

Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Let That Sink In

Or, The modern Halifax.

Andrew Zhong, Sep. 23, 2024 - Jan. 1, 2025

This journal, written by 13-year-old Gregory Heffley, a survivor of the TSS McKinley disaster on April 6, 2008, was mailed in as evidence to the NTSB the following day by his older brother Rodrick Heffley. It provides a crucial, detailed firsthand account of the disaster. All entries within are transcribed as follows from the original NTSB report.

APRIL

Friday (April 4, 2008)

It's been 3 days since April Fool's: Abigail tried and failed to snatch Rowley away last month, ATA Airlines stopped flying 2 days ago, and I'll go on the spring break field trip to Disney World along with the rest of those 8th graders tomorrow!

I have NEVER been to Disney World before, and I'd be OVERZEALOUS to get away from my CHAOTIC mess of a family, especially that irritating know-it-all Manny, to the Happiest Place on Earth, even if it's for only 8 days.

Mom signed me up for it in my favor when I begged refusing to join. But deep down, I knew I meant to sign up. And once you sign up, you cannot back out unless there's a medical emergency.

However, there is one guy who made me briefly reconsider: Albert Sandy.

Since last Monday at lunch, Albert acted like a missionary, telling helpless kids the unsettling facts and theories about both Orlando and Anaheim parks that he read on forums to make them afraid of the Disney parks.

For example: Earlier today, Albert explained in GRUESOME detail about a young hostess Deborah Stone who was CRUSHED to death on a stage in America Sings in Anaheim in 1974.

Last Tuesday, he told to us that one time a guy was born in Disneyland, and he got a LIFETIME pass as a result. Still, don't expect me to freak out at finding the parks are maternity wards. I hope no one got any suicidal thoughts.

And this Monday, Albert informed that since we're going to Florida, LIVE alligators roam Disney's swamps! He advised that if you're clumsy enough, you might get BITTEN by one!

Henceforth, each time I'd go there, I should be more safe than sorry... if that is EVEN true.

All this sounds creepy, but rest easy knowing what Albert said would NOT happen to ME, and even if they do, they no longer happened since the '90s. I've checked. Besides, those theories might be invented by bored teens. That is, unless I experience them myself.

Saturday (April 5, 2008)

It's I in the afternoon as I'm writing this. I'm riding along the Northeast Corridor, two-thirds till Chesapeake. I'm not sure if Holly is in the same car. However, that doesn't mean I should take my chances; shuffling in the aisles seem eerily awkward; creepy, even.

Remember how I said I quit girls? Well, now I'm thinking of giving it another shot. As they say, you'll never give up until you decide to quit trying.

On Monday, my 1st-period biology teacher Mrs. Matthews announced we'd be taking a train down to Baltimore to board a CRUISE ship! You know how I said how I've never been to Disney World? I also never rode on a boat, let alone a FULL-FLEDGED cruise ship!

I'm pretty wary, so when I packed my stuff last night, my duffel bag was filled notably with food; bandages; a spare journal in case this one goes missing; and extra clothes. Whereas my backpack is crammed full with my WHOLE game stock as well as my Xbox!

This is my first time on Amtrak, and I wish we could maintain the 150 mph down to Orlando. But the truth is: we want to go off in STYLE!

All the answers are consistent: to save ferrying time, with Principal Bottoms' answer being:

"We wanna spend the most time and most money in Disney World instead of on a ship."

I guess they're right!

I followed up if the ship we'd be boarding would be one of the more grander ones, but he ended up giving me a dismissive wave.

4:15 p.m.

Well, looks like I overshot my hopes. All 352 of us (with 14 teachers and 10 parents) arrived at Penn Station at 2:00 p.m. and were ushered to 6 coaches to the terminal.

Since Baltimore is by the Chesapeake, Chessie's Baltimore & Ohio was based out of here - from Bryce, and the Cheese Touch had been engraved into EVERY middle schooler, DOZENS of morons called the stop-by the "Chessie Touch".

Goodness! I wish I could shut everyone up, but I was OUTNUMBERED.

It went until we arrived. As soon as we did, though, all I saw was an older ship already docked. I REFUSED to believe it because I was expecting a HUGE Princess liner waiting.

