

Title: April Was Here: Leaving My Mark
Author: April O'Brien
Genre: Drama / Memoir

Setting: Midwest
Pages: 372
Period: 1970s

Best Medium for Adaptation:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Studio Feature Film | <input type="checkbox"/> Documentary | <input type="checkbox"/> Drama/Comedy TV series |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Independent Feature Film | <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative/reality TV series | <input type="checkbox"/> Children's TV series |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animation – Feature Film | <input type="checkbox"/> Animation – TV series (adult) | <input type="checkbox"/> Webseries |
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Logline

A young woman from an impoverished, neglectful family is faced with many challenges as she struggles to better her life.

Brief Summary

Born to a teenage mother who does not want her, April has a difficult childhood. The young girl spends all of her energy taking care of her younger siblings, and is only rewarded with abuse from her mother. When she finally attempts to escape her mother's influence and build her own life, a combination of mistakes and bad luck plague her. Still, April strives to persevere through every obstacle: from a cultishly religious school to an abusive husband and teenage motherhood, all the way up to the recent death of her child. She handles it all with a surprising level of grace and humor.

Synopsis

APRIL is born into an extremely poor Midwestern family in the 1950s. HER MOTHER is only 17 years old when she gives birth, and she immediately resents April. She had hoped to escape her small town by getting married, but now she has a child and is still unhappy. April's GRANDPARENTS take care of her because her mother does not want to. April's BROTHER is born two years later, around the time that her FATHER is sent to prison for stealing a car.



April's mother divorces her father. She then meets a nice man named BILL, who is in the Air Force. April's mother becomes pregnant with his CHILD, but before she gives birth, Bill dies in a car accident. The family is left with some life insurance and military benefits. Using this new cash, April's mother begins to move the family around. April is very sad to leave her grandparents and extended family. When her mother goes back to school, April is forced to begin taking care of her siblings at a very young age. April's mother resents her children for stealing her life. She is the hardest on April because she is the eldest. She often verbally and physically abuses her in spurts of anger. April's mom has another DAUGHTER with a kind, RED-HAIRED MAN. April later discovers that this man is actually her true father, as well as her eldest brother's. April's mother is now 25 years old with four children. Soon after, she has another daughter, RENEE, with another MAN.

When April is 12 years old, her life takes a dramatic turn when her mother finds religion. The family becomes very active in the church. In many ways, this improves their lives. They now have the charity of the church to provide some financial support. The family moves back to Oklahoma, where April's grandparents live. Over the summer they stay at her grandparent's new home, a trailer on private farm land. April has a very fun, innocent summer, but eventually the children find out that the reason the family came together is because their grandma has a brain tumor. After the doctors take the tumor out, their grandma is left more or less a vegetable. April is crushed, as her grandma has always been her true mother figure. April's relationship with her real mother gets even worse at this point.

Always eager to help others, but not her own children, April's mother takes in a "troubled" girl from church, named MARIA JO. She is a bad influence on April from the moment she arrives at the house. Maria Jo convinces her to sneak out of the house to go meet her BOYFRIEND and his FRIEND. She then pressures her into letting them steal her mother's car for the night. April drinks beer for the first time with the boys, but does not like it; she is very innocent. When the police are called, April makes it home in time to act like she was not involved. Maria Jo is sent away.

April's mom continues to rage against her. One day she asks April if she would like to move to Texas to live with one of her CHURCH FRIENDS. April cannot believe her luck and quickly agrees. She desperately wants to get out of the house, but when they arrive in Texas, April is in for a rude awakening: she is actually being sent to a religious home for girls. April immediately senses that she does not want to stay there, but her mother refuses to let her leave. As soon as she gets to her room, GRANNY, the woman in charge, begins calling her a slut and a sinner. April, an innocent virgin, is shocked and dismayed.

The home is like a prison. The girls are beaten, threatened, and spied on. They are also forced to follow insanely strict rules. Anyone who even suggests wanting to leave is beaten mercilessly, and they have very little contact with the outside world. April learns to keep her head down and to try not to attract any attention.

April is heartbroken when Granny tells her that her grandmother died, months after the fact. She then befriends a girl named BRENDA, and the two become inseparable. One day, Brenda finds out that her SISTER is missing. Soon after, she learns that her sister has actually been kidnapped and murdered. Brenda is destroyed by this news, and after Granny does not allow her to go to



the funeral, she attempts to commit suicide. April finds her in the bathroom, with her wrists slit but still alive. When Granny comes in, she slaps Brenda and tells her that she is an idiot – she cut her wrists in the wrong direction for a successful suicide. They do not even send her to a doctor.

