

# **Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim Study Guide**

**Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim by David Sedaris**

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# Plot Summary

"Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim" by David Sedaris is a collection of episodes from the author's life. Growing up in his very early days in upstate New York and later in Raleigh, North Carolina, David gives the reader insight into his life with his large family, his relationships with his parents, and with some of his many siblings. While the main focus of this book is on David's childhood and adolescence, some stories in this collection are from his adult life which includes episodes about his relationship with long-time partner, Hugh.

As David looks back on his younger years, he more clearly understands the destructive nature of his mother and father's parenting style than when he was actually living it. He brings adult prospective to the many times he was abandoned by them and felt like an outcast in his own home. It is obvious that David loved his mother, Sharon, and saw good qualities in her. Sharon never met a stranger and was at ease speaking with just about anyone. She could read people well and her intuition about them was often spot on. However, she often displayed a remoteness toward her own children and had a penchant for relentlessly criticizing them.

In one incident, Sharon shoved David and all his little sisters outside to play in the snow. The kids were all off from school on snow days and were apparently driving her crazy. She locked the door and after two hours when the kids were nearly frozen, she refused to open the door and let them back in. Even after David pounded on the door and pleaded with her, she chose to ignore them. When he peeked in the window, he saw that she was sitting at the kitchen table with a large bottle of wine - something he and the other kids observed quite often. Sharon apparently struggled with alcoholism for many years, which contributed to her failures as a parent.

As for Lou, David's father, was concerned, he always promised more than he could deliver. He got his wife and kids excited about the prospect of buying a family vacation home at the beach. They even looked at several houses. But when push came to shove, he started talking it down. The dream of a vacation home for the entire family turned into a bar for him in the basement rumpus room. Many broken promises led to his kids having a deep-seated distrust in their father, not to mention the pain they suffered over the many disappointments that had to endure over the years.

Both parents were guilty of assigning labels to their children. Lisa was the eldest and was expected to graduate from college and earn a masters' degree. When she dropped out of college after two years, she was a huge disappointment to her parents and had to live with being a failure. Sharon and Lou didn't expect much from David and he lived up to that low bar for many years. They had no idea that they had a budding writer in their midst. Their lack of support made it difficult for David to build the self-esteem that was crucial in allowing his talents and abilities to eventually emerge.



# Chapter 1: Us and Them

## Chapter 1: Us and Them Summary and Analysis

When the Sedaris family first moved to North Carolina, they rented a house three blocks from school where David would start third grade. His mother only made one friend. Getting too close to people wasn't a good idea when you moved a lot, his mother told her. Not long after, the family moved again. It was only a mile away but too far to keep in contact with kids from the other neighborhood. He eventually became like his mother and pretended not making friends was his choice.

In New York State, the family had lived in the country where people could go outside and still be alone. But in the new place, their windows looked directly out over other houses. David walked around at night hoping to see a murder but all he saw was his neighbors watching television. Except Mr. Tomkey who didn't believe in television. Although David's parents claimed they agreed with Mr. Tomkey about televisions, they spent every night in front of theirs.

After word spread that Mr. Tomkey didn't own a television, everyone felt sorry for his wife and kids. Why should they suffer? Surely they read or listened to the radio to find out what was going on. David would creep in the Tomkey's yard at night and peek in the window to see what exactly the family did do. One thing he discovered, was that since they didn't have a television, they were forced to eat dinner together and talk to one another. David felt sorry for them and couldn't imagine living like that. He tried to look at life through their eyes but it was impossible. He thought of being friends with them but he decided it was more fun to keep his distance and continue to pity them.

The Tomkeys were gone on Halloween but surprised everyone when they decided to go trick-or-treating the day after Halloween. When the Tomkey kids appeared at their front door, David's mother, Sharon, sent David and his sisters, Gretchen and Lisa, to get some of the candy they collected for the kids. David and his sisters didn't want to give their candy away because they had earned it by trick-or-treating on the correct date. He ran to his room and separated his candy into piles - the Tomkeys would get the crummiest candy. Soon his mother came in and grabbed some candy, even some of the best candy that wasn't meant for the Tomkeys. The curiosity that David had for the Tomkeys quickly turned into hatred.



## Chapter 2: Let It Snow

### Chapter 2: Let It Snow Summary and Analysis

Winters were disappointing in North Carolina compared to those in New York. When it finally did snow a little, it melted and was gone within hours. There was one exception when David was in the fifth grade. There was a snow storm and the snow actually accumulated and stuck. While that first snow was still on the ground, it snowed again. The unexpected vacation from school extended to five days which almost drove Sharon crazy. She actually threw David and his sisters out of the house. Even after two hours of sledding, Sharon still wouldn't let them in. David looked in the kitchen window where he saw his mother drinking wine and watching TV. She followed each drink of wine with a cup of coffee. David knocked on the window, hollering at her to let them in but she ignored him.

David and his sisters threw snowballs at their mother's bedroom window but she just pulled the drapes over and continued to ignore them. They began to fear they'd die from exposure. They thought of calling their dad but didn't know his number. They figured the main reason their father went to work was to escape their mother. David suggested that if one of them would get hit by a car, it would make both of their parents feel guilty. He also suggested that Gretchen volunteer to be the victim. Gretchen declined the offer and in turn suggested that Amy or Tiffany "take the bullet." Tiffany, who would do anything to get attention, agreed to become the victim. Tiffany laid in the middle of the street while the other kids watched on the sidewalk. A neighbor was the first to drive by. The neighbor stopped and demanded to know if that was a body in the middle of the street. Lisa replied that it was sort of a body. The neighbor told their mother and soon their mother was tramping through the snow to retrieve her children only because she had no choice.



# Chapter 3: The Ship Shape

## Chapter 3: The Ship Shape Summary and Analysis

David and his mother were at a cleaners. A nicely dressed woman in front of them mentioned to the clerk that she had to return to "one" of her homes. David and Sharon couldn't get over what she said. In fact, they repeated it all day long. In the mid-sixties, North Carolina was often referred to as "Variety Vacationland." The Sedaris family usually went to the beach at Emerald Island for their vacations. It was mainly their mother's idea since their father, Lou, hated to be away from home.

One year, Lou waited too long to get a nice place at the beach and the family was forced to take a rundown rental house. Amy was bitten by a caterpillar and had an allergic reaction. She swelled to a dangerous level and had to be taken to the hospital. Sharon was angry with Lou for waiting too long to reserve a decent place to stay. From that time on, it was always Sharon who made the reservations for Emerald Island. She made sure they always got a nice Cape Cod style vacation home.

