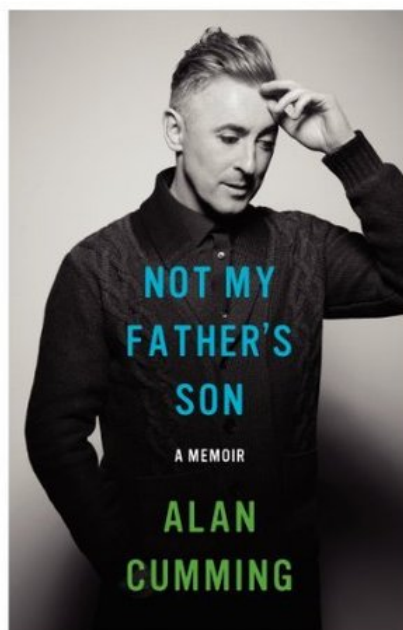




Not My Father's Son

Alan Cumming

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In his unique and engaging voice, the acclaimed actor of stage and screen shares the emotional story of his complicated relationship with his father and the deeply buried family secrets that shaped his life and career.

A beloved star of stage, television, and film—"one of the most fun people in show business" (*Time* magazine)—Alan Cumming is a successful artist whose diversity and fearlessness is unparalleled. His success masks a painful childhood growing up under the heavy rule of an emotionally and physically abusive father—a relationship that tormented him long into adulthood.

When television producers in the UK approached him to appear on a popular celebrity genealogy show in 2010, Alan enthusiastically agreed. He hoped the show would solve a family mystery involving his maternal grandfather, a celebrated WWII hero who disappeared in the Far East. But as the truth of his family ancestors revealed itself, Alan learned far more than he bargained for about himself, his past, and his own father.

With ribald humor, wit, and incredible insight, Alan seamlessly moves back and forth in time, integrating stories from his childhood in Scotland and his experiences today as a film, television, and theater star. At times suspenseful, deeply moving, and wickedly funny, *Not My Father's Son* will make readers laugh even as it breaks their hearts.

Not My Father's Son Details

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From Reader Review Not My Father's Son for online ebook

Stephanie *Very Stable Genius* says

“Sometimes people do you a favour when they drop out of your life.”

Truth.

I’m struggling with my words here, so I’m just going to simplify them. Alex Cumming (Alan’s dad) was a raging, abusive asshole. Astonishingly, Alan Cumming is not. He really ought to be, growing up in Hell, instead he seems to have come through to the other side as a pretty fantastic fella. I’d love to tell him that in person and give him a hug.

Growing up in a situation with a man who could (and would) blow his top at the slightest provocation, Alan had to learn to act. He learned well. It was an awful way to learn his craft, but Alan attributes this skill to having to act his way around his dad.....to learn how not to set him off.

Alan is not only a great actor, he’s a pretty darn good writer as well. He has done a good job here moving back and forth through time and pulling the two together in a way that makes sense. It’s a compelling, emotional, open and honest memoir and I highly recommend it.

Yes it’s dark, but it also has some funny in it too.

“For yes, being a woman, even one with a penis and for the purposes of drama, really made me feel that women have been coerced into a way of presenting themselves that is basically a form of bondage. Their shoes, their skirts, even their nails seem designed to stop them from being able to escape whilst at the same time drawing attention to their sexual and secondary sexual characteristics.

And I think that has happened so that men feel they can ogle them and protect them in equal measure.”

What pushed this book over the top for me and made it a five star was that I listened to the audio version read by the author. Being that he can act and that this is his story, he did it very well and added the perfect amount of emotion at all the right moments.

In fact, I could listen to him read Heaven is for Real, front to back, and not gag once.....or the phone book, the bible, the menu from Cracker Barrel.....he’s just that good.

TL says

Re-read via audio book (finally got my hands on it):)

Side note: First time I saw/heard of Alan Cumming was as Nightcrawler in X2.. I've seen him in things on and off over time but never followed him like I did with certain bands/authors but he's been on my radar.

Just as compelling and heartwrenching, and at times heartwarming as the first time around.. even more so with Alan narrating itself. His voice is so beautiful and soothing/calming.

Not to overuse the word but still amazed he put this whole story out for the world to see and judge...very brave of him on all fronts.

Go check it out now:):!

