

JUNE

Friday

If there's one thing I've learned from my years of being a kid, it's that you have ZERO control over your own life.

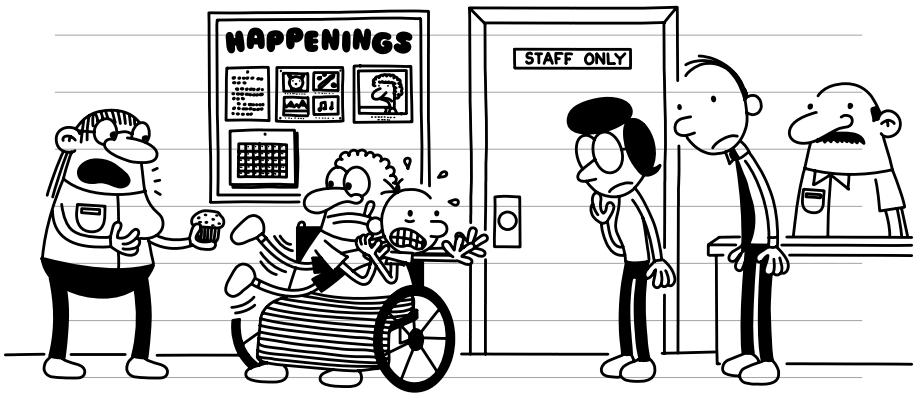
Ever since school let out, I haven't had anything I've needed to DO or anywhere I've needed to BE. As long as the air-conditioning was working and the TV remote had batteries in it, I was all set for a relaxing summer vacation.

But then, out of the blue, THIS happened—

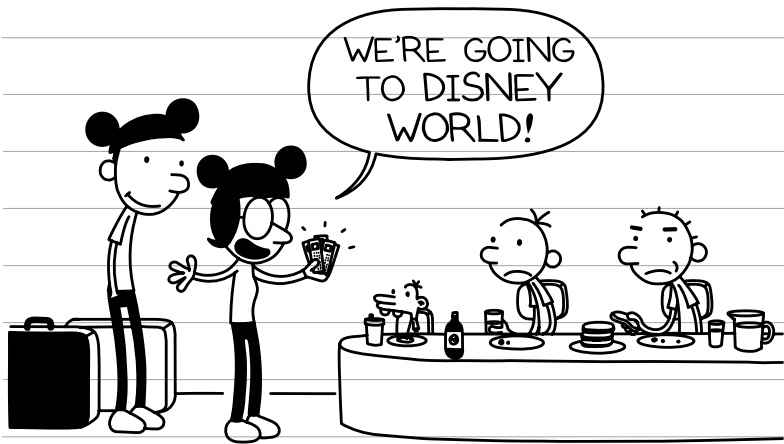


This isn't the FIRST time Mom has sprung a trip on us without any warning. Last year on the first day of summer, she said we were going upstate for a few days to visit Aunt Loretta at the nursing home.

It wasn't exactly my idea of a fun way to kick off the summer. One time when we visited Aunt Loretta, her roommate grabbed me and wouldn't let go until a staffer gave her a chocolate chip muffin.

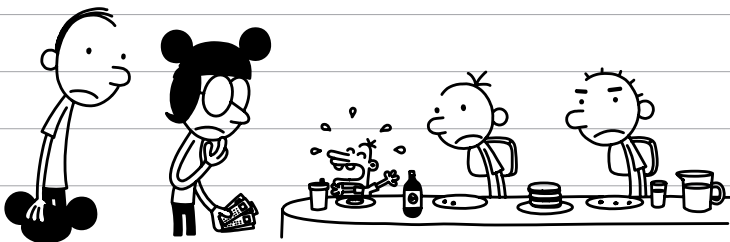


But Mom was just bluffing about going to the nursing home. At breakfast the next morning, she told us where we were REALLY going.