Lou grew to like Emerald Island so much that he suggested they buy a vacation home there. Everyone, especially Sharon, was wary. Lou would often make promises that he didn't keep. Their mother and father took two-year-old Paul with them to the real estate office but the other kids stayed behind at the vacation home. Sharon and Lou looked at several homes for sale and decided to give it some thought. The family discussed the prospect of spending Thanksgiving and even Christmas at their beach house.

Sharon and Lou were very interested in one particular house and took the kids to see it. David suggested they paint the silhouette of a ship on the sign in front of the house and call the house the "Ship Shape." No one else liked David's idea much and everyone began offering other suggested names. The family looked at the cottage but just as David feared, his father changed his mind. Maybe they should wait. Maybe they should put in a pool in the backyard in their house. The dream of a vacation house was soon reduced to installing a bar in the basement. Even as adults years later, David and his siblings would feel nostalgic when they drove by that cottage that had almost been "one of their homes." Over the years, their father would continue to make promises that he didn't keep.



# Chapter 4: Full House

## Chapter 4: Full House Summary and Analysis

Lou would usually fall asleep in his chair. Sharon fell asleep anywhere—even on the floor. There weren't many parental controls in the house. If his mother found him awake at two am on a school night, she'd just ask him if he wasn't tired. She wouldn't holler at him and make him go to bed like other mothers. Since the siblings were used to staying up as late as they wanted, all-night pj parties were no treat.

When David was eleven, he went to his first slumber party at a neighbor's house. Walt Winters had invited him but David wasn't very excited because he hardly knew the boy. His parents both encouraged him to go. David didn't want to tell his father that boys frightened him. There were three other boys plus Walt at the party. They talked about football and cars - subjects that David had no knowledge of or interest in.

Sharon would always say, "What is she on?" when she would run into Mrs. Winters. After being in her house just fifteen minutes, David had to agree with his mother. The boys watched a horror movie at midnight. Mrs. Winters had left a butcher knife dripping with ketchup in the bathroom to scare the boys. After an hour when no one had used the bathroom, she kept urging the boys to wash their hands. Mr. and Mrs. Winters turned in at two am. She hadn't been up that late since Lauren was born. Lauren was born prematurely and lived less than two days. David's mother thought it was creepy that they celebrated Lauren's birthday each year.

The boys engaged in "titty twisting" once Mr. and Mrs. Winters went to bed. Several boys jumped on David when he didn't want to take part in the "fun." David escaped to the kitchen but was soon joined by Walt who was carrying a deck of cards. They were going to play strip poker. While being with a naked boy was what David desired more than anything, he feared he'd be embarrassed. He told the others he was Greek Orthodox and playing cards was against his religion but the boys didn't buy it. He planned to drag the game out as best he could. He knew the other boys didn't like him but as was his pattern, the more someone hated him the more he was attracted to him.

The game started at 3:30 p.m. and an hour later, David was only missing one shoe. Scott got naked and David suggested that he keep playing and with each hand he lost, he'd have to do whatever the other boys told him to do. For his first loss, David had the naked Scott sit in his lap. David figured they might talk about him at school but for the time being he was actually enjoying himself.



# Chapter 5: Consider the Stars

## Chapter 5: Consider the Stars Summary and Analysis

Hugh stepped outside each night and watched the stars. He was fascinated by them. He was sure there was life on other planets. The thought made David feel obscure. He thought back to a 1968 Labor Day celebration at the Raleigh Country Club.

David overheard Janet say that Pam Dobbins and J. J. Jackson had not been invited to the Duffy twins' July 4th party and were basically social outcasts. He didn't know who the two people were but it made him realize that the popular clique at his school wasn't the only such group in his community. The popular kids had formed a club in the third grade. None of those kids were interested or talented. David couldn't figure out what their allure was.

David felt honored when Thad Pope, one of the popular kids, hit him in the mouth with a rock one day. It was such a special occasion that Lisa asked if David had saved the rock. Lou told David to go punch the kid. His father was obviously ignoring the fact that David usually spent his weekends making banana nut muffins. The rock had damaged one of David's bottom teeth and needed a root canal. David's father insisted on calling Thad's parents. He was going to make them pay for the dental work. David was mortified.

At the Pope house, Thad and his mother and father gathered to talk things over with Lou. Thad said it was an accident and David supported him. The overwhelming feeling that his father didn't belong with these refined people came over David. Although there was a bit of a stand-off, the Mr. Pope agreed to pay for half of David's dental bill. David hoped that the experience would result in a friendship between him and Thad but that wasn't to be. At school, Thad ignored him as usual.

After graduation, David thought of Thad often and wondered what his life had become. He hoped that one day he'd run into him and they'd finally be friends. Later, when David was living in Paris, his French doctor asked what happened to his tooth that was by then grayish brown. David told him that it was a misunderstanding between friends.





# Chapter 6: Monie Changes Everything

## Chapter 6: Monie Changes Everything Summary and Analysis

David remembered when his wealthy great aunt Mildred visited them in Binghamton, New York, when he was just six years old. His mother had always referred to her as Aunt Monie, a cross between moaning and money. Sharon introduced her aunt to Lou and the kids. She had arrived in a new chauffeur-driven Cadillac. Aunt Mildred brought each of the kids a gift. David's gift was a marionette. She declined Sharon's offer to stay for lunch and left after a very short visit.

Aunt Mildred never visited again but she did pay for David to go to a camp in Greece. Sharon made David write a thank you note to Aunt Mildred but David kept putting it and never got around to it. Sharon, her sister and their homosexual cousin, Philip, visited Aunt Mildred. David had never met Philip but was obsessed with him. Sharon told David that Philip was a lot like him. He wished they lived closer to Cleveland where Aunt Monie lived, especially since her days were numbered.

When Aunt Mildred became very ill, Sharon took David and Lisa to visit her. Hank, Aunt Mildred's chauffeur, picked them up at the airport. They were greeted by a maid named Dorothy when they arrived at Aunt Mildred's house. Dorothy was actually dressed like a maid—black dress and white collar and cuffs. Dorothy said that Aunt Mildred was resting and would be down soon.

It had been ten years since David had seen her. So, when she came downstairs, he was surprised at how thin and frail she looked. Aunt Mildred had to be reminded who Sharon and her children were. It was an interesting visit for David. Aunt Mildred's second husband had been a big game hunter and there was a trophy room off the main parlor where preserved and stuffed animals were displayed. They stayed three days and on Sunday afternoon, Hank took them back to the airport.