Original review:

I don't know what to say... this was in turn a funny/heartwarming/deeply moving and suspenseful read. Many times (and still now) I just wanted to give Alan a big hug and tell him I'm proud of him for how he came through this and is leading a good life.

He's a strong person and a good man... if one day I get the privilege to meet him, I will tell him that :).

Highly recommend, words cannot do this enough justice *gives Alan a hug*

pre-read:

Coming from paperbackswap:):!!

J.L. Sutton says

The scars of an abusive childhood form the backdrop for Alan Cumming's Not My Father's Son. I really enjoy memoirs, but I sometimes have to question why I enjoy them. Scenes from Cumming's childhood were brutal; in addition to outright violence, his father knew just what to do to make sure Cumming and his brother never received approval or validation for anything they did. This is not a childhood we would wish on anyone. Does Cumming rise above this childhood? Does he redeem himself from the horror of living in fear from those who should support and love him?

When we read memoirs, I think we expect the author to reconcile him/herself with their painful past. I'm not sure that happened entirely. While preparing for an episode of the UK version of Who Do You Think You Are, Cumming's estranged and abusive father interjects himself into his son's life. While the program was showcasing a mystery in Cumming's family (a maternal grandfather who disappeared when he was Cumming was a boy), this other side of his family arguably demonstrated a more enduring impact. There is certainly power in laying bare such truths. Many would prefer such stories to remain buried, but they are the truths by which we live our imperfect lives.

Diane says

This memoir blew me away. I had no idea Alan Cumming had such a miserable childhood. After finishing this I wanted to give the guy a hug.

I knew little about the book when I downloaded it* — I chose it because I like Alan Cumming as an actor, and he has that charming Scottish accent, so I thought it would be a good audiobook.

Alan was a wonderful narrator, but this memoir was quite dark. It tells how Alan's father terrorized and abused him, and of Alan's search to learn more about his grandfather, who died under mysterious circumstances in Malaysia.

The memoir alternates between flashbacks to Alan's childhood and a bizarre experience that Alan had in 2010. I hesitate to spoil any details, because not knowing the story made it more thrilling to read. But I will say that Alan's father was skilled at causing chaos and disrupting his family, and he told Alan a secret that made Alan question everything he thought he knew.

Thankfully, the book was not all bleak. There are some sweet stories about his granny, and amusing stories with Alan's husband, Grant, and Alan is gifted at sharing the humor of a situation. One of my favorite of his childhood remembrances was the day he was at a fair and he found himself all alone because his father had disappeared with his mistress. Alan suddenly decided to buy himself his own set of dishes:

"I didn't mean to. I was thirteen, after all, and not likely to be throwing any dinner parties for quite a while hence. But I needed to feel comfort, I needed to know there was a future for me that did not involve my father and a woman who was not my mother running around like schoolchildren trying to hide from me, dashing off to the back of a van carefully parked in a quiet side street. I needed to imagine a home where I would not be tormented, where I would be in control, where I would be the one inviting others into my space, and I would be providing for them ... Up until very recently I still had one of the saucers from that dinner service."

I think this book would be comforting to people who have had some experience with abuse, because Alan's story is also one of survival, and how he was eventually able to confront his father and break free from him. Fans of Alan Cumming would also like it because he shares stories of how he got started in acting, and explains why he has had so many different hair styles over the years. (Hint: it was an act of rebellion against his dad.) Highly recommended.

FAVORITE QUOTE:

"Memory is so subjective. We all remember in a visceral, emotional way, and so even if we agree on the facts — what was said, what happened where and when — what we take away and store from a moment, what we *feel* about it, can vary radically."

*FOOTNOTE:

I downloaded *Not My Father's Son* on Super Bowl Sunday, which is the biggest sports day of the year in America. Since I do not like to watch American football, let alone 8 hours of it, I was trawling for a new book to read. Alan Cumming's memoir was so compelling that I only paused it once — to watch Katy Perry's halftime show. I finished the book just as the Super Bowl was ending, so I am calling that a huge win for Team Readers.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

Picked this up on a whim when I was skimming the new books at the library, and read it in an evening. Half the memoir is the same story told on Alan's episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, about his maternal grandfather, a man who was a bit of a family mystery, never returning to England after World War II despite having a wife and children.

The other half is about his abusive childhood with a violent father, and how that has effected him today. He also talks about how he has worked on it - therapy, confrontation, release. I can't decide if I don't recommend

or highly recommend this for people who grew up in similar situations, but definitely were the parts I felt more connected to than the military darling.

