

Dog paddling across the Bluegrass

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Chapter 10

"We hit a sandbar," Cap informed the crew.

"A what?" I whispered to Dad. The captain heard me and explained.

"Sand and silt build up and form long ridges called sandbars along the riverbank," Cap explained. "They begin underwater and rise to the top, making them difficult to see. Unfortunately, they get wedged under the barge. If we can't maneuver the barge out, another tugboat will have to pull us out."

As Cap spoke, a boat with the words "U.S. Coast Guard" written across approached. A man in uniform exited the boat and spoke to Captain Donahue.

"Unfortunately, we won't be able to take you to Kentucky Lake," the captain explained. "I told Officer Grady about how you two found the keys and about the tournament. He has offered to take you to Kentucky Lake."

Jack put our canoe on the Coast Guard's boat. We thanked the crew and promised we'd keep in touch.

"Bring home a win!" Cap yelled as Officer Grady started the motor. Within seconds, my ears flew back.

"This boat's fast," I yelled.

"It's a motorboat," Dad answered. We couldn't talk over the sound so we enjoyed the sights speeding by. An hour later, Officer Grady slowed the boat down.

"This is the Four Rivers area," he informed. "Western Kentucky has the greatest concentration of navigable rivers in the United States. Ahead is the confluence of the Ohio and Cumberland Rivers. Farther downstream is the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers, and even farther is the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. We're getting ready to head upstream on the Tennessee River." Officer Grady cranked the boat. We didn't stop again until we reached a lock.

"Since we're going upstream, the water level must be raised," the officer explained. We sat inside the lock as the boat rose higher. Finally, the gates opened.

"Welcome to Kentucky Lake," Officer Grady smiled.

"It's the largest by surface area, manmade lake east of the Mississippi River. It was created by damming the Tennessee River." I couldn't believe my eyes. As far as I

could see, there was clear, blue water.

We went farther and saw the sign, "Kenlake Marina – Home of the Hook the Biggest Bass Fishing Tournament."

"We're here," Officer Grady announced, as he unloaded our canoe. "I contacted a buddy to repair your car and transport it here. You'll find it in the marina parking lot. Good luck." We said goodbye and headed to the registration desk.

"Name?" the lady asked.

"Dogwood Furr. F-u-r-r." I spoke as clearly as possible.

"Fishing partner?"

"Chloe. C-h-l..."

"Got it," she interrupted.

She handed me a paper with the number 42 on it. "Wait in front of your boat. Someone will inspect your rig."

Chloe and I stood in front of the canoe. She held her fishing pole and the paper while I polished my Red Rover Rod 'n Reel. A few minutes later a man arrived.

"I'm Chester but call me 'Catfish.' I need to make sure you're in compliance with the regulations." Catfish looked at our canoe and made notes on his clipboard.

"All boats must have a livewell - a device that pumps fresh water from the lake into the tank. Any boat that doesn't have one is disqualified. It was clearly stated in the application. I'm sorry. Although you can't compete, feel free to fish." He thanked us and left.

"I should've read the directions," I said, once Mom and Dad arrived. "We went to all this trouble and couldn't even participate because I didn't pay attention to details. What a waste of time and energy!"

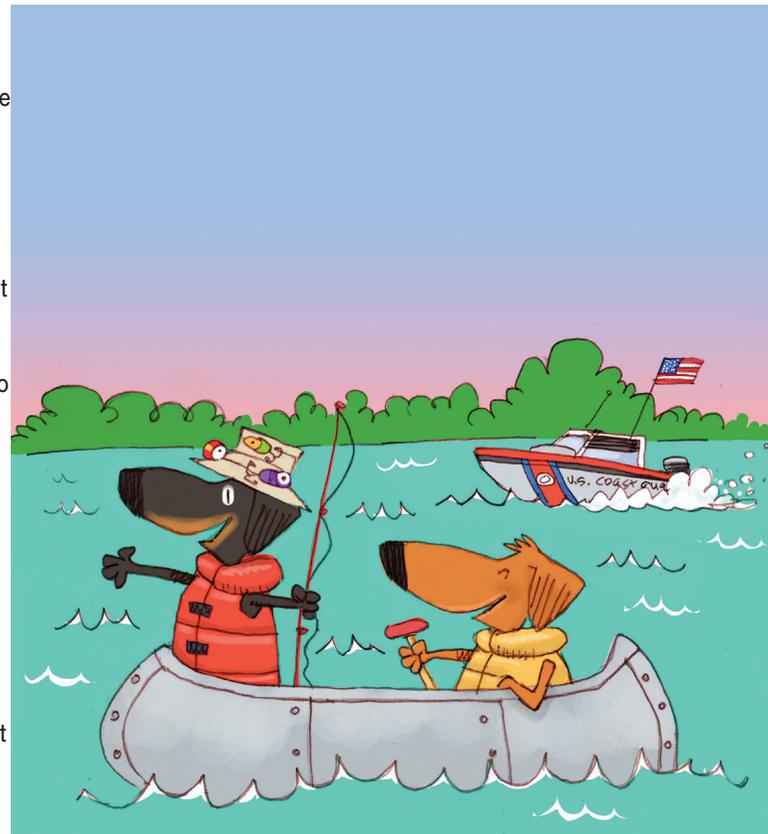
"Woody, you need to pay attention to details," Dad replied, "but learning is never a waste of time. Think about all the things you learned." I thought about what Dad said.

"I learned about the rivers and lakes in our state, met new friends, saw new

sites, and enjoyed so many of the things Kentucky offers. And I learned how to fish," I added, feeling better. "Before this trip, I didn't know how to bait a hook, or a row a boat. Look at me now." Everyone laughed.

"And you helped others," Mom added. "You and Chloe found the keys, tried to help guys you thought were drowning, and provided food to a bear," Mom added, giggling. "Those lives were impacted by you and Chloe."

"Anybody want to go fishing?" I asked. Mom, Dad, Chloe and I climbed in the canoe. I sat in the front, Chloe in the back. As I turned around to hand her an oar, I saw three faces staring back at me. It was a sunny day and I had a boat, a lake, and people that I loved to share it with. As we dog-paddled away from the bank, I realized this was better than winning any tournament in the world!



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