That next spring, Aunt Mildred died. Sharon and Lou attended the funeral. Several months after that, they returned to Cleveland to participate in the settling of the will. Sharon wouldn't tell David how much her inheritance was, although he tried and tried to get it out of her. The family was given Aunt Mildred's new Cadillac. Since Sharon had a cache of money now, she would threaten to leave Lou warning him that she could make it on her own. Aunt Mildred's money paid for David to attend the Art Institute in Chicago and for Lisa to attend the School of Design in Rhode Island. The Canadian Museum wasn't interested in Aunt Mildred's collection of animal trophies so it was given to Hank. David was sent a bearskin pelt that he kept in his apartment for years.



# Chapter 7: The Change in Me

## Chapter 7: The Change in Me Summary and Analysis

At thirteen, David was flattered when a hippie girl stopped him and begged for money. It was obvious that she thought he was much older. Sharon was waiting in the car while he ran in a convenience store to get her cigarettes. David didn't think his mother would mind so he gave the girl a dollar. But Sharon did mind and insisted that he get the dollar back from the girl. The next time David went to the store, he was by himself. He gave a guy hippie who was begging for money fifty cents. They guy was shooed away by the store owner after collecting a few more coins from customers. David watched in fascination.

David was receiving three dollars at week allowance which he supplemented with an occasional job at the Dorton Arena where he worked the concession stand or traipsed up and down the aisles selling cold drinks to the concert goers. It was an awkward stage for David. He had braces and wore thick black-framed glasses. The only proof he needed that he looked awful was his mother's insistence that he looked just fine. His long-time friend, Dan, was allowed to grow his hair and have a pony tail while David would have to wait until he was sixteen.

To make additional money, David and Dan began splitting up the grounds and begging for money. Dan worked on one side of the Ferris wheel and David on the other. People around their own ages were the most generous. Jerry, their boss at the concession stand, hollered at them for walking off the job. They quit on the spot, telling him they found a better way to earn money. By that evening, David had earned enough from begging to buy a red vest he had his eye on.

On one occasoin, David approached the wrong guy, a Vietnam veteran who was having traumatic flashbacks. With no more provocation than asking for some change, the man began punching David. His glasses were knocked off and broken. The man's friends pulled him off of David and later returned and gave David a dollar and apologized for the man's behavior. David was able to buy the red vest which he paired with a pair of blue corduroy hip-huggers. His mother couldn't believe he was going to go out publicly in that colorful outfit.

David debuted his outfit the convenience store where he saw the same hippie girl who was there with a friend. They laughed at him which made him realize that his mother had been right. It was amazing how one moment he thought he looked so good and the next realized just how awful he actually looked.



# Chapters 8 and 9

## Chapters 8 and 9 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 8: Hejira

At the age of twenty-two after dropping out of his second college and traveling around the country, David returned to Raleigh. He moved into his parent's basement. After six months of sponging off of them and getting high on a daily basis, his father threw him out. His sister Lisa had an apartment near the university and told him he could move in there. His mother dropped him off and when he started to leave, she teared up. He didn't know it at the time but his father threw him out not because he was a bum but because he was gay. His mother couldn't stop crying. David assured her he'd be fine. He'd have a job and his own place in no time.

### Chapter 9: Slumus Lordicus

In 1980, Sharon had cable TV installed and got hooked on infomercials—especially the one with a man who claimed he refinanced his house, bought seventeen more houses and became a millionaire. As a result, Sharon and Lou bought a dozen duplexes on the south side of Raleigh. David and his siblings called their parents slum lords. All the tenants were black except for one elderly man. Most were on public assistance and were unemployed.

Lou took care of the repairs while Sharon handled the leases and paperwork. David earned money from time to time, helping his father with repairs and maintenance. While Sharon was still the more personable of the two, it was Lou who had a soft heart for the tenants. He was more understanding if they were late with the rent or made special requests about their accommodations. One of the tenants, Dora, moved out in the middle of the night and took the stove and refrigerator with her. Lou rented an apartment to the Taylors, a biracial couple who was looking for a place to stay. Sharon had misgivings about the couple but Lou was sure they'd be good tenants.

The couple was a disappointment. They promised to paint the living room but never did. And, they had frequent loud arguments, even bringing the police to their place after complaints by neighbors. The man, Lance, told Lou he wouldn't pay his rent until his driveway was paved with new gravel. Surprisingly, Lou complied and had gravel poured on all the driveways of his properties. Lance continued to make demands and cause problems, even accusing Lou of being racist—which was the farthest thing from the truth. One day, they almost came to blows. Lou regretted he had rented to them and decided he'd have to somehow get them out. Eventually Lance and Belinda moved out but only after the perfectly sturdy bathroom ceiling somehow fell on Belinda's head. She hobbled to court and convinced the jury that it was owner negligence. She was awarded a settlement.

The day that Lou and Lance almost came to blows, David told his father that he had his back. If Lance would have started swinging, David would have defended his father. Lou was pleased with David's support and the two began to grow closer.



# Chapters 10 and 11

## Chapters 10 and 11 Summary and Analysis

Sharon was helping David pack up and move from his apartment. He blamed the neighbors but as usual she blamed him for getting such a cheap apartment and for turning down a full-time job that would have allowed him to get a better apartment. Brandi, a little nine-year-old neighbor, and her mother lived next door David. Her mother was a bartender and left Brandi alone everyday from late afternoon until the wee hours of the morning.

Brandi's mother would wake her daughter in the middle of the night and yell at her for leaving a dirty dish or not cleaning the bathtub. David couldn't help but overhear and increasingly he began to realize that Brandi was at the least being emotionally and mentally abused. Brandi gravitated toward David. Most mothers wouldn't encourage a relationship between their nine-year-old daughter and a twenty-year-old male neighbor. It didn't bother her mother who used David when she wanted to get rid of Brandi.

Sharon warned David not to let Brandi in his apartment. It would lead to problems. But David thought his mother was being overly critical as usual. Most every evening after David got home from his job, Brandi would be knocking on his door a few minutes later. When it was 6:55, he would send her home. Sometimes she wanted to stay but David, being an obsessive-compulsive, wouldn't bend. That was the arrangement and he was sticking to it to the minute.