On dealing with an abusive parent as an adult:

"Since I had gone off and begun to live my own life, my father had ceased to be a physical threat to me; he even became quite civil. This change in him allowed me to pack away much of my past in a box that I never wanted to open. For ten years I kept it closed, pretending that my family was no more difficult or trying than anybody else's. I didn't begin to forgive my father - far from it."

On the way families tend to ignore the angry elephant:

"We never discussed what we were going through, how it was affecting us. When my dad was absent... [we might] indirectly empathize about our plight, but we never actually addressed what was really going on: that we were living with a tyrant, someone who, I believe now, was mentally ill. As our silence grew, so did our denial."

Alan Cumming talks about how keeping this all in led to a mental breakdown of his own, one that mirrored one his grandfather had, the other character in the book. So it nicely ties together and it does seem like he ended the book more whole than he started. That is always nice to see. I think it was a book he needed to write for himself even if for nobody else. May it bring him strength and closure.

Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says

Review of the audio read by Alan Cumming.

Just a few thoughts I have to get down. Audios read by the author are always among my favorites. There is an honesty there that I connect with, and that was even more true with Alan Cumming's reading of Not My Father's Son. This was a deeply personal account of Alan's childhood, his harsh and violent father, his loving mother (I loved her name "Mary Darling"), and his forgotten and misunderstood grandfather. This is a solid, heartfelt memoir. Well-done.

Wart Hill says

Dear Mr. Cumming, I feel you deserve a big hug. Since the chances of me ever giving you one are beyond nonexistent, I say this: Grant, give him a hug for me, please.

Sincerely,
Wart.

Full review to come. Maybe.

Greta says

Happiness erased

Clouded by fear, humiliation, pain
Darkens my mind
Irrationality, rage, violence
Anxious, never relax
Shutting down, never speak
Joy suppressed, hurts less
Tension, humiliation
Become nothing
Give nothing away
Darkness, silence, fear
Never safe
Navigating a minefield
Unhealthy
Failings, feeling guilty
Worthless, loath myself
"I'm sorry"
Silent house, facades
Volatility
Denial, never rely
Unresolved pain, hurt
My own mind, my own opinion
Gates open, trickle, flood
Fill my head, explode
Sadness, deep depression
Need to be away
Sort myself out
Cocoon
Feel, remember, mourn
Gazing, remembering, reliving
Horrifying, liberating
Understand
Fragile, terrified, vulnerable
Raw, painful
Telling, collapsing, weeping
Accepted and understood
Shame, grief
Acknowledgment, apology
Mind games, scare tactics
Manipulation, intimidation
Egotism, madness
False assumptions
Abuse, justify, despicable
Dark secrets, twisted reality, paranoia
Truth, openness, commitment
Illogical, impossible to fathom
Little boy, surreal
Empty, nagging ache
Marks, closed off, embracing
Taken away, shaken up, recalibrated
Carry on, no choice, reassess
Shut the door, dead
"I'm not my father's son"

Antonio says

"Finally, the scariest thing about abuse of any shape or form, is, in my opinion, not the abuse itself, but that if it continues it can begin to feel commonplace and eventually acceptable."

Wow. I think everyone is surprised by how hard and painful was Alan's childhood. He grew up in a lair where fear was part of the routine, where one had to learn to read expressions like a book, so it was possible to be ready - was it possible to ever be ready, though? - to what was coming. Aggression and humiliation shaping one's life.

"Sometimes people do you a favour when they drop out of your life."

They sure do it. Being far from your abuser, from the unhappy place in which you grew up, is a liberating feeling. It feels like there's finally the sun illuminating and warming your body. A body which forgot what warmth felt like. A body left alone in the devastated frozen tundra that was its reality for so long.

"Had I not had the childhood I did, would these traits not be so at the forefront of my personality? Who knows? All I know is that I am the product of all the experiences I have had, good and bad, and if I am in a happy place in my life (as I truly am), then I can have no regrets about any of the combination of events and circumstances that have led me to the here and now."

That's, however, it's part of the person Alan Cumming became. For the good and for the bad. Everything we go through has a significant importance in our identity. It's undeniable. We can only try to deal with everything in the best possible way, being open about it and guaranteeing that it won't happen again. We can use all the memories in our favor, fighting for brighter days not only to ourselves but also to humankind.

