



CHAPTER 7

"We're sinking," I announced as Dad drove in the river. Although I couldn't see, I felt it.

"Open your eyes, Woody," Dad laughed. "We're on a ferry."

"A fairy?" I repeated.

"Not fairy, but ferry," Dad corrected. "It's a small boat that transports people or goods across the river."

Although I was scared, I trusted Dad. Slowly I opened my eyes. Our car wasn't underwater, but was sitting on a big float. We sat in the car, windows rolled down and engine off, while a small towboat, the John Craig, navigated us across the Kentucky River.

"Hey guys! I'm Tommy. Welcome aboard the Valley View Ferry," a man standing on the float said.

"Thanks! We have a scaredy cat in the backseat." Dad teased.

"This ferry's transported folks across the river for 200 years – including Daniel Boone, Ulysses S. Grant and Henry Clay!"

"They had a car?" I asked, confused.

“No,” Tommy laughed, “But the ferry can transport horses and pedestrians.” I wondered if Grant used the ferry when he was Union Army General during the Civil War or United States President. Before I could ask we’d reached the other side.

“Crossing on the ferry only takes about 3 minutes, saving lots of time,” Dad said as he started the car. Riding down the highway, Chloe and I looked for more Kentucky symbols but struck out. Before long, we’d stopped again. There was a sign that read, “Welcome to Shaker Village”

“I’ll help with the canoe, Dad,” I volunteered.

“Thanks, but we’ve got a surprise first.” Chloe and I loved surprises! We smiled at each other, then followed Mom and Dad. We passed another sign that said, “Shaker Landing,” before walking down a dock and on to a huge white boat with a big red paddlewheel.

“Is that a float?” I asked, pointing to a red and white ring hanging on the side of the boat. The ring had a long rope attached. It looked like the float Chloe and I took to the swimming pool, except it didn’t have Snoopy and Charlie Brown on it.

“It’s a lifebuoy,” Mom explained. “If someone’s in the water and needs help, you grab it, throw it to them, and help them in the boat.”

“This boat has two floors!” I exclaimed as I saw the stairway. We walked to the second story of the boat, where the American flag waved proudly. A few minutes later we felt the boat float along the river.

“Welcome aboard the Dixie Belle Riverboat. I’m Jen, your guide. We’re traveling the Kentucky River. The river forms in Eastern Kentucky, meanders through the Bluegrass region, and flows into the Ohio River at Carrolton, Kentucky. Forty-two counties are within this river’s watershed, meaning excess water from those counties eventually drains into this river. Therefore, any trash or pollution on the ground has the potential to make its way into the river. The Kentucky River provides drinking water to over 700,00 Kentuckians. Therefore, it’s essential we keep our land and streams clean.” I looked at Mom, remembering the conversation we’d had days ago.

“We’re entering the Palisades. Encompassing about 100 miles of river, the Palisades are known for steep gorges and for 450-million-year-old limestone cliffs!”

“FOUR HUNDRED FIF…”

“Shhhh, Woody,” Mom nudged.

“This unique ecosystem is home to 25 different mammals, 35 different reptiles, and 2 endangered bats,” Jen continued. I was amazed she wasn’t reading the information. “The Palisades have the largest concentration of rare plant species. We’re now approaching High Bridge,” Jen continued. “Built in 1875, trains still use this bridge to transport goods. It’s the highest railroad bridge over water in the United States.” Mom snapped a picture or two before we went underneath.

“Ahead you’ll see the confluence of the Kentucky River and Dix River.” I looked at Dad.

“A confluence is where two rivers meet,” Dad whispered.

“In 1925, the Dix River was impounded, or dammed, to create Herrington Lake. Known as the deepest lake in Kentucky, Herrington was designed to produce electricity.” As I listened, something caught my eye. I blinked so I could focus.

I saw four guys in the water. Two of them kept going underwater, staying, then coming back up. My gut said they were in trouble. I ran to the first floor, grabbed the lifebuoy and threw it as far as I could.

“GRAB THIS!”

They looked toward the ring but didn’t move.

“GRAB. THE. RING.” I yelled, slowly and loudly.

Mom, Dad, Chloe and a few others came downstairs to help. Most people weren’t wearing life jackets, but Mom insisted Chloe and I wear one for safety. “Chloe, come help,” I said before I jumped in the river. I dog paddled to the lifebuoy and grabbed it, then dog paddled to the guys. I was determined to save their lives.

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