After about a month, David noticed that little things were missing. Brandi was probably sneaking in when he was gone. They shared a back porch and his door wasn't locked. When he confronted Brandi, she broke down and confessed. He felt telling her mother was the the right thing to do. But her mother didn't care and acted like David was being petty for telling her. David cut off Brandi's visit, at least for the time being. One afternoon when taking out the trash, David noticed a crawl space in the back of the building. Something made him look inside and to his surprise saw all the missing things that Brandi had taken from his apartment.

David found slides of his family in the pile of items. He hadn't even noticed that they had been taken. When he held them up to the sunlight, he saw that they all contained epitaphs, scratched on them with a pin or razor. David showed Brandi's mother but she twisted the conversation around. She was the victim. She had no one to help her raise her child. Things reached crisis level for David when Brandi started calling him fagot and screaming it for all the neighborhood to hear.

David's mother told him he had to move. Next, the girl would be at the police station reporting that he had molested her. But he was gay, he reminded his mother. That didn't matter. The police would have to take the report and investigate her claims. Sharon paid



the deposit and first month's rent for David's new apartment and helped him move his belongings.

David cleaned apartments in New York for many years, earning ten dollars an hour. Most of his jobs were residents and the customers were usually at work while he cleaned their apartments or houses. He had been cleaning the apartment of a claims adjuster for about a year before he ever ran into him. The man was at home recovering from an operation. He asked David to do him a favor if he wasn't up by three o'clock that afternoon. He wanted him to insert a suppository into his anus if he was still asleep. Luckily, the man inserted his own medication and David didn't have to worry about it. David's boss was horrified.

In December 1992, a story that David had written was broadcast on NPR. The New York Times ran it six months later. The article was entitled, "He Does Radio and Windows." After the article was published, his client load increased. He figured it was part his celebratory and part the customer's hope that he would write an expose of something that they were suffering under.

A new customer named Martin arranged for David to clean his apartment at 2 pm on a Sunday. The apartment was in a posh building on the Upper East Side. Martin, who was middle aged and quite sweaty, greeted him in the hallway. Once inside the apartment, David understood why the guy was perspiring so profusely. The temperature in the apartment was at least ten degrees hotter than it needed to be. Martin stressed that he did not like air conditioning. Martin asked David if he had ever gone to Fire Island. Martin seemed to be obsessed with Fire Island and wouldn't stop talking about it. He opened a drawer, pulled out a brochure and handed it to David. The cover featured muscular men frolicking together on a pleasure craft. As much as Martin tried to get David engaged in the subject of Fire Island and the underlying one that was really he focused on, he managed to evade them at every turn.

David cleaned the kitchen first and then moved onto the bathroom and bedroom. In the bedroom, there was gay pornography everywhere. Martin had diabetes and wanted to test David's blood sugar. David rejected the idea but Martin was persistent, caught David off guard and stabbed a short needle in his finger. David's blood sugar was normal. Martin told David how he'd sometimes pass out. He stressed that he wasn't always responsible for his actions—a comment that was unsettling to David. He moved onto the living room with Martin right behind him. Martin sank into the sofa and turned on a gay porno tape and began to pleasure himself. David did his best to ignore Martin and what he was doing. Martin excused him and paid him six times what he was hired to earn. Fortunately, David never had to go back to Martin's.



# Chapters 12 and 13

## Chapters 12 and 13 Summary and Analysis

One evening in Paris, David and Hugh went to see the film adaption of Graham Greene's "The End of the Affair." David was tired and slept through most of it. Hugh cried through it, from beginning to end. The trouble with taking a lover to a love story was the inevitable comparisons between real life and fantasy, with the latter always paling in comparison. At that time, David and Hugh had been together over ten years. Life had become mundane and unexciting. Even though they both found it difficult to express their love for each other, David could never think of being with anyone else.

David had plans to visit Lisa in Winston-Salem. The last time he had visited her was when she lived in an apartment complex in the late seventies. Lisa dropped out of college after two years and returned to Raleigh and went to work in a wine shop. Sharon and Lou had always expected the most out of Lisa. She was the oldest child and it was assumed that she'd graduate from college and then go on and earn a masters' degree. She actually had very little confidence and was fragile and easily discouraged. David had been labeled as "lazy and irresponsible" by his parents so therefore it was more acceptable when he dropped out of college. But Lisa eventually returned to college and got an English degree. She had a career as a photographer until she married her husband, Bob. She quit her job so he could take a job in Winston-Salem.

During David's visit to Winston-Salem, Lisa was happy to see that David and Henry, her parrot, were hitting it off. Bob spent time upstairs with his bird, a green-cheeked conure named Jose. The birds never got together because they hated each other. David was there to deliver a lecture at a local college but he also had big news. His book had been optioned by a studio that wanted to bring it to the big screen. The book was about their lives. Lisa took it well but warned him that she wouldn't let her parrot take part in it. Lisa was tempted to take up smoking again to lose a few pounds. Ever since her last visit to her in-laws, she was paranoid about losing weight. She had been sitting near the fireplace when her father-in-law asked her if she was "too fat." He immediately he corrected himself and changed it to "too hot" but the damage had been done.

David and Lisa saw a movie together that struck a familiar note. It was about a brother and sister who "stumbled to adulthood playing the worn, confining roles assigned to them as children." (153) Afterward it was Lisa who broke down remembering the struggles that she had gone through in her childhood and adolescence and that were still part of her. The scar would never heal.





# Chapters 14 and 15

## Chapters 14 and 15 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 14: Six to Eight Black Men

David was interested in the gun laws of any new American city he visited. What restrictions were there? How easy was it to get a gun license? He learned some bizarre facts. A blind person can legally hunt in both Texas and Michigan. In a country that is becoming homogeneous in many ways, the gun laws remain one of the last vestiges of regionalism and independence. Firearms weren't an issue in Europe so when traveling there, David often asked about barnyard animals.

When families open Christmas presents was another conversation starter that David was known to use. He concluded that those who open their presents on Christmas Eve were a bit more pious than those who opted for Christmas morning. Gifts were usually limited to children and the gift-giving was not usually not excessive. In the Netherlands, children open their presents on St. Nicholas Day which is December 5th. St. Nicholas was described as tall and willowy as opposed to the American Santa who was fat and jolly. His costume was what he wore as the Bishop of Turkey.

