



An Abbreviated Life: A Memoir

Ariel Leve

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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 with 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 South East 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 which resulted in intense attachment and loss. It was not until decades later, when Leve moved to other side of the world, that she could begin to emancipate herself from the past. In a relationship with a man who has children, caring for them yields 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 unabridged life.

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From Reader Review An Abbreviated Life: A Memoir for online ebook

Wendi says

An Abbreviated Life is one of those rare books about which I'm not really going to be able to say much. This isn't due to any lack on the part of this memoir, but more that its contents hit so close to home that it feels so overwhelming and personal that it's difficult to write about.

Although her name seemed familiar, I wasn't really sure that I'd previously read anything by Leve, and when I told a friend I was reading this book and she instantly knew who I was talking about, I finally googled her. In the process I discovered a review at The Guardian, wherein the writer felt emotionally distressed about the way she perceived Leve's writing of the memoir and her separation from her mother as a betrayal, and she felt badly for Leve's mother. She even tracked her down to her apartment to interview her about the book.

It was when I felt hostility towards that reviewer that I understood three things:

1. I likely can't write coherently about this memoir, as my own experiences and loss of my own autonomy within those experiences just places me beyond the realm of anything close to unbiased thinking.
2. This memoir was more helpful to me than any self help books I've read on the subject, simply because I both freaked out about the similarities to my own reality and felt gratitude and relief to know that it's not just me who has gone through these experiences.
3. That reviewer clearly had no idea what it could be like to grow up with a controlling, gaslighting, emotionally manipulative narcissistic mother... and, unfortunately, apparently having read Leve's memoir wasn't enough for her to understand the horrors of that environment.

Which also makes me think that there may be any number of readers out there who simply cannot imagine having a mother so different from their own experiences that they may put this book down, thinking that Leve is either being too sensitive or overly dramatic or even cruel towards her mother. Most everyone has some level of strife or drama in their relationship with their mother, but if they go into this memoir believing that they might empathize with Leve's experiences, they may well be shocked or questioning Leve's veracity when they discover that this situation is beyond anything they've experienced in their personal dynamics.

I imagine most readers won't be able to directly empathize with Leve's experiences, but it's certainly a memoir that may make you grateful for the environment you did grow up in, similar to reading The Glass Castle. If you have had a similar life, however, this memoir can be all that much more illuminating and gratifying, with the tendency to make you feel just slightly less crazy.

My one regret over the outcome of An Abbreviated Life was that Leve had managed to gather the strength to walk away before she was 45 years old.

Lolly K Dandeneau says

"I am in hiding, an emotional fugitive."

<https://bookstalkerblog.wordpress.com...>

I held my breath in sorrow for her, even what passes for normal when there isn't anything to measure your life against, Ariel knew her mother's behaviors were 'off'. Being a child and unable to have your own feelings validated, always walking on eggshells, wondering which mommy you will deal with today, it has to do something to you. The painful part of memoirs for me is knowing you can't step in and help and it isn't fiction. On the other side of the coin, obviously her mother wasn't normal and needed help, it's interesting how adults don't know how to step in and often when they do it makes things worse or nothing happens. Without pointing fingers (for legal reasons) anyone with someone in their life who is histrionic and a grand manipulator, they know full grown adults can tremble around such people. Most people don't like scenes, and so many of us can't untangle ourselves from expert manipulators- I don't care how smart you profess to be. When it's coming from someone you are related to or love, there is guilt, because we are supposed to love each other no matter what, especially if it's your parent (honor thy mother and father etc). I have seen and been told tales of such a parent, and I don't care if it's labeled abuse or not, speaking to an adult that has lived with such a parent, it lingers like a bad smell. And sometimes, removing yourself is vital to survival. So why didn't anyone save her? I thought about that, because her mother was 'crafty' and could easily convince others that she was fine, and she tells us as much. It's tricky.

A mother's love should be without strings attached, minus conditions, ideally anyway. This isn't so for Ariel. The cringe worthy moments when her mother made scenes, begging even for a man 'not to leave', or embarrassing her at school, or in front of friends is gut wrenching. (again without saying who, I know a similar incident of someone I love dearly being humiliated when he was a little boy by his mother, he is in his 70's- these things stay with us). Thinking about the exciting people her mother knew didn't take the sting out of her version of such gatherings, who cares what celebrity is at your house when you are just a little kid who needs rest and has to get up for school but the adults are chaotic or loud, partying 'til the break of dawn.' It sounds silly, but to those who know sleep deprivation it's awful! If you care for children, you know this isn't right.

