

Dog paddling across the Bluegrass

written by Leigh Anne Florence and illustrated by Chris Ware

Chapter 1

"A FISHING TOURNAMENT?" Mom, Dad, and Chloe said in unison.

"Isn't it great?" I responded.

"But you've only fished a couple times in your entire life, and both those times didn't turn out all that well," Mom said, referring to the time my biggest catch was an old tennis shoe.

"I know, but since I got my Red Rover Rod 'n Reel for Christmas I've been itching to put it to good use. When I saw the advertisement for the Hook the Biggest Bass Fishing Tournament, I knew I had to enter!"

My parents were always talking about the importance of goal-setting and self-improvement. A few weeks ago, Dad challenged Chloe and me to choose a goal to work toward. My goal was to compete, no, to win, the Hook the Biggest Bass Fishing Tournament.

"Let's back up, son," Dad said. "I don't want to rain on your parade but WE DON'T EVEN OWN A BOAT," Dad said stressing the last phrase with a funny look on his face.

"We do now," I answered.

I noticed Mom and Chloe giggling. Dad was counting backwards from 10, although I wasn't sure why. When he arrived at the number 1, he took a breath and said, "Woody, haven't we talked about the dangers of making impulsive decisions without talking them over with us first?"

"Yes sir," I answered.

"And haven't we discussed how impulsive decisions have consequences? And therefore, it's always best to take some time and think about our choices?"

"Yes sir," I answered again, "but I thought about the tournament a long time before I signed up. And I used my allowance to pay the entry fee. But the application needed our boat information. I looked on the internet and through the newspapers and found the perfect boat!"

"What kind of boat is it?"

"I think a motorboat," I answered. "And it was only \$35!"

"Woody, there's no way you could buy a motorboat for \$35," Dad replied.

"I thought the same thing," I answered, "but I told the seller about the tournament and how I only had \$35 in my piggy bank. He let me have the boat for that exact amount. I couldn't mail all that change so he said we could make a gentle agreement."

"Gentleman's agreement," Dad corrected.

"Yes! That's it," I replied. "By the way, what is a gentleman's agreement?"

"It's an agreement based on trust. It means you are giving him your word, which is as good as written contract."

"Yes - a gentleman's agreement. And he said he would store the boat until we picked it up," I explained. "I figured we'd pick up the boat and head directly to the fishing tournament. We can make the whole trip on the water."

"Where's the fishing tournament, Woody?" Mom asked. "Kentucky Lake."

"Where's the boat located?" Dad asked.

"Pikeville," I replied.

"Good grief!" Mom gasped. "Woody, Kentucky Lake is in Western Kentucky and Pikeville's in Eastern Kentucky. And you're wanting to make the entire trip in the boat?"

"Exactly," I replied, relieved to know they finally understood.

"Woody," Dad said in a serious voice, "Pikeville, Kentucky and Kentucky Lake are over four-hundred miles apart! It would take us at least six hours to make the trip in the car, much less a boat. There are more important things about boating than a boat and rod 'n reel. Do you have a PFD - or Personal Floatation Device? What about a fishing license? We need a first-aid kit, a horn in case we need to call for help, and a host of other things to be prepared. Besides, even if we were equipped for a boat trip across the state, water levels, locks and dams, and weather can make the trip difficult, if not impossible. Besides, you aren't

experienced enough to travel that far on the water - none of us are. It's a long, hard trip for an experienced boater, much less a novice."

I felt a lump in my throat. As usual, Dad was right, although I was still disappointed. For the next few minutes, everyone was silent.

"Although I'm not happy with your impulsive decision, I do agree it's important you learn about the waterways in Kentucky, as well as water safety," Dad said, finally breaking the silence. "I'll agree to the tournament and to purchasing the boat. We'll pick up the boat in Eastern Kentucky and tow the boat to Western Kentucky, stopping along the way at as many lakes and rivers as we can so you and Chloe can practice boating and fishing. Hopefully by the time we arrive at Kentucky Lake, you'll be prepared. We'll call this trip a learning vacation. How does that sound?"

"It sounds terrific," I answered, giving him a great big hug. "But Dad?"

"Yes, Woody?"

"We've still got one problem."



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