According to a man named Oscar, the Dutch version of Santa arrived by river boat and mounted a horse to begin his mission on land. St. Nicholas did not have elves as helper; rather, according to the Dutch, he traveled with was was described as six to eight black men. They were initially characterized as slaves but when that term became politically incorrect, the men were described as just good friends. Saint Nicholas and his six to eight black men would beat kids who displayed bad behavior with a switch. In the days before central heating, Dutch children would leave their clogs by the fireplace in hopes that they would be filled with presents from Saint Nicholas and his friends. The ways in which Saint Nicholas gained entrance to homes was varied and vague. But how the American Santa gets down a chimney when there isn't one was just as confounding.

### Chapter 15: Rooster at the Hitchin' Post

David was eleven when his younger brother, Paul, was born. He was just a blob for the first six month of his life. David and his sisters would dress him as a girl but by the time he was 18 months old, any thought that a person could be made to be gay was dispelled. There was no doubt that Paul was all boy. Paul was a joker. At their mother's funeral, Paul stuck a sticker on the back of David's coat that read, "Hello, I'm gay."

There was never any worry about whether Paul could make it on his own. From the time he was in high school he had worked and at age twenty-six founded his own floor-sanding company. When his older siblings were barely able to pay their rent, Paul had already bought himself a house in a nice neighborhood in Raleigh. He lived with his girlfriend for a year before David finally met her. Her name was Kathy and, minus the





tattoos and the nicotine patch, she resembled a Flemish Madonna. They planned a wedding that was to take place in a hotel where the service would be performed by a psychic they found in the phone book.

David flew in from Paris two days before the wedding. He was surprised to see his formerly slim brother carrying an extra 60 pounds. The wedding took place in a large pavilion adjacent to the hotel. Guests were allowed to bring their dogs. The rehearsal dinner for the dogs included both dry and canned food. David and his father spent time with Paul in his hotel room just before the ceremony. Oddly, Paul and Lou were engrossed in a cable TV news program and got upset when David talked too much and disturbed their program.

The 5 pm wedding was delayed while waiting for another ceremony to conclude. The DJ was stuck in traffic and the march down the aisle proceeded without the prerecorded wedding march. As the ceremony commenced, David thought back to the time when he went swimming in the ocean off the nearby beach and was followed by Paul who almost drowned. David found his brother underwater and not moving. He pulled him out of the water by his hair. After Paul vomited a mouthful of seawater, David towed him to the beach. As they both lay their exhausted, David thought it was a true moment of bonding. Instead, once his brother caught his breath, he flung invectives at him over the incident.

The psychic married Paul and Kathy and everyone had a good time at the reception. David had a speech he wanted to give but no one asked him so he remained silent. Walking the dogs with Paul later, David realized that he and his brother were nothing alike and never would be.



# Chapters 16 and 17

## Chapters 16 and 17 Summary and Analysis

Although Hugh loved their Paris apartment, he wanted to own his own home. David loved the apartment and wanted to stay as long as they could. But Hugh had his way and they began looking at apartments for sale in Paris. One day their real estate lady found a real fixer up. Hugh was excited but David had only negative things to say. Even though he was unenthusiastic and dubious, David agreed to buy the apartment and signed the contract and loan papers.

Three months after moving into their new place, they took a trip to Amsterdam. David was so impressed with the city he wondered if they should have considered purchasing a home in European locales other than Paris. They toured Anne Frank's house, entering the annex behind the famous bookcase. Touring the Frank's apartment, David thought it would have been the perfect apartment to buy. David was nearly obsessed with the apartment, feeling like he'd come home. Of course, the apartment was part of a museum and not for sale.

David visited Tiffany who lived in Somerville. Her house was a small two-story. In her garage out back, she kept her bicycle and the rickshaw she sometimes attached to it. Tiffany worked out in front of the TV each day, trying to attain a slimmer profile. Lou always said Tiffany had a beautiful voice and should sing for a career - put out an album. The only time David heard Tiffany sing was "Happy Birthday" at family parties. But it was Lou's fantasy.

When Tiffany was fourteen, she tried to remove her braces with a pair of pliers. She had run away from home and was trying to change her identity. Tiffany was found and captured and placed in juvenile detention. After she was freed, Sharon signed her up for one of those "tough love" schools that she'd heard about on TV. After she was released from the school, Tiffany became interested in baking and attended a culinary institute in Boston. She wound up working for years in an upscale restaurant.

Tiffany was a lot like her mother in that she could talk to anyone with ease. But she had a problem telling the truth. The last place she had worked was an Italian bakery. After she made what the owner considered an ethnic remark against Italians, she was fired. After that, she made money going through people's trash and collecting items she could sell.

When they finally entered her apartment, David couldn't believe how filthy it was. It was full of debris and trash. Tiffany had never had a lot of furniture or possessions and her taste had always been simple. But her place had always been clean and orderly. David noticed several mosaics that Tiffany was working on. She used broken bits of crockery and other items she found in the trash to make them. It was her one way of expressing herself and making art out of other peoples' castoffs. A woman wanted to buy one of her



mosaics but she couldn't part with it. He suggested she could sell it and use the money to buy a vacuum cleaner or new tile for her floor. It suddenly occurred to him that he sounded just like his father. Instead of encouraging her art, David was trying to get her to be something she wasn't. When Tiffany was distracted by a phone call, David filled the sink with hot soapy water in an effort to clean up her place and save her life.



# Chapters 18 and 19

## Chapters 18 and 19 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 18: A Can of Worms

When in Los Angeles, David and Hugh had lunch with Hugh's friend, Anne. She was a professional photographer and worked all around the country for a magazine. Anne and Hugh reminisced about their college days where they had originally met. Since David didn't know who they were talking about he got distracted by the other patrons of the diner and people-watched. Two men sitting nearby were talking about the can of tiny worms called nematodes that had survived the Columbia explosion and had been discovered in the Texas plains. One of the many mysteries of life—all the astronauts died and the worms lived.

Anne ordered a piece of pie for David and told him that it was tradition to eat the pie from crust to the point and then make a wish at the point. It made David think of all the things in life that he had wished for but had never come true.

### Chapter 19: Chicken in the Henhouse

The airport had lost David's luggage. He was delayed filling out a bunch of forms and had to drive right from the airport to Manchester where he was giving a talk to a group of students. When he finally got to his room at 1 am, he found that he was booked in a basement room and that the accommodations were sub-par. The airport promised his luggage would be there in the morning but it wasn't.