Reading about Ariel's life I have to admit, many people dismiss the suffering children of privilege go through, as if having things and money makes everything that happens to them okay. "Well you can't think I am a bad mom because I gave you everything." I have always felt when you raise children, you don't keep a tally of what's owed you. You give and nurture them because it's an expression of love, and it's your job to guide them. You don't get to erase bad treatment because you 'gave so much,' anymore than abusing your partner is fine as long as you say sorry with gifts. I imagine this is a young woman people would envy from afar and never imagine how lonely and abused she was. There are people who flinch because of physical abuse, why should we think emotional abuse is any less damaging? The good is the people who were there for her, but choices she has to make later in life about her mother aren't a quick fix, certainly it is something she still internalizes and struggles with, but necessary, so very necessary. This is about a little girl who in so many ways was her mother's keeper, and maybe will get a second chance at childhood through love.

Luke Narlee says

Updated!

I wanted to make sure and rate this memoir before the year was over, because it's one of my favorite books of the year. Easily my favorite memoir/non-fiction of 2016.

This fascinating memoir is a "mommy dearest" type tale, written so beautifully that you sometimes forget how unsettling it all is. Ariel Leve grew up with a celebrity-ish mother who was both unpredictable and manic, not to mention completely insane (as far as I'm concerned). She was forever telling poor little Ariel that nobody else in her life really cared about her or loved her or even wanted her around. Her crazy mother was the only one on this Earth that she could truly trust. The psychological abuse was endless. Her mother would disappear for days at time, focused on her career or having fun with other men, while a series of nanny-types helped look after Ariel. The best person for the job had a habit of changing frequently because nobody could deal with her mother's antics. Which was unfortunate because these other women were far better mothers' to her than her real mother ever dreamed of being. And unfortunately, her father, despite being a decent man, dipped out early. Left the country when Ariel was five in order to get as far away from her mother as possible. The fascinating part is, Ariel never seems to judge her father for this. There's no resentment. She doesn't hold a grudge. She spends loving moments with him as an adult because she loves him and understands how impossible her mother was. Come to think of it, Ariel never seems to judge anybody in this book, even her mother. She tells her stories matter-of-factly. This is what happened, and this is how it made me feel at the time. She was clearly wise beyond her years, even as a young child. I guess that's more likely to happen when you're forced to grow up really fast.

The things that her mother does and says is often disturbing, like an accident you can't look away from. For example, her mother loved to play a game called "giving birth," where she would try to relive "the happiest moment of her life" by laying completely naked in bed under a sheet, and have seven-year-old Ariel crawl underneath, get between her legs for a minute or two and then pop out as her mother would blow and grunt and pretend to give birth to her daughter again. Interestingly enough, this game provided some of their most genuinely touching moments between the two of them. This was when Ariel felt truly loved and appreciated by her mother. She felt special. Despite the disturbing nature of how the game was being played, there was nothing sexual about it. Her mother honestly had no idea that what she was doing could possibly be deemed inappropriate. This is evident by the fact that during one of the few times that Ariel has a friend over to play, her mother invites them both into her bedroom to play "giving birth." Needless, to say, that friend was never allowed to come over again. I have no doubt that Ariel's mom loved her very much, she just wasn't mentally fit to show it properly. I think that's part of the reason I find her mother to be a very interesting character to read about, as opposed to someone that made my skin crawl every time she was on the page. I think that's one of the things that sets this story apart from the other books of this sort, such as the more extreme "Mommy Dearest" or "Sybil." (God, the woman who played Sybil's mom in the movie version still gives me the creeps.)

I never found any of the content to be so disturbing that I wanted to stop reading. I think it's important to point out (for those who are sensitive to this) that her mother never physically harms Ariel (that I can remember). Apart from the things I've already mentioned, she was mostly an embarrassment to Ariel. Showing up at her school inappropriate clothing. Saying things that would make anyone's jaw drop. No filter, and no sense of needing one.