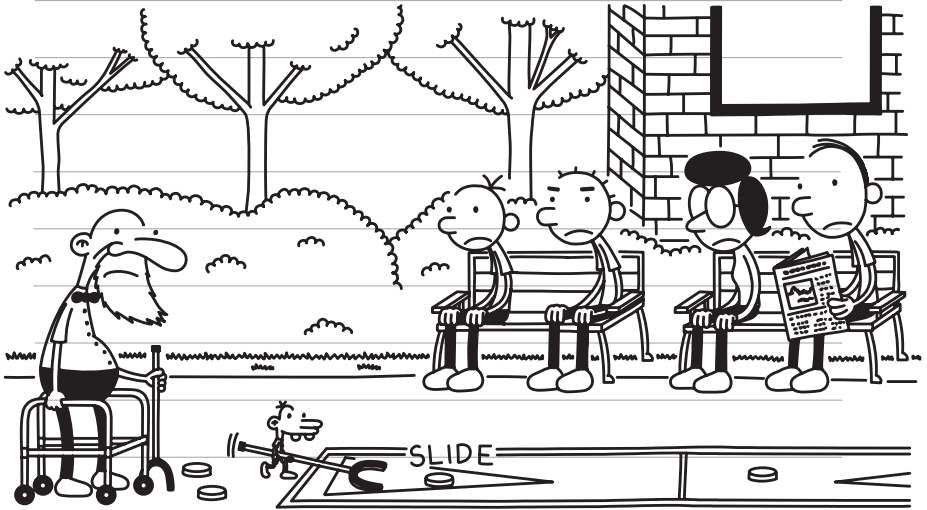


Me and my brother Rodrick were happy, because we were both dreading spending the first week of summer vacation playing shuffleboard at a nursing home.

But when my little brother, Manny, heard about the change in plans, he totally LOST it. Mom had talked up the Aunt Loretta trip so much that Manny was actually EXCITED about going.

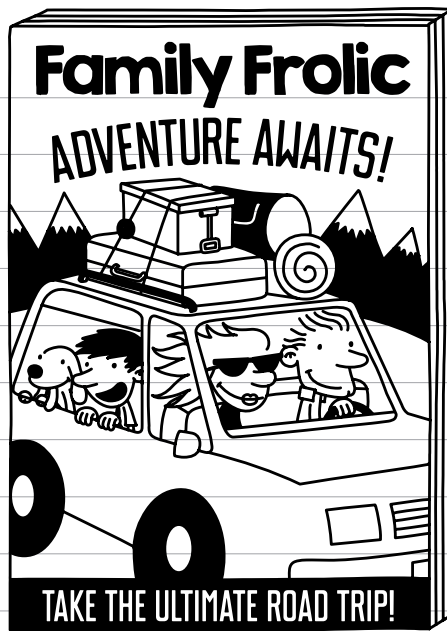


We ended up **POSTPONING** our trip to Disney so we could visit Aunt Loretta. You'd think Mom would've learned her lesson about surprise trips after **THAT** one.



I know **EXACTLY** where this road trip idea came from, because the new issue of "Family Frolic" magazine came in the mail today.

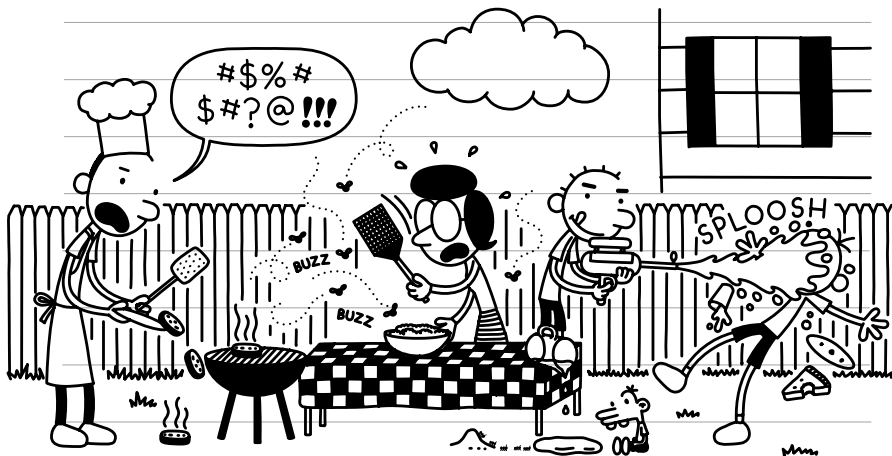
If I had to guess, I'd say 90% of everything we do as a family comes from ideas Mom gets from that magazine. And when I saw the latest issue, I knew it was gonna get Mom's wheels turning.