The screening took SO LONG that my legs wanted to collapse right then and there! In fact, some morons wore so much metallic stuff that the security held EVERYONE behind up for a whole QUARTER HOUR!

After I was screened, my system luckily didn't get confiscated, and our chaperones ushered all of us to board. As I walked, I prayed we'd arrived too early. But I found out the old-schooler turned out to be OURS.

One thing that piqued my interest (and my fear) is that she seemed to be a relic from when jet planes first flew.

In fact, I'm willing to bet Grandpa sailed on this EXACT vessel on his English vacation back when it was called the Empress of Canada, and when Dad was only a BABY.

Nowadays, the cruise ship is named the McKinley; with the logo of Seaboard & Eastern Lines, a relatively smaller cruise line that sails her on routes just like all the other cruise lines.

"Zoo-Wee Mama, we have to board THIS?!"

Rowley addressed the huge elephant by the dock like the class clown he is. I had no words, but there were a couple of scared chuckles around.

A few others also joked that you have to wear dated attires, claiming that third- and first-class passengers are SEGREGATED, and sarcastically remarking that this is a mansion renowned as her namesake, hence the name.

Bryce the maritime geek went as far as to blurt this out as soon as he realized our ship was an ocean liner.

"Hey, guys! This old tub is the heir to Titanic's 'unsinkability'! Can't you believe it?!"

Nonetheless, just by looking at the McKinley, I guessed she's 40 years old. I think by now, such a ship would probably malfunction or even SINK.

Despite her age, the ship had been OVERHAULED and REFURBISHED, according to a welcoming sailor as the students zealously board.

He added that except the Rivera Dining Room, the entire Rivera Deck below had been converted to additional cargo holds.

Now, here's a sentence that made me seriously doubt the man.

"By the way, everything technical, including the engines and boilers, had been totally refitted in a month!"

It's not just the age that's the issue, you also have to know the boiler and engine are NOT a toy's batteries. I think you have to HALF the ship just to replace them. But whatever. So long as this jet-age-era seafarer is practical enough and cared for, I wouldn't have to closely examine every square inch.

We boarded it at 4:00 and soon found out via Mr. Ira that every kid is to share a cabin in the main deck with anywhere between one to three other random roommates.

The boys got cabins toward the bow, and the girls' toward the stern. No one of the opposite gender is to visit each other's cabins to prevent sexual harassments, not like it's gonna happen.

Still, we can share the corridors and interact with girls OUTSIDE of our cabins. Better go scavenging for Holly first chance! The first hour isn't that first chance, though. Everyone has to settle in their cabins.

I feel especially bad for those having to suffer with insane weirdos like Fregley or Ruby Bird. Those weirdos think quitting freaking others out is like quitting SMOKING.

In fact, I'm wondering how they EVEN got in to begin with. Let that sink in.

Anyway, since Holly is a GIRL, she can't just come over. At 13, everyone has the instinct to drive those of the opposite gender away from their rooms like the rooms are BATHROOMS.

And if Holly and I were in the same place, the chances would be SLIM.

On the flipside; Rowley was the only one to share the 4-bunk cabin with me. I guess our organizers accidentally did us the GREATEST favor I could EVER imagine!

Just when the two of us settle in, captain Lee announced on the PA system the voyage from Baltimore to Port Canaveral. He planned it would take 36 hours at top speed, with the arrival time set to Monday morning at 4:30.

After the announcement ended, all of us are officially off on our way to Disney World!

We're leaving the Patapsco now. I was starting to get BORED. So, I came up with the literal FIRST thing: Playing video games together with Rowley.

10:11 p.m.

Do you know one other person that's been driving me totally NUTS other than Manny?

Can't answer? I'll answer it for you: It's Holly Hills.

7:30 p.m. is dinnertime and it's my first chance at impressing her. As soon as Mr. Jefferson told us to go to dinner, I made a BEELINE down the halls and down the stairs to the Rivera Dining Room astern.

I sat at a table, waited for Rowley, and excitedly ordered well-done filet mignon, pan-roasted salmon, and jumbo shrimp scampi, all with one item each for the two of us. Mostly because we never ate TRUE Italian cuisine before.

But as it turns out, the waiter is INEPT as heck. I got my salmon OVERCOOKED, the waiter somehow MISHEARD "scampi" as "scallop", whereas the steaks are EXACTLY how I wanted by sheer LUCK.