Ariel Leve is a fantastic writer, and she knows how to tell a tale. I love the format of this book, in which she

chooses to jump back and forth between past and present. In some books, this technique can be rather annoying. But not in this one, because the segments fit together perfectly. First, she'll tell you a tale of her past, then show you how it still affects her everyday life as an adult, as she tries to be as normal as she can while interacting with other adults, children and potential boyfriends. She's still trying to figure out what normal is, because her childhood was anything but. I've known far too many people with this problem, and it's heartbreaking. Children deserve better than this. Love can be many things, but it's certainly not a threat to hold over someone's head, or a method in which to keep someone mentally hostage, as is the case here.

Another thing I like about this book is how it's mostly written in quick, brief paragraphs and short chapters. I feel like I could pick this up at any time, read a page or two, admire it and put it down. Now, you may be thinking that's weird, considering what she's writing about, but for me, the entire book has a very relaxing, dream-like quality to it that puts me in a bit of a trance. The segments about her adult life are often gorgeous and uplifting, in both setting and the poetic way in which it's written. Even the childhood flashbacks have a beautifully, yet haunting surreal quality to them.

Here's a good example of how she's jump from adulthood, back to childhood in the following two paragraphs. Here, compares what she learned about love then, to what she's learning about it now. In the first paragraph she's an adult, beginning to form a close, meaningful bond with her boyfriend's daughters:

THE GIRLS BOTH run across the garden after me as I get on my bicycle. I open the green gate and they follow me out onto the black pebble road. They stand there, both of them shielding their eyes from the sun, seeing me off. "I'm going to stay here and watch you ride away on your bicycle," one of them says. "Because I love you." I pedal away for a few seconds and then stop. I get off the bike, flick the kickstand with my foot, and stand with both arms extended forward. This is the signal for a hug. The girls come running over and wrap their arms around my torso, one on either side. I pull them in tight. We embrace for a few seconds and then I lean down so that they can kiss me on the face. I kiss them back, several times, before taking off again on my bike.

MY MOTHER SAYS, "What kind of daughter doesn't want to kiss her own mother? How did I get such an unaffectionate child?" I don't respond. Her ire doesn't change my mind. And I don't feel criminal. When my mother kissed me, I wiped the kiss off my cheek. I used the back of my hand and wrinkled my nose. Her kisses were uncomfortable on my skin. She was wounded by this reaction. But it wasn't meant to punish her. It was an instinctive revolt. She responded by grasping me in her arms, suffocating me with kiss after kiss after kiss after kiss. "Don't!" I protested, trying to disentangle from her clutch, like a cat that thrashes around when it doesn't want to be held. I knew, in a way that I couldn't articulate, her kisses weren't about me.

For me, reading this book was like making a new best friend. One that is very flawed and obviously has a lot of issues to work out, but she's also very genuine and warm-hearted, so when she talks about her past, you listen. Because you care.

There's a lot of people that grow up with unstable parents. I for one, am not one of those people, thankfully. My parents were as kind and loving as parents get. But, like I said, many people have, and I think reading this helped me to understand what they went through a whole lot better.

So, this one comes highly recommended from me. I realize this won't be any easy read for some, depending on how well they can relate, but I recommend giving it a chance. It's very easy to get lost in it and read through it pretty fast because of how smoothly it's written. You read the flashbacks in horror (but, again, not like "not for the squeamish" horror, just unsettling) then read the other parts with admiration, and a smile on your face.

If you're on the fence with this one, I recommend clicking on a sample and reading the first page or two. After that you'll already have a pretty good of an idea of what you're getting yourself into. And if you are a fan of memoirs in general, like I know some of you are, then you'd be foolish to not at least give this one a shot.

It seems preposterous to me that a book this good only has 65 reviews on Goodreads currently. And only four on Amazon! I know there's a been a lot of books written about this topic already, but they're rarely as good as this.

If you know anyone who grew up with a mentally unstable parent, I guarantee you'll look at them in a different light after this. And if that person is you, then I hope reading this will bring you some sort of comfort, and that it's similar to listening to a new friend who can relate to what you went through. But it feels like this will hit too close to home, then that's okay too. Skip it. You've been through enough. There's many other books in the sea.

Eve says

“Imagine someone lies to you and about you. Imagine this person is your mother, whose job it is to provide safety, security, consistency, and love. ‘You’re my sunshine,’ she says. ‘The love of my life.’”