"Memory is so subjective. We all remember in a visceral, emotional way, and so even if we agree on the facts—what was said, what happened where and when—what we take away and store from a moment, what we feel about it, can vary radically."

Barbara says

Alan Cumming is a Scottish actor who's probably best known in America for hosting "Masterpiece Theater" on PBS and playing Eli Gold on "The Good Wife". He's also a very successful stage and movie actor, now happily married to his husband Grant.

Alan's life wasn't always so bright though. In this memoir Alan talks about growing up with a father, Alex Cumming, who was physically, psychologically, and emotionally abusive. The book starts off with a bang as Alan describes a childhood scene where his vicious father yanked him out to the barn, threw him down on a table, and roughly shaved his head with sheep shears. Alan and his brother Tom lived in constant fear of their dad, who perpetually criticized and banged them around.

The impetus to write this book came from Alan's planned 2010 appearance on the British TV show "Who Do You Think You Are?". Celebrities who go on the show have aspects of their ancestry/past revealed, things that are often a surprise to them. (In an American version of this show, for example, Ben Affleck was shocked to learn his ancestors owned slaves.)

In Alan's case, he hoped to find out more about his maternal grandfather, Tommy Darling. Tommy survived fighting in World War II but didn't come home when hostilities ended. Instead Tommy became a police officer in Malaya, where he was supposedly killed by an accidental gunshot wound. Tommy left behind his wife, Mary Darling, and four children. The Darlings struggled to get by without Tommy's income or pension. Alan wanted to find out more about this mysterious granddad, as well as other aspects of his own past.

While Alan was filming "Who Do You Think You Are?" - which required traveling around the world with the show's production team - Alex Cumming dropped a bombshell. He revealed that he wasn't Alan's father. Alex claimed that he had caught his wife leaving a bedroom with another man nine months before Alan was born, and that this man was Alan's father. According to Alex he wanted to give Alan a heads-up so the actor wouldn't be blindsided when this news came to light on the TV show.

The book jumps back and forth between Alan's youth and adulthood. In the 'then' sections Alan describes childhood incidents where his father yelled at him, threw him around, hit him, degraded him, embarrassed him, and so on. Alan also talks about his father's constant public infidelities, which humiliated his wife and sons. In fact Alex sometimes took Alan along when he was meeting other women. These parts of the book are very disturbing.

In the 'now' sections Alan reveals the residual anxiety he feels from his childhood. He also writes about his acting gigs; professional successes; ex-wife; fears about having children (he has none); nervous breakdown; therapist; husband; friends; beloved mother, brother, and granny; parties; dinners; wine; etc. - in short, his life as an adult.

Alan also discusses his reaction to Alex Cumming announcing that he isn't the actor's biological father. Could this explain why Alex was always so cruel and hateful? Or did Alex just make this up to cause Alan more pain? Alan makes sure to find out the truth!

The book is well-written, enlightening, entertaining, and uplifting. It's good to learn that children with awful childhoods can go on to live happy, successful lives.

I highly recommend this book to people who enjoy celebrity memoirs. This is a very good one.

You can follow my reviews at <http://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot.com/>

Becky says

Blargh. This is another review that I just don't know how to start. I've typed and deleted about 6 different versions already, so I've given up and now THIS is how I'm starting it. That's the way it goes sometimes. It's after midnight and I'm determined to finish this review so I don't have it hanging over my head any longer.

So. Alan Cumming. It might be surprising to some of you, but I've seen very little that he's been in, yet for some reason, I have nothing but positive associations in my mind when it comes to him. (Or I did before - now there's a tiny blemish thanks to the trivia on his IMDB page saying that he turned down the role of Gilderoy Lockhart because he didn't want to make less money than amateur Rupert Grint. Tsk!) Anyway, what I'm getting at is that when I saw he had this book out, I thought "Oh, I like him! I'll pick that up!"

So I did. And eventually I even got around to reading it. Will wonders never cease? :D

I listened to this on audio, read by Cumming himself, which was fantastic. I adore his accent, and having him

telling his story made the experience feel so much more intimate and personal than reading it would have been. It allowed the humor to come through, the pain to come through, his personality to come through. I loved it. Well, as much as you can love someone telling you about the emotional, psychological, and physical abuse that they endured.