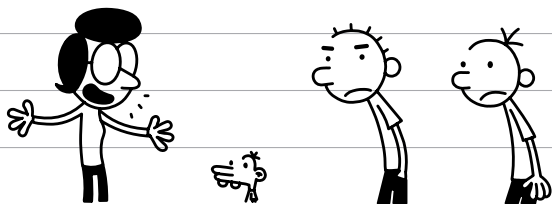
I've flipped through "Family Frolic" a few times, and I have to admit, the pictures always make everything look like a lot of fun.



But there must be something wrong with OUR family, because we can never measure up to the ones they show in the magazine.



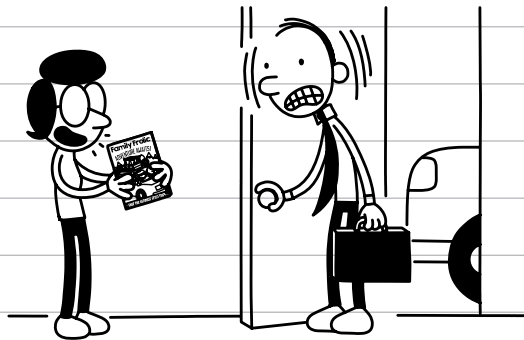
I guess Mom's not giving up, though. She said this road trip is gonna be awesome and that spending a lot of time together in the car will be a "bonding" experience for the whole family.



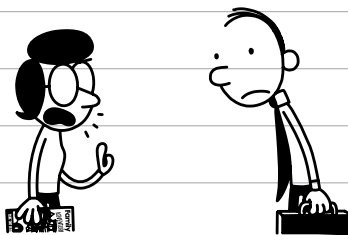
I tried to talk her into letting us do something NORMAL, like going to a water park for the day, but Mom didn't want to hear it.

She said the whole point of this trip is to do things we've never done before and to have "authentic" experiences.

I thought Mom would've looped Dad in about her road trip idea, but apparently I was wrong. Because when he got home from work, he seemed just as surprised as us kids.



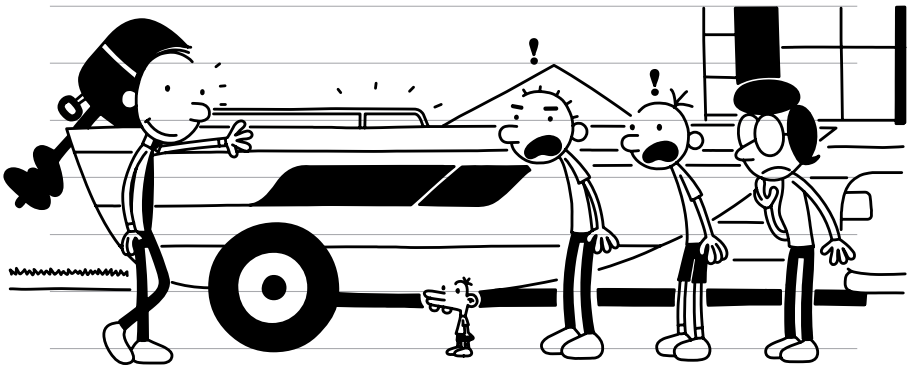
Dad told Mom it was a bad time to be away from work and he didn't want to use his vacation days unless he absolutely HAD to. But Mom said there's nothing more important than spending time with your family.