But her love comes with conditions. You need to be able to give her what she needs first. You have to meet her demands. For attention, appreciation, company, and admiration. Anything else is unacceptable. But no matter how much you give, there will be a need for more. These are the terms. You were five. You were ten. You were twenty. You were forty. And at forty-five, something changed.”—Ariel Leve

I am drawn to people's life stories, especially when they are about troubled relationships between mother and daughter. I have a great relationship with my own mother, although we've weathered some tough storms *together*. Ariel's account of growing up with her mother, feminist poet, Sandra Hochman, was so incredulous that I could understand why she first attempted to write it as a novel. Hochman was a narcissistic, eccentric artist who didn't have an ounce of maternal instinct. I feel harsh writing that, but some people just aren't cut out for parenthood. I couldn't help but be reminded of *Mommy Dearest*.

At the age of forty-five, Ariel decides to cut ties with her manipulative mother. The memoir begins with her contemplating how to word her letter from half way across the world. Thereafter she relates growing up with her mother in their glitzy Manhattan apartment, where her mom hosted elaborate dinner parties with famous authors and actors of the 60s and 70s. Early on it's clear that Ariel is the parent figure, and that Hochman has serious boundary issues (also more than likely suffers from mental illness).

“Whether abuse of a child is physical, psychological, or sexual, it sets off a ripple of hormonal changes that wire the child’s brain to cope with a malevolent world.”—Martin Teicher

One day Leve realizes that what she's always thought of as a “normal childhood” was in fact quite the reverse. With help from her psychiatrist and a prominent doctor at a notorious behavioral hospital, she travels back in time to reanalyze her toxic relationship with her mother and to see if she can be rehabilitated.

I love the way this book ended. I love the way it was sparsely written, and the journalistic feel of the relating

of events. I rated this 4.5 stars, but I'm pretty sure that it's a favorite of mine. I would highly recommend it.

Hannah says

I don't quite know how to write about this book in a way that is respectful to the author and the genre. This is always a problem I run into when I don't quite enjoy a memoir. This is somebody's life I am talking about and who am I to tell them how to tell their story? But I struggled with this.

Ariel Leve tells of her difficult relationship with her emotionally (and maybe physically) abusive mother and how this has influenced who she became. It is not until her forties that she realizes what long-reaching consequences her childhood had. I am in awe of Leve's bravery of confronting her inner demons and of trying to find closure.

The thing that hit me the strongest was the realisation that Ariel Leve is still not sure anybody will believe her account of her relationship with her mother. The gaslighting cut so deep that even years, even decades later, while writing her memoir, she needs outside perspectives, the assurance that others have seen it too, to be able to tell this story. Which is why she quotes letters written by people close to her, her therapist, and even her father; she feels the need to prove beyond doubt that she had a horrible childhood. This was by far the most successful part of the book for me – and something I am not so sure was intentional on the author's part.

The book is loosely structured and told in short paragraphs jumping through time; a technique I am usually particularly fond of. Here I found the framing (a story of her falling in love with a quiet man who never talks about his feelings and of starting to act as a mother to his twin daughters) a bit tedious. She never examines her relationship in a meaningful way and moreover seems to think that because Mario does not talk much he must be more truthful and more worthy than other people. A conclusion I cannot agree with – I mean, I love that she found happiness, but equating quietness with honesty seems a bit shortsighted.

Leve seems unable to look outside her own trauma while pretending to do just that (I am notoriously glad when women unapologetically center their art around themselves, but they do have to own it). She sometimes sounds dismissive of other people's trauma to a point that made it difficult to read (example: "My emotionally impaired beliefs have a source. This information is comforting because it is a real, scientific explanation. Feeling grounded in an uncertain world is not a matter of willpower or getting over it in the way one might get over a breakup, a lost job, a death, or an outrage." p. 138). When talking to a neuroscientist specialising in trauma she realises the myriad ways in which her trauma has fundamentally altered her – but she never extends that line of thinking to her mother who supposedly also suffered trauma. And now, I don't mean to say that she has to take her abuser's feelings into account when writing about her own story, but it does not seem to fit into the overall narrative voice that she doesn't find these parallels and draws on them. Especially because she herself works to provide the twins with the childhood stability she had wished for herself. That this inability to give proper room to the outside world might be directly influenced by her mothers gaslighting is something I would have loved to have seen explored.

The book is well-written and competently told. It just does not even come close to some of the brilliant memoirs I have read the last couple of years. And it is a shame because I was so very sure this would be amazing.

You can find this review and other thoughts on books on my blog.

Lisa Hazen says

Since I'm on a memoir binge, I really wanted to love this one. But it felt more like a personal catharsis, less like a narrative. It was tough to really get invested in the story because it felt like the retelling wasn't fully fleshed out.