David listened to a talk radio show where the subject was abuse by Catholic priests which quickly devolved into talk of homosexual pedophilia which everyone who called in agreed was the worse kind. He had been traveling around the country for the past ten years and the subject seemed to be popular everywhere. One person referred to it as the "proverbial chicken in the hen house." (213) Another caller corrected the statement by saying it was the fox in the hen house. Yet another caller said that "chicken" was more fitting in describing a gay man.

David felt the world was conspiring against him. He had a strange experience in the lobby where he went to get a cup of coffee. He noticed a ten-year-old boy struggling with several cups of coffee he was trying to carry. He offered to help him and carried some of the cups of coffee for him. During their trek through the hotel and the elevators, David had an overwhelming compulsion to touch the boy's head. It had been a thing with him for a time. But he never got the chance. Once at the kid's room, his mother opened the door and when she saw David, she gave him a tip and told him that "you people" run a very nice place.



# Chapters 20, 21 and 22

## Chapters 20, 21 and 22 Summary and Analysis

At a dinner party, David told Hugh and the guests about his boss at a volunteer job he had. In French, the word for boss is "chef." His job was to serve as a guide for blind people at the Metro station. The day he worked, however, no blind people showed up. David had drifted back into English and Hugh reminded him to speak French. David and Hugh got into a debate about their plumber. David said he had one arm. Hugh contradicted him and said he had two. David pointed out that one of his arms was non-functional. The dinner guests were growing uncomfortable with their bickering. David dropped the argument. He wasn't going to let it break them up. He was dependent on Hugh for survival.

When the family was still young, Sharon and David discussed who of the siblings would have the first baby. David guessed Lisa who was the first-born and Sharon guessed that it would be Gretchen the second oldest, then Lisa and then Tiffany. She thought Amy, the animal lover, wouldn't have kids but would have a monkey instead. As it turned out, way after Sharon had died, it was the youngest child, Paul, who would have the first and only child in the family.

As soon as Paul found out Kathy was pregnant, everyone in the world knew. There was no worry of miscarriage on Paul's part. Paul bought the series of Baby Einstein videos for his child to be who was going to have some brains whether it was a boy or girl. They chose not to learn the sex of the baby. There was a lot of drama about the name for the baby. But by the time their daughter was born, they had decided upon Madelyn. It would be their only child because Kathy had a weak heart and the doctor advised her not to have more.

David flew to Portland to see his niece two weeks after she was born. That night, while Kathy held the baby and fed her a bottle, everyone watched the videos that had been taken at the hospital. Kathy had to return to the hospital after coming home with the baby. Her legs swelled and she had a hard time breathing. That was when they realized she had a heart condition. Because of her health, the doctor advised that she sleep through the night to build her strength. Getting up with the crying baby in the middle of the night then fell to Paul. Instead of going to bed for a few hours, he chose to just throw a pillow on the floor and sleep in the same room with the baby. David wondered if Madelyn would turn on Paul when she was a teenager or if she would somehow remember how dedicated he was to her when she was a baby.

David hated being alone at home when Hugh was out of town. During World War II, the house had been occupied by Nazis. The former owner had died in the house and David feared that it was haunted. He let his imagination run away with him and thought of the most bone-chilling scenarios when he was alone. Often, if Hugh was gone just overnight, David would make himself stay up and not go to sleep at all.



There was a walnut tree in the backyard. Hugh would collect the nuts from the tree and soon mice would pick up their scent and would be coming into the apartment trying to steal the walnuts. The mice couldn't get the walnuts in their mouths so they had to roll them across the floor. Sometimes the sound would get on David's nerves although having mice didn't bother him. He thought they were cute. On one occasion, a mouse got caught in a trap that Hugh had set. It didn't kill him but he was so injured that David, out of mercy, decided to drown him.

Just then a van of Scandinavian tourists pulled up asking for directions. David said he had a map he could give them and invited the man who was driving inside. The man saw that David was drowning the mouse which made for a little awkward conversation. The man was very appreciative when David gave him the map. David finally drowned the mouse and planned to bury him the next day.



# Characters

## David Sedaris

David Sedaris is the author of "Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim." The book is a collection of episodes in David's life. The majority of the stories focus on David's childhood and adolescence although there are some accounts of his adult life. David grew up in a large family with his earliest years in upstate New York. When David was still quite young, the family moved to the Raleigh, North Carolina, area. Sharon and Lou Sedaris were his parents and David had four sisters and one brother.

David realized at a young that he was attracted to boys, in fact, he commented that they scared him. His father had no tolerance for a less than manly son and David's sexual preference became a point of contention between father and son for the rest of their lives. Sharon and Lou were not the most attentive of parents. Sharon had a drinking problem and Lou was narrow-minded and was wrapped up in to his own goals and pursuits.

David recalled incidents in which his mother locked him and his sisters outside in the bitter cold after a snow. A slumber party David attended at a neighbor's house was more like a nightmare for him. All the other boys wanted to do was talk about cars and sports which David knew nothing about and had no interest in.

David's parents had low expectations for him and for many years he proved them right. He dropped out of college and lived in sleazy neighborhoods because his low paying jobs didn't allow him to rent a nicer place. But as he matured, he realized somewhere in that confusion that he could write. He went on to become a noted and successful writer. David eventually moved to Paris where he lived with his life-long partner, Hugh.

## Sharon Sedaris

Sharon Sedaris was David's mother. There were things that David admired about his mother. Sharon was a person who felt comfortable with strangers—she could talk with anyone. But Sharon was a very critical person and did not understand the lasting impact that misdirected and often totally uncalled for criticism had on her children. Sharon and Lou were unthinking in their tendency to unfairly assign blame for unavoidable or unintentional missteps by her kids.

When her children were very young, Sharon frequently overburdened them with guilt and was unthinking about the ramifications from doing so. Sharon had a drinking problem and was probably a closet alcoholic. She apparently was not happy in her marriage but she didn't work outside the home and with six children, she was pretty much destined to stay in it. Her anger was misdirected. She took her frustrations out on her children when in reality it stemmed from her dissatisfaction with her mate.



Sharon was not the ideal mother. She was obsessed with watching television and when she got cable television, her pastime became even more obsessive. David recalled an incident in which she literally locked her kids out in the bitter cold. A rare snow storm hit North Carolina and all the kids were happily out of school for several days in a row. The kids were driving her crazy and she sent them out to play in the snow. However, two hours later when they were freezing and begging to come inside, she refused to unlock the door. She was inside with two of her favorite hobbies - drinking wine and watching television.

