a gauntlet thrown and a madness born - to sort and sift through a life of fantasy, but also a life on earth, and locate truths wherever truths had been sent to hide."

It's no coincidence that *Lost in the Funhouse* takes its name from John Barth's famously metafictional postmodern short story collection. Andy was an enigma to almost everyone that knew him, more of a schizophrenic collection of characters (that all represented some facet of his emotional defense system) than anything concrete. His entire existence was a performance art piece that prided itself on alienating the audience by any means necessary, to keep them in a constant state of bafflement as to what is 'really' going on and 'what's the punchline,' if there was one. One of his major techniques was to respond to the fluxing criticisms/interpretations of his own media image in ways that would only serve to push the question of 'who is Andy Kaufman' into more murky territory (even to him) while still maintaining his artistic integrity. Thus, to chronicle the life of Andy Kaufman is to traverse a minefield almost more mine than field. The author clearly knew the implications of such a task beforehand, which led to a six-year commitment of living and breathing Kaufman. Lesser writers would have cracked up, poisoned themselves with gallon after gallon of chocolate ice cream, found solace in the arms of dozens of strange prostitutes and given up on a project mortal man wasn't meant to undertake. Awarding this book five stars is just as much a profound appreciation of the author's herculean effort and patience as it is a reflection of it's wonderful, hilarious, and thought-provoking content.

Bill Zehme is the narrator, but he channels Andy Kaufman and focalizes Andy's life through Andy's whacked-out but still all-too-human perspective. By doing so, he shapes a second plane in which the reader can better understand who exactly Andy was, not simply through the events of his life but through the

meaningful expressionist discourse of said events. This experimental edge results in a sometimes fractured structure and electric, stream-of-consciousness prose that probably wouldn't work in any other biography but works splendidly here. The focus on Andy's childhood (the childhood bit is usually my least favorite part of biographies) strays away from a simple A-Z retelling of events and brilliantly highlights the formative scenes (believing there was a camera in the wall of his bedroom that he would constantly perform for, early infatuation with Elvis and wrestling, fixation on hijinks, fascination with freaks, then with the Beats in his teen years and poetry and the novels of Kerouac and Selby Jr. and the films of Fellini, his discovery of transcendental meditation) that built the foundation of Andy's psyche and clearly prefigured much of his adult life. Zehme, while delving into and embodying the chaos of Kaufman's life, works incredibly hard to humanize Andy, to connect the dots and show how there was a logical but still bizarre chain of events that led to the creation of the Andy that freaked out a nation.

Over the course of my reading, I developed an enormous sympathy for this polarizing figure. His vulnerability and intentions and successes and failures and tragic death are laid bare and I found myself trapped in Andy's head (the funhouse) and I lived his experiences with him and felt I understood his every move. He spent his life on the fringes, his inability to communicate and fear of becoming something he felt he wasn't driving further him down the rabbit hole until he'd passed through fame with nothing on the other side but a few close friends and family, the people that held his hand while he died. I don't think I've ever laughed or cried as much from any other book, or had as much satisfaction in closing the final page and knowing I'd experienced something special. If I ever read a biography more alive and satisfying, it will be a miracle.

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### **Carlos Aguirre says**

Interesting tale and interestingly told about a very eccentric man. I never saw *Man on the Moon* and never wanted to. I'm not a Jim Carrey fan at all and would rather watch clips of Andy himself rather than watch someone try to ape him, which is impossible and unnecessary. Once again, clips of the man are out there on the Internet and elsewhere. Anyway, for anyone that wants to get a glimpse of the mind behind the madness, this seems to be the path to "enlightenment". Enlightenment being something that Andy seemed to crave. This is not a comfortable or safe ride. Be warned, lots of talk of sex. But the details are left out. So, nothing too graphic (or pornographic) but probably isn't for those that are easily offended. Anyway, I enjoyed it and found out some interesting behind the scenes details of some of my favorite Andy Kaufman bits. God rest your soul Andy and thanks so much for the laughs.

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### **John G. says**

Definitely one of the best comic biographies I've ever read. Really gets into the head of a very unique, bizarre and complicated man and artist. This man was fearless and truly original who never pandered to his audience. Interesting exportation into creativity, comedy, performance, and pushing the envelope! Kaufman was one of a kind and this book does his life and art Justice, a work of art in interlude.

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### **Dustin Reade says**

Awesome bio. Unlike other bios, which usually read like lists of accomplishments, this one utilizes a unique

style, which flips from strangely poetic, to somewht remorseful, to the calm, detached voice of journalism. Great descriptions of Andy's early career, and some interesting stories about the birth of his most memorable material. A great book and a must for anyone fascinated with this incredible artist.

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### **Phil says**

Bill Zehme does an amazing job of using form to enhance meaning in this simultaneously hilarious and sobering biography. He adopts different Kaufman personae/speech patterns to help tell the story, which helps the reader connect with Andy's scattered head space.

I was only marginally familiar with AK's work prior to reading this, but I was frequently laughing out loud regardless. And it led me to a bit of an Andy Kaufman obsession--the day after I finished the book I spent several hours scouring YouTube for old clips.

Perhaps more humorous than anything is that this book, of all books, picked up where Wilber's *\_Brief History\_* left off in suggesting to me the utility of meditation. Seriously.

If you have an appreciation for absurd humor, you need to read this book. We owe Andy so much.

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