Bill says

3.0 Stars

At the age of 45, often from a country half way around the world, Ariel Leve tells the story of her psychological abuse at the hands of her mother while growing up at 180 E 79th Street in NYC, and a lifetime working to repair the damage.

Brain damage. That's what Emily calls it. Emily is her therapist. Ariel has been seeing her on and off for the past seventeen years.

“There are parts of your brain that did not develop the way they should have. And the way you function is a consequence ... she explains how children reflect the world they are raised in. Trauma, fear and anxiety alters the brain as it is developing.”

Leve is an accomplished and successful journalist and author. Her mother was a successful American poet and feminist film-maker. Her mother suffered from the trauma of abandonment by her parents at a very early age and her mental illness rained down on Ariel in the form of psychological ambush, conditional love, violent and vulgar outbursts, emotional instability and threats.

I struggled with the cadence of the story, told through paragraphic bursts of the past and present, moving from today to the past when she was five years old, seven years old, nine years, in her bedroom in NYC to her time with her loving father in Thailand. I didn't care for the literary approach but I suppose that reflects the turmoil of her life.

Arrested life. Autopilot existence. An adulthood of recuperation. The story is sad but profound and ultimately redeeming. While the damage cannot be completely undone, Leve seems to end her story with a degree of self-love and an elevated sense of self-esteem. I feel her strength and determination to live her adult life in the face of a withering onslaught of feelings and flashbacks to her childhood, an arrested life, An Abbreviated Life!

Thomas says

How do you review a book that mirrors your soul? *An Abbreviated Life* stunned me over and over again, as Ariel Leve writes about growing up with a mother who abused her, a mother whose constant venom and lack

of boundaries reminded me of my own. Leve's mother berated her nonstop and made her feel unsafe in her own home; my mother yelled at me all the time and sent me sprawling into an eating disorder. Senior year of high school, I ran away from home and then left for college to preserve my sanity, my health; in her mid-40s, Leve escaped across the world to Bali, so she could break free from her mother's imprisonment and learn to trust and to love again. Leve recovered from her awful childhood through writing, through receiving the kindness of her caretakers and father and therapist; I healed much in the same way, through reading, through accepting the care of my mentors and friends and therapist. A quote that captures just a slice of Leve's experience growing up with an unstable, toxic mother:

"If I wanted independence in any way, I was hurting her. Her feeling that she was being abandoned would trigger her aggression. Her behavior threatened my safety. I deserved it. I was out to get her. I'd been poisoned against her. I wasn't smart enough to get it. I wasn't appreciative of who she was and what she did. I was special, brilliant, and talented. All she cared about was my happiness. I love you meant nothing. I hate you meant nothing. She meant all of it. I felt none of it."

I have so much to praise about *An Abbreviated Life*. I could write forever about Leve's concise, piercing prose, her unflinching, ruthless, yet compassionate examination of her past, and the beautiful, tragic way she juxtaposes her mother's abuse with how she herself got to parent her partner's children with affection and stability. But I am most blown away by her courage. In this book, she writes about gaslighting, about how the worst part of being a trauma victim is not the trauma itself, but how people will try to erase your experience, by calling you a liar and saying your suffering never happened. As someone who has faced this onslaught myself, I know the pain, that black hole of self-doubt that opens when individual people and society both refuse to acknowledge child abuse, especially emotional abuse. Leve's book, then, is the ultimate light in a world that wants to keep people in the dark. Through sharing her story, she allows others to feel less ashamed, less alone, and more able to seek the support they need. Another passage that struck me to my core, about not having the privilege of a loving parent:

"Privilege would have been falling asleep at night without fear about what would happen as the night went on. Privilege would have been not being woken up with terror. Privilege would have been not having to disown negative feelings or suppress them because those feelings were not permitted. Not being punished for responding appropriately to inappropriate behavior. Privilege would have been not being held responsible for the stability of my mother's psyche. Privilege would have been stability. An indemnity from being idealized one minute, devalued the next. Privilege would have been a parent capable of empathy. A protector."