As the home becomes filled with more and more girls, it becomes more difficult for the ADMINISTRATORS to be as controlling over everyone. The more trusted girls, like April, are not watched as closely. Although all letters are carefully censored, when April's mother sends her a tape recorder for Christmas, April is able to secretly send her mother tapes asking to let her leave. Soon after, April is called into Granny's office. Granny tells her that her mother is holding a fundraiser at their church in Tucson in order to fund the new kitchen at the home. She tells her that she can go help her mother for two weeks only. April is thrilled; she agrees and secretly plans to convince her mother to let her stay home permanently. She has been at the home for two years at this point, and believes that Granny will never agree to let her leave.

When she arrives home, she does her best to be a perfect daughter for her mom, so that she will not make her go back to the home. Finally, the day before she is supposed to return, her mother agrees that she can stay. April enrolls in high school. She is very different than her peers: she dresses very conservatively and carries a large amount of guilt because she has been ingrained with the idea that she will go to hell if she does anything wrong. She is shocked when her mom allows her to go to a basketball game with a BOY from church. When he drops her off, he kisses her. She feels like a sinner. She does not go out with the boy for long.

Eventually April begins to loosen up. She starts to wear bell bottoms and makeup like the other kids at school, listen to rock and roll music, and smoke cigarettes. Boys notice her, and she loves it because she is starved for attention at home. One night she sneaks off to a party and is convinced to drink and take a pill for the first time. She is too innocent to really know what she is doing. She also has sex for the first time at the party, while she is very out of it. It hurts a lot and is very embarrassing afterwards. Shortly after, she goes out drinking again and is caught by her mother. She stays with a NURSE FRIEND of her mother's for a while after that, while her mother cools down.

During her time out of the house, she meets a handsome boy named ALBERT, who is a few years older than she is. She is immediately mesmerized by him. The two are convinced that they are in love. Albert is Hispanic and very charming and spoiled. His family dislikes April from the moment they meet her. One day, the nurse tells April that her mother wants her to return to the religious home. April is horrified. She runs away with Albert and they stay in his friend's trailer for a few weeks. They smoke weed and have sex all day. April dyes her hair black to avoid detection, but when the police come and threaten Albert, April is forced to turn herself in.

Her mother comes to pick her up from the police station. Surprisingly, she does not hit her and she tells April that she does not have to go back to the girls' home if she feels that strongly about it. She also allows her to continue seeing Albert. When April's mother receives word that her father is very sick, she goes home to Oklahoma. Once again, April runs off with Albert.

Soon after, she is again forced to turn herself in. April assumes that it will be the same as last time, but this time her mother tells the police to keep her locked up. She goes to juvie for several

weeks, until she promises that she will not see Albert anymore. But as soon as she gets home she immediately starts seeing him again. They concoct a plan to get her pregnant, so that their parents will be forced to allow them to get married. They are successful on both counts, much to the dismay of their respective families. April is only 16. Meanwhile, April's grandpa dies and her mother begins a long-distance relationship with CLARK, the doctor who treated him. April is very sad to lose another of her parental figures.

During a party before they are married, Albert hits April while he is drunk. The next day he is very apologetic and sweet, so she forgives him. Their wedding is a mess. April's mother forces her to wear a red dress so that everyone will know that she is a slut. The whole thing is very awkward, since both families are unhappy with the marriage. Afterwards, Albert and his friends have a party. Everyone stays very late. When April asks Albert if they can ask people to leave so that they can go to bed, he hits her again. She is shocked and frightened.

From then on, Albert begins beating her regularly. His personality completely changes: he is demanding and harsh. They buy a trailer, and Albert will not even give April a key to it because he wants to have complete control over her; he sees her as his possession. The only place he allows her to go is to his parent's house, who hate her. Albert will usually stay out drinking until three in the morning, then come home and beat April, force her to have sex, and then make him food. April also knows that he cheats on her, but she does not even care; she hopes that he will find someone else and leave her.

One night when Albert is having a party at the trailer, he beats April very badly. That night she goes in to labor. She is only seven-and-a-half months pregnant. Fortunately, the baby is healthy, and they name him MICHAEL. April hopes that the baby will change things, but he does not. One day, when they are at Albert's family's house, Albert starts hitting his SISTER. Scared, April runs to get the POLICE. When they arrive, everyone acts as if nothing happened. After they leave, Albert beats April very badly as punishment for telling on him. He then takes Michael and tells her that she will never see her baby again.

April's mom comes to pick her up. She takes her to a lawyer, telling her that she has to divorce Albert because he is a monster. Her mother assures her that they will get the baby back, but for now she should come to her family's house. They stop at April's trailer to collect belongings. Albert comes back and they all fight. There are many BYSTANDERS, but no one does anything to help them. Albert breaks April's mother's breastbone and threatens to kill April. When the police arrive they handcuff Albert, but they cannot take him in unless April presses charges. April does not because she is scared. Albert is released and he brings back the baby.

Over the course of the next few months, April repeatedly runs away from Albert, but he tracks her down every time. She always returns home with him when he threatens her life. He continues to beat her. After one particularly brutal beating, April goes to the hospital. She tries to lie and say she fell, but the DOCTOR can see hand prints all over her body. He tells her that she needs to press charges against her husband. She agrees, but later drops the charges. Instead, she goes to Albert's LAWYER and signs divorce papers that he has drawn up. Albert gets the baby. At this point, April is still just 17 years old.