## **Lou Sedaris**

Lou Sedaris was David's father. He was the kind of father who held specific expectations for each of his children. One of his biggest disappointments was that David was gay.

## **Lisa Sedaris**

Lisa was the first-born child in the Sedaris family. She went to college but dropped out after two years. She married a man name Bob and shared a home with him in Raleigh.

## **Tiffany Sedaris**

Tiffany Sedaris was the problem child. She ran away from home and was placed in a juvenile detention center. After that she was enrolled in a "tough love" school. She earned money as a chef and baker and eventually from trash and castaway objects she collected from other people.

## **Paul Sedaris**

Paul Sedaris was the youngest child in the Sedaris family. What David lacked in masculinity, Paul made up for it in spades. He always had a job and when he was just twenty-six founded his own floor-sanding company.

## **Kathy and Madelyn Sedaris**

After Paul married Kathy, they soon learned that Kathy was pregnant. Madelyn Sedaris was born and would be the only grandchild in the family from all six children.





## **Aunt Mildred**

Aunt Mildred was David's great aunt and his mother's aunt. She had been married twice and received quite an inheritance after her second husband's death. She was generous and shared the money with her niece Sharon and her kids.

## **Hugh**

Hugh was the man that David fell in love with. The couple bought an apartment in Paris, France, where they chose to live.

## **Brandi**

Brandi was a little neighbor girl at one of the low-rent apartments where David lived. She became a problem after she started stealing things from him and was angered when he no longer wanted her to be his friend.



## Objects/Places

### Binghamton, New York

When he was a small child, David Sedaris lived with his family in Binghamton which was in upstate New York. Some of his first memories were of the cold winters and snow storms they experienced there.

### Raleigh, North Carolina

The Sedaris family spent most of their lives together in and around Raleigh, North Carolina.

### Paris, France

David Sedaris met and fell in love with a man named Hugh. The couple settled in Paris, France, where they bought a house together.

### Greece

David's wealthy Aunt Mildred sponsored him to go to an exclusive camp in Greece when he was a youngster.

### Chicago Art Institute

Money from Aunt Mildred's estate paid for David's tuition at the Chicago Art Institute.

### Winston-Salem, NC

Tiffany rented a small house in Winston-Salem, NC. David came to stay with her a few days during one of his trips back to the United States.

### Amsterdam

David and Hugh toured Amsterdam and visited the apartment where Anne Frank lived. David became so enthralled with the apartment, that he wanted to buy it. Of course, that was impossible since it was part of a museum.



## **New York City**

David cleaned apartments and houses for many years while living in New York City. He didn't earn very much for his work and met a number of strange people during his house-cleaning career.

## **Emerald Island**

Emerald Island was a vacation spot that the family visited every year. Lou got his wife and kids excited when he talked about buying a permanent vacation home there. But like many of his ideas, this one faded away and was forgotten.

## **Cleveland, Ohio**

David, his mother and sister visited Aunt Mildred in her palatial home in Cleveland. Her health was declining and a few months after their visit, Aunt Mildred died.



# Themes

## Abandonment

Abandonment can take many different forms. There is the obvious physical abandonment that happens when a husband leaves his wife and begins to live at another residence. Of course, it can be the wife who leaves the husband and abandons him. An added dimension which increases the damage is if one spouse takes all the couple's money and assets and leaves the other without any means of support.

In such a case, the spouse not only abandoned his marital obligations, but he also abandoned his monetary responsibilities. However, adults have ways and methods to deal with such a life crisis. They can earn incomes or can seek financial assistance through the courts or through governmental agencies. An adult who is abandoned experiences pain but it in no way compares to the pain that a child must endure when he is abandoned.

Child abandonment can be defined as the physical type when one or both parents leaves the child alone to fend for himself. But there is another type of abandonment, a more common occurrence, that is just as damaging. Emotional abandonment has long-lasting and destructive impact on children. It causes the kind of misery and distrust and even self-hatred that a child can take a lifetime to recover from.

David Sedaris and his siblings suffered from parents who neglected them and had little interest in fostering the skills and talents of each child. These children were emotionally abandoned by being denied the support and encouragement that every child must have in order to survive and flourish.

## The Expectations Trap

When a parent tells a child what he or she should become as an adult and what the child should study in order to pursue that goal, that parent is setting the child up for failure, disappointment and devastating frustration. If a man who is a physician is adamant that his son follow in his footsteps, he is pressuring his son to do something that he may not be interested in and that may indeed be a field to which he is not suited. Such a parent is denying his child his own hopes and dreams and implicitly is signaling his potential displeasure if the son elects to follow a different path than the one he has charted out for him.

On the other side of the issue, a parent can expect too little of his child. If a parent is constantly critical of a child or adolescent, the parent may tell the child that he will never amount to anything. One of the most cruel and destructive things that a parent can do is compare a child to his brother or sister. Such comparison can only lead to disaster and may cause a schism between siblings. Or a parent from meager beginnings may instill



in his child the false belief that since his people were always poor and never held good jobs that he too was destined for the same kind of existence.

The only healthy expectation that a parent can have for his child is the expectation that he will live up to his potential and talents and will follow his own dreams.

David and his siblings were all labeled by their parents. Lisa was the oldest and would get her master's degree. She dropped out of college after two brief years. David was a loser and would never have any level of success. David emerged as a noted writer and lecturer despite being told for years that he was destined to be a nobody.

## **Abusive Environment**

A family that lives under the burden of any form of abuse is a damaged and tragic one that is doomed to suffer for generations. For children, even though they escape the abuse once they are grown and can move away from it, the scars that they suffered during the abusive years do not soon leave.

Sharon Sedaris felt trapped in an unhappy marriage. Without a job and six children to care for, she chose to distract herself from her misery with two favorite pastimes of drinking wine and watching television.

In addition to alcohol, Sharon had other ways of letting out her frustrations. Her proclivity toward harsh criticism was often turned on her children. Not only did she blame them for things they had no control over, she made sure they felt shame and guilt over their actions. Shame and guilt have a way of burrowing themselves into the psyche and refusing to come out without the help of intensive therapy.

Lou made it a habit of promising everything and delivering very little. He was careless with his penchant to promise the moon and the stars and apparently had no regard for his young children who were disappointed time and again when their father failed to come through. Lou and Sharon also made it a habit to label their children. Lisa was the oldest and the smartest. She would graduate from college and get her masters' degree. She was a big disappointment to her family when she quit college after two years. She didn't earn a degree but she did earn the scorn of her parents and a new label, that of failure, to try to live down the rest of her days. On the flip side, Lou and Sharon were sure that David was a loser and basically a waste of humanity. Although it took him years to struggle against the destructive nature of low expectations, he ultimately rose above them and became enormously successful.