Overall, I am just so thankful that Ariel Leve wrote this magnificent, painful, hopeful memoir, that she cultivated courage and resilience and healing, and that she found people who loved her unconditionally even when her mother did not. I am so thankful to live in a time when creative nonfiction and memoir are taking off, where writers like Ariel Leve, Caroline Knapp, Garrard Conley, and so many others can inspire us with their strength and vulnerability. And, as self-centered as this is, I am thankful for my own healing process, for the people in my life - including those on Goodreads - who have helped me help myself, to achieve the kind of self-soothing that Leve writes about so eloquently in *An Abbreviated Life*. I will end this review with one final quote, one of my favorites, because it shows that for those of us who have faced abuse like Leve's - we will be okay.

"But I did break free. I am here now, in Bali, and I must learn to control the impulses that will destroy the loving climate I thrive in, one that I have fought hard to achieve. I have the scary feeling of not knowing what will happen. The tiniest rupture feels like a chasm. It is not about the moment; it is forty-five years of history, and I want to know the future is secure. I just want I just need I just I just. I let it go. And I, in spite of

my need to be reassured, focus instead on the good feelings. I trust, which is so hard to come by, that it will be okay. That I will be okay. No matter what."

Wanda says

As I read this I found myself thinking the author's therapist must have suggested she 'write a letter' and this book was the result. A few lines from the opening paragraph of chapter 50 show what I mean, "Sometimes those stories free us. Sometimes they free others. When they are not told, they free no one." The stories Ariel Leve tells describe a stealthy sort of abuse that transcends the physical and includes many of the classic tactics used by narcissists. I hope writing this book was therapeutic for its author and will be illuminating for others.

I received this book for free through Goodreads Giveaways.

Kelli says

I want to give every memoir five stars. Writing a memoir is such a brave decision...making oneself vulnerable, opening up chapters of your life for all to see. I give nothing but love to the author, who shares her story of the deep psychological abuse she endured at the hands of her mentally unstable mother. I rejoice in her strength to not only persevere but in most respects overcome her childhood. I hope that writing this memoir was cathartic and healing for her. Stylistically, it read purposefully disjointed and painfully honest. The writing was excellent. The last two chapters were particularly affecting.

But if I am honest, this did not resonate with me as it did with so many other readers. It seemed endless. Endlessly endless. 2.5 stars for this one but all respect and love to the author.

Elizabeth says

because bat shit crazy mother.

Robin says

The writing is gorgeous, the story is real. Do not miss *An Abbreviated Life* by Ariel Leve. This book is about survival and I hope it finds its way into many hands.

Charlotte says

This is hard slog - not because of the content or subject - but the way it's written. I'm assuming it was

structured to reflect memory, but the result was a very chop/change, inconsistent, paragraph to paragraph swing between the story/memories and her current feelings/in time.

Others here have wondered why it was published and I have to agree. This reads as a cathartic outlet of someone who is only dealing with their past in their 40's, rather than a book which has had a long time of reflection and understanding invested into it.

She speaks for some reasons for her mother's behaviour, but the overarching tone is that of a stunned victim. I kept waiting for the pivotal moment of change, the turn of her perspective and I thought it would come when she spoke to the neuroscientist, but the woeful tone continued, as if knowledge was reinforcement, rather than power. The continual pathos was so frustrating, as someone who shares a similar experience this book reinforced the sense that the affected will always be broken, when in reality many people from these situations go on to live rich and meaningful lives.

Sian Lile-Pastore says

I think I've mentioned it before on Goodreads - but if there is a memoir in which Andy Warhol comes to dinner - I am going to be reading that memoir.

Less celeb appearances than I thought in this - But that's ok I just completely adore great written memoirs written by women set in bohemian New York.

This is a memoir about Ariel's crazy mom, Ariel coming to terms with her privileged and yet deprived childhood and her eventual estrangement from her mom. It's an interesting and sometimes tough read and my sympathies were torn. Loved the style, loved how searching and thoughtful it was. Sometimes it seemed quite slight and I was less interested in her present day relationship with the hot Italian. (I made the hot bit up - he may not have been hot. But he does carpentry so probably is)

Riva Sciuto says

One of the best memoirs I have ever read. Ariel invites us to experience life through her stories -- as brutal and excruciating and painful as they are. Her recollections -- spanning from early childhood to mid-adulthood -- reflect on the long-term ramifications of emotional and psychological abuse -- but her desire for a better, freer life ultimately prevails. Her openness makes us feel the wrath of an unstable and erratic mother, but her decision to free herself from the abuse reminds us that we ALWAYS have the choice for a better life. Ariel's memoir is a beautiful reminder that we may not be able to choose our family, but we can always, always choose our own path.