I guess what I really mean is that this was a powerful story, and it touched me, and I'm happy and proud that he survived it to become the person he is today. In that way, I loved it. But it broke my heart to listen to much of it.

This memoir is focused dually on two specific stories that intertwine - his relationship (or lack thereof) with his father, and his experience with the show "Who Do You Think You Are?" which seeks out lost family history - in this case, that of Alan's maternal grandfather, who died when his mother was young.

These stories parallel and intersect in many ways, and it was so interesting to hear the behind the scenes stuff that you don't get to see. Alan hearing a bombshell, as relayed by his brother, that completely shocks him and makes him question his entire childhood and life - and then having to be filmed minutes later for the show, and hear yet more shocking history, only this time about his grandfather. It was fascinating, and one of the reasons that I put off writing this review for a week was so that I could watch his episode of the show.

I knew the outcome of the show, but knowing what he was going through and dealing with while filming it, and how much he struggled to keep his shit together during that time, it was really kind of heartbreaking. Of course the information relayed to him in the show was sad, though it did have a positive impact and brought awareness to an important issue, but knowing that many of the times when he's filmed looking pensive and introspective that he's likely thinking about much more recent and potentially life-changing revelations, just made it that much more sad to watch. My heart went out to the guy, because you could tell that he just needed a little time to process everything - but the hits just kept coming at him non-stop.

This is pretty dark material, but it is quite uplifting at the same time. It's a story of overcoming abuse and adversity, of surviving one's abuser, of finding and learning to love oneself. And I have to admit, it warmed the dark recesses of my cold, bitter heart whenever he mentioned his husband, Grant. You could just feel the love that they have between them, and I couldn't help but feel thankful that he found the person that makes him happy, that he can rely on, and trust, and who supports and loves him in return.

And speaking of which, I adore Alan's relationship with his brother Tom. These brothers are everything that siblings are supposed to be, and I was once again thankful that Alan had Tom in his life. I honestly think that without Tom acting as his buffer, his protector, and friend, that Alan likely would not have survived to be who he is.

My one criticism would be that I think that Alan let his mother off too lightly in her responsibility. He loves and adores his mother, that is clear, and he thanks her for being the kind and accepting counter to her husband's controlling, hypercritical tyrant, but she failed in her responsibility to protect her children. Perhaps she was a buffer, and deflected some of it, but she knew how miserable they all had to be, how terrified of him they were, and she even endured that herself. Yet she did not leave her husband until after both of her kids had moved out on their own. I know it was a different time back then, but I think she bears a bit of the responsibility as well. She didn't do enough, in my opinion, to protect her sons from their abusive father.

Anyway, this was a great book, and I highly recommend it even if you're not familiar with Alan Cumming. It's well worth the read (or listen).

Glenn Sumi says

The puckishly charismatic actor Alan Cumming (*The Good Wife*, *Spy Kids*, *Cabaret*) delves into his horrific childhood and uncovers secrets from his family's history in this brave, beautifully written and honest memoir. The book is anything but a typical celebrity tell-all.

Through a BBC genealogy reality TV show called *Who Do You Think You Are?*, Cumming learns about his maternal grandfather – who died under mysterious circumstances in his 30s – at the same time that his physically and emotionally abusive father reveals he might not be his biological dad.

Both events – which together have the feel of an ancient Greek drama – set in motion a life-changing journey that's full of heart, humour and hope.

Be prepared for some hard-to-read scenes of abuse. Cumming's father Alex, a manager of a Scottish estate, systematically brutalized and belittled both Alan and his older brother Tom when they were younger. He also carried on a series of affairs in front of the boys and their mother, Mary Darling. Alan suppressed these disturbing memories; only after experiencing a nervous breakdown in his early 20s – while playing Hamlet – did they return.

In one of several wise and funny observations, Alan says his difficult childhood – with his father claiming he was worthless and his mother saying the opposite – prepared him for a career in show business. If you believed one, he suggests, you had to believe the other. So he learned not to take things personally in the ego-crushing industry.

The book's time-jumping structure takes some time to get used to, but it's a lot more interesting than a straightforward chronological approach. And there's a lot to pack in, including stories about three generations of family, the odd celebrity anecdote (look for the amusing story involving Patti Smith, Marion Cotillard and Mary J. Blige in Cannes) and mention of Cumming's marriages (one to a woman, while in his 20s, the other to a man, while in his 40s).