Abuse can take many forms but one thing they have in common is that they all cause deep and lasting pain and damage.



# Style

## Perspective

"Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim" by David Sedaris is an autobiographical work and is conveyed in the first-person. David is adept at providing a collection of stories from his childhood and adolescence. Of course, no one other than the other principals in the story, especially David's siblings, could provide such a vivid and insightful work. But just as each of his siblings would have his or her own story, this account is David's and no one would be better suited than he to tell that particular story.

Making his story different than his siblings was the fact that David was the only homosexual sibling among the children. Although the children all suffered in their unique ways from parents who failed to see each child in his own best and special light, it was David who felt the most isolated within his family. His father was not pleased to have a gay son.

David is able to so successfully expresses himself because of his writing talent and communications skills. He is a successful and noted author and lecturer and has written many other letters. His other works include, "Barrel Fever," "Naked," "Holidays on Ice," "Mr. Talk Pretty One Day," and "When You Are Engulfed in Flames."

## Tone

David Sedaris is a successful and able writer who relates the stories from his life in a clear and charming manner. Even though the subject matter is often one of abuse and abandonment, David Sedaris often brings the point home aptly with charm and biting humor. He speaks of the isolation of his family in what is a normal and friendly neighborhood. Looking back, he realized that it was his family that isolated itself. He learned the lessons of his parents well. He began to convince himself that, like his mother, it was by choice that he didn't have friends. Friends were too much trouble since the more friends you had, the more people you had to say goodbye, too.

During an event that smacked of abuse and neglect, David and his younger sisters were all forced outside to play in the snow. While his mother was enjoying two of her favorite pastimes, drinking wine, and watching television, the kids sledged and played in the snow. However, after two hours, they were freezing and miserable and wanted to go back into their warm home. However, their mother wasn't ready for them and wouldn't open the door.

The kids figured that in order to make their parents worry about them and, more to the point, to force their mother to let them back in the house, that the youngest child who always was starved for attention, had to "take the bullet" and get hit by a car. Brave little Tiffany laid in the middle of the street while the other kids watched from the sidewalk. A neighbor saw what was going on and called their mother over. Well, at least they got



back inside. Although the incident was told in an engaging and humorous way, it was the retelling of life in an abusive environment.

David Sedaris is master storyteller. He mixes his ability to convey both humor and poignancy in an artful manner.

## Structure

"Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim" by David Sedaris is separated into twenty-two chapters mostly of medium length. As far as the story itself, there is no structure as the chapters are not contiguous and do not form one story. The first several chapters do focus on David's early years and make a chronological progression through his adolescence. However, the rest of the book moves back and forth between his childhood and adulthood. Rather than providing a historical account of his family, David uses episodes of his life to illustrate a particular aspect characteristic to his family.

The book is a collection of stories from David's own life. The first chapter, "Us and Them" focuses on David's childhood, as does subsequent chapters. By writing about the pain of his childhood, David illustrates the neglect and emotional abuse that he and his siblings had to endure and relates it to their struggles as adults. The scars that are inflicted from parents who are inattentive and not supportive of their children never heal.

The chapters that focus on David's adult life draw comparisons to his childhood and how the scars of abandonment and neglect remain throughout one's life. Although David became successful, the reality of his childhood and his feelings of inadequacy remained elements of his life and things that he had to fight against to finally emerge successfully. Therefore, although the structure is not a typical one that provides a story in chronological order, its structure is designed in such a way to make a clear connection from childhood to adulthood.



## Quotes

"It was more of a 'see you later' situation, but still I adopted my mother's attitude, as it allowed me to pretend that not making friends was a conscious choice" (Chapter 1, p. 3).

"...friendship would have taken away their mystery and interfered with the good feeling I got from pitying them" (Chapter 1, p. 6).

"When older, even the crankiest of us would accept them as proof that we were once a happy family: our mother young and healthy, our father the man who could snap his fingers and give us everything we wanted" (Chapter 3, p. 26).

"The slumber party took place in what the Methodists called a family room, the Catholics used as an extra bedroom, and the neighborhood's only Jews had turned into a combination darkroom and fallout shelter" (Chapter 4, p. 32).

"Lance paid his rent and called a few months later complaining that birds were congregating in the tree outside his bedroom window. Had they been vultures, we may have seen his point, but these were songbirds, whose only crime was happiness" (Chapter 9, p. 97).

"You live in bad neighborhoods so you can feel superior...The point is to move up in the world. Even sideways will do in a pinch, but what's the point of moving down?" (Chapter 10, p. 109).

"The implication was that he could not be held responsible for his actions. It was not a comforting message, but still I stayed not because I felt sorry for him but because I didn't know how to leave. It would have been awkward - or rather more awkward - and while I definitely thought about it, the mechanics were beyond me" (Chapter 11, p. 131).

"We can't profess love without talking through hand puppets, and we'd never consciously sit down to discuss our relationship." (Chapter 12, p. 139).

"There was no physical resemblance between us and the main characters—the brother and sister were younger and orphaned—but like us, they'd stumbled to adulthood playing the worn, confining roles assigned to them as children" (Chapter 13, p. 153).

"It wasn't the gentle flow of tears you might release when recalling an isolated action or event, but the violent explosion that comes when you realize that all such events are connected, forming an endless chain of guilt and suffering" (Chapter 13, p. 155).



"If finding an apartment is like falling in love, buying one is like proposing on your first date and agreeing not to see each other until the wedding" (Chapter 16, p. 183).

"These homosexuals can't reproduce themselves, and so they go into the schools and try to recruit our young people" (Chapter 19, p. 213).



## Topics for Discussion

What was David's relationship with his mother and with his father? How did his relationships impact his life?

What style of parenting did David's parents have? How did their parenting impact their children as adults?

How were David's parents guilty of committing child abuse? Provide examples. What different types of child abuse are there?

What behavior did Lou have that was a constant source of disappointment to his wife and children? How did that impact the relationships between father and children?

How did bias against homosexuality impact David? How did each of his parents react to his sexual orientation?

What were some signs that David had an obsessive-compulsive disorder? How did it impact his life?

Why was it risky for David to befriend Brandi? What did he learn from that incident? Why was he lucky to avoid a bigger problem from that relationship?