

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 reveals the early years of the narrator's family life, set against the backdrop of modest beginnings and a series of challenges. Her parents, both young and just starting out in life, were struggling financially in their small home in Kentwood. Her mother, at 21, was no longer supported by her family, while her father, at 23, worked as a welder at oil refineries—jobs that were short-lived but physically demanding. In 1977, the couple had their first child, Bryan, and later moved to a three-bedroom ranch house as their family grew. This was just the beginning of a series of challenges and turning points for the family, with both parents navigating their own personal struggles as well as those within the family unit.

As her mother returned to school to pursue a teaching career, her father's drinking began to take a more significant toll on their lives. The growing strain of his alcoholism led to erratic behavior, with incidents like missing Bryan's first birthday party after a drinking binge. In 1980, following a Christmas morning where her father went missing after getting drunk at a party, her mother reached her breaking point. She decided to leave and filed for divorce, but after much pleading from both her father and his new wife, she reluctantly took him back. The instability in the family was only temporarily stabilized when her father shifted careers, starting a construction business that led to a small period of success with his gym, Total Fitness, which helped him regain some influence in the town.

During this period of recovery, her father began to establish himself as one of the most well-known figures in their small town, and the family's life started to stabilize. The family enjoyed large backyard crawfish boils and parties, but it's clear that there were darker undertones to these gatherings, as the narrator suspects the use of speed—common in that era—was involved. Meanwhile, her mother opened a daycare center with her sister, Aunt Sandra, and the family had a second child, the narrator,

born on December 2, 1981. Despite the difficult labor her mother endured with her birth, the narrator's arrival was met with love and affection, and she grew up surrounded by strong familial connections, especially with her aunt Sandra, who became like a second mother to her.

Growing up, the narrator had a deep affection for the women in her family, especially her Aunt Sandra and cousin Laura Lynne, who was just a few months younger than her. Together, they shared a bond that was as close as sisters, and their childhood was filled with companionship and support. Another crucial figure in her early life was her great-grandmother, Lexie Pierce, a woman known for her strength and bold personality. Though Lexie had been married seven times and had strong opinions about certain family members, including her son-in-law June, she played an instrumental role in helping care for the narrator and her siblings. Their time together was precious, filled with the warmth of shared experiences, like sleepovers and listening to slow 1950s ballads from Lexie's record collection.

The bond between the narrator and her great-grandmother Lexie was exceptionally close, and she cherished every moment spent with her. Her great-grandmother's love and care provided a sense of comfort and stability during the narrator's formative years. Lexie would often have her over for sleepovers, where they would go through her makeup cabinet, enjoy delicious breakfasts, and nap together. The narrator loved the closeness they shared, the smell of Lexie's face powder and perfume as she drifted off to sleep. However, a frightening incident involving a car accident that Lexie caused led to the end of their time together. Lexie's involvement in a minor car accident, where the car got stuck in a hole and required a tow truck, left the narrator's mother concerned, and as a result, she forbade her daughter from spending any more time with her great-grandmother.

Through these stories, the reader is introduced to the complexities of family life, the challenges of navigating alcoholism and strained relationships, and the resilience of a young girl finding strength in her family bonds. The narrator's connection to her parents, her brother, and her extended family shaped her into someone who deeply

values love, support, and understanding. Even as she faced the realities of a difficult childhood, the presence of strong women and a close-knit family gave her the stability needed to grow. Though moments of pain, loss, and confusion were part of her journey, they also served as defining moments, influencing her path in the years that followed.