As Cumming's past catches up with his present – and he bravely confronts his demons – there are some remarkable sequences, which I won't spoil here.

But I should say that having read *Not My Father's Son*, I now have so much more respect for Cumming as a man and an artist. His story is inspiring and life-affirming.

Will Byrnes says

Wilkommen, bienvenue, welcome!

Settle in for a story that is appalling and entertaining, hopeful and disappointing, reflective and sometimes ephemeral.

Life is disappointing? Forget it.

It is a good thing that this advice was not followed. Remembering seems more the thing.

We have no troubles here. Here life is beautiful.

Ummm, not so much. And now, Meine Damen und Herren, Mes Dames et Messieurs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ich bin eur confrencier, je suis votre compere...I am your host.

the star of our show:

Cumming in the 1998 production - from Fanpop.com

“You need a haircut, boy!”

My father had only glanced at me across the kitchen table as he spoke but I had already seen in his eyes the coming storm.

I tried to speak but the fear that now engulfed me made it hard to swallow, and all that came out was a little gasping sound that hurt my throat even more. And I knew speaking would only make things worse, make him despise me more, make him pounce sooner. That was the worst bit, the waiting. I never knew exactly when it would come, and that, I know, was his favorite part.

Alan Cumming, star of stage and screen, notable *Cabaret* emcee, introducer of *Masterpiece Mystery*, bluish *X-man*, Smurf voice, and political operative Eli Gold on *The Good Wife*, among many other memorable characters, was raised on a large estate in Scotland. His father, Alex, was the head groundskeeper. He was also a mercurial and often cruel and violent parent to both Alan and his older brother Tom, offering ambiguous instructions to the boys and almost always finding the resulting work unsatisfactory, an excuse to justify the punishment that usually followed. Cumming’s experience as a battered child, coming to terms as an adult with some of the reasons for his harsh upbringing, and attempting to finally, decades later, move past it, is the core of the story in *Not My Father’s Son*. But this is not just a story of the father he knew. It is also about the grandfather he had never met.

Mary Darling and Alex Cumming – wedding day - from the NY Times

In 2010, Cumming, having attained a certain level of celebrity, was invited by the British show *Who Do You Think you Are* (now in the USA as well) to be a subject for their weekly genealogy quest program. The research that was intrinsic to this process would cast light on a black hole in his family history. As awful as his father was, Mary Darling, Alan’s mother, was his angel, always supporting and nurturing him. Within limits, of course. She did not seem to do a very good job of preventing her husband from tormenting their sons. She had last seen her own father, Tommie Darling, when she was eight years old. He had supposedly died in a gun accident in Malaysia in 1951. The family knew very little about him, and had few remnants of his existence. The TV show would follow that trail and find out what had happened to Tommie. (There is a link to the entire program in the EXTRA STUFF section below) Just before this process began, Alan’s father, long estranged, got in touch, passing along a disturbing piece of information.

As Eli Gold and Nightcrawler - from NothingButMemory.net

One part of this memoir is travelling along and peeling back the layers of the mystery that was Tommie

Darling. (Peter Pan was not involved) As researchers for the program unearth more and more information about Tommie, Alan learns more and more about not only his family, but sees in his ancestor traits he recognizes in himself.

Masterpiece Mystery host - from the Boston Herald

Chapters alternate, more or less, between now (2010) and then, the years of Alan's childhood, the new work prodding recollections of the past. However, it is not *all* childhood and now. Cumming also tells of his breakdown at age 28 when he was starring in a London production of *Hamlet*, rehearsing for his breakthrough role as the emcee in the London revival of *Cabaret* and planning to have a child with his wife. There is some detail here. Later he tells of meeting his current mate when he was 39. He seems to have packs of friends, who remain mostly nameless, in both London and New York, and who function as scenery, for the most part. He offers a few tales from his acting life.

When I joined Twitter I described myself as “Scottish elf trapped inside a middle aged man’s body” and I still think that’s accurate.

Despite Cumming's elfishness, there is not much comedy in the book. Although Cumming the performer does indeed present a pixie-ish facade, the only real laugh, at least for me, was when he talked about Patti Smith and a particular vile habit of hers. A story about attempting to film against the incessant noise in South Africa during a particularly noisy World Cup is another light moment. A youthful masturbatory scene that one thinks might be queasily amusing turns in another, far more substantive direction.

