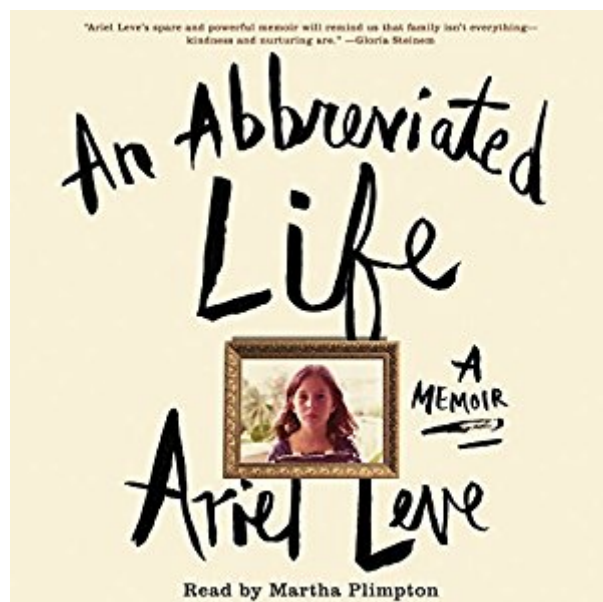


The book was found

An Abbreviated Life: A Memoir



Synopsis

A beautiful, startling, and candid memoir about growing up without boundaries, in which Ariel Leve recalls with candor and sensitivity the turbulent time she endured as the only child of an unstable poet for a mother and a beloved but largely absent father, and explores the consequences of a psychologically harrowing childhood as she seeks refuge from the past and recovers what was lost. Ariel Leve grew up in Manhattan with an eccentric mother she describes as "a poet, an artist, a self-appointed troublemaker and attention seeker". Leve learned to become her own parent, taking care of herself and her mother's needs. There would be uncontrolled, impulsive rages followed by denial, disavowed responsibility, and then extreme outpourings of affection. How does a child learn to feel safe in this topsy-turvy world of conditional love? Leve captures the chaos and lasting impact of a child's life under siege and explores how the coping mechanisms she developed to survive later incapacitated her as an adult. There were material comforts but no emotional safety except for summer visits to her father's home in Southeast Asia - an escape that was terminated after he attempted to gain custody. Following the death of a loving caretaker, a succession of replacements raised Leve - relationships that resulted in intense attachment and loss. It was not until decades later, when Leve moved to the other side of the world, that she could begin to emancipate herself from the past. In a relationship with a man who had children, caring for them yielded clarity of what was missing. In telling her haunting story, Leve seeks to understand the effects of chronic psychological maltreatment on a child's developing brain and to discover how to build a life for herself that she never dreamed possible: an unabbreviated life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Those who have suffered the psychological abuse, and worse, from parents who are narcissists, bipolar, alcoholics, etc., will find Ariel Leve's narrative and analysis of the PTSD-like symptoms she suffers a refreshing take on a familiar subject. Ariel's mother was a member of the literati with excessive self-regard. She had long red fingernails and would prevent damaging them by using chop sticks to use the dial-phone. She was too lazy to use phonebooks to get people's phone numbers, so she dialed information and accrued monthly phone bills in the hundreds of dollars. Then Ariel's mother would haggle the operators to have the charges rescinded. In other words, Ariel's mother was an imperious drama-addict who abused her single child and blamed her for her divorce, accused her of betrayal, told her she had never been loved, and engaged in a birthing game that would compel social services to put Ariel in foster care if they had ever known about this sick game. Children in chronically abusive situations grow up to believe their world is "normal" when in fact their adaptations, in adulthood, turn into maladaptations. Leve learns the above by consulting Harvard neuroscientist Martin Teicher who explains that a child with chronic abuse is deprived of the good hormones to the brain and overloaded with the bad hormones resulting in "altered" (in a very bad way) brain development. The hardwiring gets changed. The abused child actually changes on a cellular level. Teicher explains to Leve with the analogy of a tree that exists in a windy climate: It becomes altered in its shape that is different than a tree that is struck by lightning (lightning being a metaphor for short-term trauma).

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