April then stays with a series of friends and acquaintances. She meets some older BOYS who do heroin and she tries it a few times, once with a dirty needle. She also has a one-night stand with ANOTHER BOY from her high school. By this time her mother has married Clark, the doctor she was seeing. April's new stepfather is not a very warm man. He comes from a wealthy family and is very well-educated but he is extremely cheap and makes it very apparent that he does not want to take on all of his new wife's children. Clark initially tells April that he will help her get her baby back, but then he changes his mind. When the family goes to visit Clark's relatives in Denver, April ends up going to the hospital. She has a horrible case of gonorrhea and hepatitis. The doctor tells her that she will not be able to have any more children, but that she will survive. Her mother and stepfather are furious. Clark eventually pulls her out of the hospital, against the doctor's orders.

Clark and her mother leave April alone with the kids in Denver for almost a month. She unhappily enrolls in high school again. They put her in the twelfth grade, because of her age, even though she is way behind the other students academically. She then gets a job that she loves at a restaurant and makes some good friends there. When she can no longer stand life at her family's house, she moves in with a quiet guy from work named ROGER. April and Roger begin a relationship, but she is not really attracted to him. She just uses him to better her situation.

One night, Roger pulls a knife on one of April's friends. She freaks out and gets the police, even though apparently it was a joke. After that, Roger insists that they leave town to go visit his family. He reveals that Roger is actually his brother's name, which he took on because he was in trouble with the law after he jumped parole. His real name is Marvin – April cannot believe it. Soon after, she finds out that she is pregnant with his child. She is now 18.

After she has the baby, KATRINA, April leaves Marvin. She then meets a nice boy named KEVIN, who is three years her junior. He is very good to her and becomes extremely close with Katrina. Eventually he and April get married. They have now been together for 26 years. Her daughter Katrina has passed away, but she and Kevin are still grateful for the time they had with her.

Element Ratings

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Development Needed
Concept	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Story	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Characters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments/Suggestions for Adaptation

APRIL WAS HERE is an astonishing dramatic saga, in which the protagonist experiences a seemingly impossible series of horrific events. The author presents these occurrences in chilling detail, while still maintaining an air of humor and self-deprecation. Overall, between the content,



the strong writing, and the tone, this book has excellent potential as a dark and moving feature film. Indeed, this purported true story contains more twists and turns than most works of fiction. Depending on the treatment of the film and the author's ability to fine-tune the structure of the plotline, this story has the potential to work as either a cable network movie or a poignant independent project. If the latter is combined with a stellar cast and director, this plotline could create an Academy Award-level film.

The biggest issues facing the author at this point are minor structural nuances, most importantly the creation of a three-act structure. Film requires a much more concrete sense of beginning, middle, and end than literature. As currently written, though entertaining and interesting, the story is presented as a series of small vignettes, in which no single event is given more weight than the others. That said, the author would be well-served to decide just exactly which event in the story she would like to use as her climax. Then the other episodes can be structured around it. This may seem like a difficult task, because in real life the sense that all events lead to a climax and then resolve into a conclusion simply does not exist. But film does not work in the same way as real life, even if you are telling a true story.

The plotline needs to convey a feeling of continuously building tension (instead of the repeated small peaks and valleys that exist now) in order to be as compelling as possible. This said, the repeated instances of the same plot event should be restructured to reach their full emotional capabilities. For instance, when April leaves Albert multiple times, these occurrences should be boiled down to their most raw form, with one or two of the most dramatic depictions ultimately serving as the representative examples of all of the cases. In this manner, the audience will maintain their sense of compassion, surprise, and horror when Albert arrives to force her home, instead of becoming a little numb to these events due to their repetition. There are multiple points in the plot that could do with a similar pairing down. This would also help the story stay within the strict time limits of a feature film.

Additionally, while interesting for a book, minor, inconsequential anecdotes should be excluded from a film version. Similarly, the peripheral characters that are introduced for only a short segment of the plot can be eliminated in order to not bog down the audience with unnecessary information. Only the characters that actively propel the plotline forward should be included. It might even be helpful to exclude direct reference to the names of April's brothers and sisters, since they do not have a major influence on the personal-development story that she is telling. Instead, presenting her siblings as an unidentified mass might be more effective for the overwhelming sensation the author desires to convey in scenes like when April is left alone for a month to take care of her large family.

Overall, since the plot itself is so compelling and well-written, these structural changes are the only major issues that need addressing. The author does not need to change the real events, but can definitely exclude some minor episodes, characters, and acts of repetition in order to restructure the remainder of the story for optimal emotional impact.

Final Recommendation



authorHOUSE®

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Consider	Consider
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider with Development	
<input type="checkbox"/>		