Then Dad told Mom he was really hoping to get his BOAT out on the water this weekend, and if we went on a road trip, he wouldn't be able to.

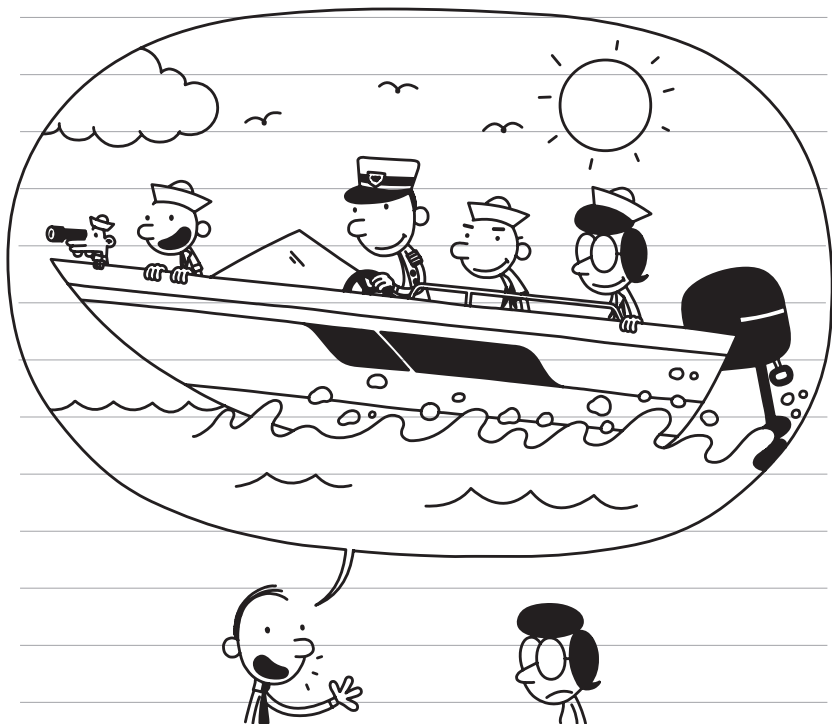
Mom and Dad get along pretty well in general, but the one thing that's guaranteed to cause a fight between them is Dad's boat.

A few years ago, Mom sent Dad out to get some milk, but along the way he spotted a boat for sale in someone's front yard. And before you knew it, the boat was in our driveway.



Mom was mad that Dad didn't check with her first, because having a boat is a ton of work.

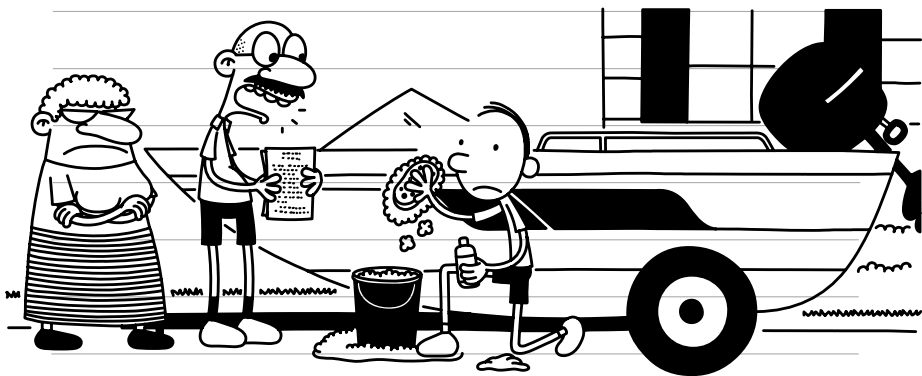
But Dad said it was always his dream to own a boat and that we could spend every weekend out on the water as a family.



So Dad got to KEEP the boat, and he seemed really happy. But things went downhill fast.