The two parts of this story now seem so clearly connected, mirroring each other perfectly. I had lost a father but found a grandfather. One of them had never sought the truth and lived a life based on a lie; the other's truth was hidden from us because society deemed it unsuitable. Both caused strife, and sadness. But now, both combined to reinforce for me what I knew to be the only truth: there is never shame in being open and honest. It was shame that prevented us from knowing what a great man Tommy Darling was. And it was shame that made my father treat me and Tom and my mum the way he did.

Not My Father's Son is a moving and fascinating tale, and probably would not have been told had Cumming not been world famous. TV programs do not seek out the likes of you or me to give them permission to travel the world looking into our backgrounds. Most of us do not have the resources to delve into our family history so richly. It remains to be seen if the book would have been written had the TV program not been made. Cumming had indeed been thinking about his childhood for some time, but it was the show that prompted him to move ahead with it. What Cumming's talent did was give him a way to get out of a bad situation. A lesser light might have dimmed if left in that place. One thing the book might do is prompt a bit of reflection. Surely there are leafless branches on all our family trees and Cumming's tale of looking into his might encourage some of us to consider looking into some of ours. And maybe to look a bit closer at even our known history for a bit of help in explaining how we became the people we are.

Tom, Mary and Alan at Tommie's grave

I have admired Alan Cumming as a performer ever since seeing him in the New York revival of *Cabaret* back in 1998. I now admire him as a writer as well. He has written a moving memoir of a father lost and a grandfather gained. It is rich with reflection, insight, pain, and healing. Any decent father would be bursting with pride to have a son capable of writing such a book.

Review posted – 10/17/14

Publication date – 10/7/14

This review has also been posted at Cootsreviews.com

=====EXTRA STUFF

Links to the author's personal and Twitter pages

He is not on Facebook. Some miscreants have posed as him, but those pages have been taken down

Definitely check out his site. It is a cornucopia of info.

NY Times article on Alan

Here is the full Who Do You Think You Are episode from September 2010 - thanks to Richard Derus for passing along the link, previously removed. — oops, looks like this link is no longer working. When/if I find another one that does the trick I will post it here. ?

Sue says

After reading Will Byrne's review of this book and then watching Cumming's episode of Who Do You Think You Are on YouTube, I just had to settle in with the book for myself. I've enjoyed Alan Cumming in various performances for quite some time and it is now very interesting to learn more of the whole person and his earlier life.

The world really opened up for him as he grew up and, especially during the year when he was filming the genealogy show, he learned more than he ever would have expected about his family and, ultimately, about himself. While the show led to information about his mother's father, Tommy Darling, a man who was largely unknown to the family, other events opened up Alan's eyes to the reality of his abusive father Alex who had been in and out of his life, mostly out, for years.

I found that this book complements the TV show wonderfully and explains the occasional worn and frazzled appearance I had noticed. So much was going on in the background! If you like Alan Cumming, if you appreciate learning of how an adult learns to live with the result of all the abuse heaped on them in childhood, then this may well be a book for you. I recommend it.

Elyse says

Audiobook.....

Alan Cumming, Scottish and American actor, singer/performer, author, and activist....
survived the most horrific childhood from brutal emotional and physical abuse. His father who would inflict harm on him with no warning.

This is a very powerful audiobook - hard to pull away from. It's a suspenseful memoir.
Alan doesn't hold back. He said that his difficult childhood taught him how to act by needing to suppress his own emotions and feelings around his father when he was a little boy. He does have some happy memories

of his childhood-and a special 'survival-closeness' with his mother and brother, Tom.

Alan appeared on the UK show, "Who Do You Think You Are?"..... A show where famous people came on to find out more in-depth history about their genealogy.

Alan asked the show to look into his grandfather who he had not seen since he had been a little boy... but Alan gets much more than he asked for involving his father and things get very complex and shocking.

As sad as Alan's childhood was - horrible painful experiences- (and the storytelling moves back and forth between his childhood days and his adult days) - ultimately this is an inspiring/ empowering story. He doesn't live a life as a victim. We see clearly from Alan's story the value from digging up the hidden 'truths'. We see what suppressing costs a person --and the courage it takes to make peace with abuse --breakthrough to live life to the fullest!

Very inspiring for anyone who has suffered from abuse. The audiobook is excellent with Alan reading his own book!