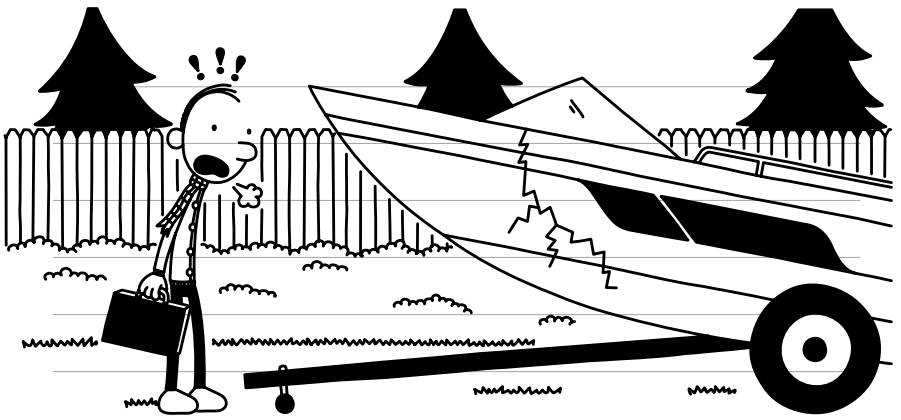
A few days later, some people from the Homeowners' Association knocked on our door.

They said there were rules in our neighborhood against having a boat parked in front of your house and told Dad he had to move it to the back.

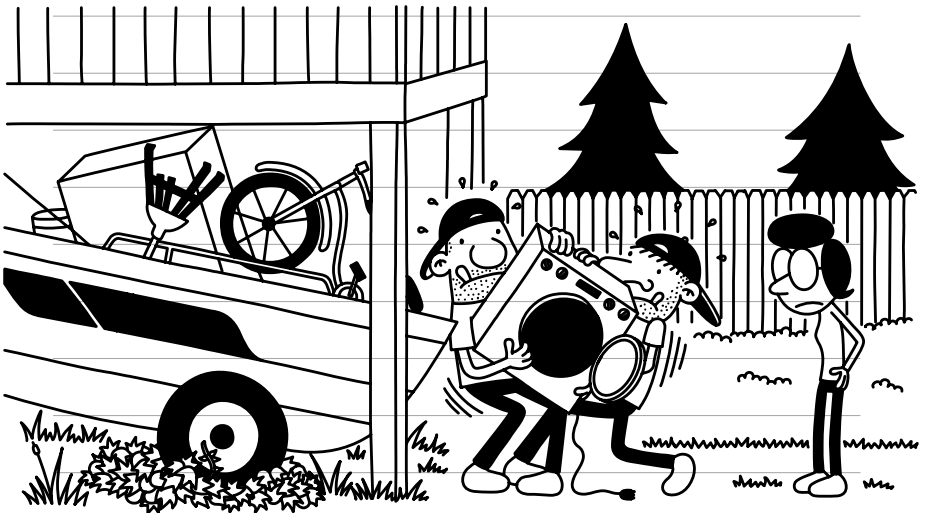


The boat sat in the backyard for the whole summer because Dad was too busy and didn't have time to use it. Then, in the fall, one of Dad's coworkers told him he'd have to WINTERIZE the boat to protect it from the cold weather.

Dad found out it would cost more to winterize the boat than it cost him to BUY it, so he decided he'd take his chances. And sure enough, two weeks later, when the temperature dropped below freezing, a big crack appeared in the hull.



When it started to snow, Dad rolled the boat under the back deck, and it sat there all winter. In the spring, Mom started using it to store all sorts of junk from the house.



The next summer, Dad decided he was gonna fix the boat.

But when he went to pull it out from under the deck, he discovered a family of raccoons living in our old washing machine.



Dad called an exterminator to get rid of the raccoons, but when he heard how much THAT was gonna cost, he decided to take care of it himself.

By then Manny had heard about the baby raccoons living in the washing machine, and Mom had to step in.