The entire time we slowly and bitterly ate, I anxiously scanned my eyes for Holly in a sea of 8th graders and other tourists, to not see her whatsoever.

"OK, maybe others are blocking my view; she MUST be here," I thought.

Even though I'd announced to Rowley "I'm all done," I asked for a tray and one more filet, a salmon, and a scampi; with my clearest voice to a waitress as she passed by.

Fortunately, the waitress had proper ears and gave me the requested food, and after I put Holly's food on the HUGE tray, Rowley abruptly questioned me.

"Greg, is there something wrong? You said you're all done with your food, but one of each isn't enough? Also, why are your eyes rapidly dashing around?"

I didn't have the heart to spill the beans, so I vaguely told him I'd be out "walking" around "to take a break," when in reality I was going to scavenge for that girl.

I mapped through EVERY promenade, not without bumping into others. I mapped the ENTIRE ship from the upper deck ALL THE WAY to the observation deck, and I did it FOUR times just to make sure.

Guess what?! She's NOT ANYWHERE!

I thought I'd turned the wrong promenades upside down in all the wrong times, thus I lounged on a chair facing the heavily-packed pool with all the rowdy 8th graders reliving that time of their lives.

After a while, my body was FUSING to my chair from boredom. So, I removed myself from the commotion, leaving my cold food behind, and went up to the observation deck.

I still had the must to see Holly; I had been waiting for YEARS to impress her. Even by thinking about her, she's nearly driving me NUTS, forcing a MILLION questions.

"Was she seasick?" "Did she get the Touch?" "Does she hate me?" "Was she also finding me?" "Did she find another guy?" "Was she trapped in an elevator?" "Did she fall overboard and no one noticed?" and "Was she on the ship to begin with?"

Fireworks are banned; a waving hand could be ANYONE's hand; and promenades are sardine-packed, drowning out my pointless shouting. I cannot visit her, not only was it due to the rules, I also have no idea WHERE she stays in the first place.

Rowley reunited seeing me stare off, still having his questions unanswered.

"Greg, what's the matter, and why are you acting so weird?"

Then Rowley kept insisting I should answer him because he wanted to get his concerns out of his system - just like Mom every DARN time.

Well, I couldn't keep this a secret no longer. As a result, I spilled the beans saying that the entire time, from the very start of this trip, I'd been scavenging for Holly to impress and even DATE her.

Rowley sighed, and advised me that I cannot find Holly no matter how hard I try to look like a stalker, but I knew he was just trying to make me feel better.

"Look, Greg. You're not a god of the company. You're probably even creeping her out. So, Greg, please forget it; instead think about what this trip itself is gonna be. We could cross the bridge when we arrive."

I'm wondering if tomorrow things would change for the best.

Sunday (April 6, 2008)

I hate to break it to you, but today I accidentally predicted it: The TSS McKinley is CAPSIZING as I'm writing this! If I die, I need to write the events leading to my demise:

At 8:49 a.m., we felt a hideous JERK toward the left and I fell right onto the floor with my duffel bag crushing me.

Rowley and I were both prepared for the day. Although we were both puzzled, we didn't freak out. Rowley asked if I've ever felt turbulence, but I haven't even BEEN on a plane.

"As if I've EVER been on a plane before, Rowley."

Within 5 minutes or so, this message started blaring constantly.

"Attention, all passengers of the TSS McKinley! Captain Francis Lee would inform you to stay in your cabins; it is absolutely dangerous to move, so do not risk your life! Wait until an evacuation order is to be given."

After all, who would've thought this ship was gonna sink? I certainly didn't at first.

Nonetheless, we joked about maritime perils to cope with in the confusion, with - of course - some of them being Zoo-Wee Mama jokes.

But deep down, we both knew the ship was dead-set on capsizing.

I heard constant PUNCHING on all the doors - including mine. I think it's Bryce because I could just recognize his voice checking up on his cronies.

A quarter hour later, Mr. Jefferson busted in AGAIN. He informed both of us we'd be "in grave danger" if we left our room. He also ordered that we have to wear life vests.

A few minutes later and we started to grow ever more scared.

I joked about the costs of faulty unit conversions. However, Rowley out of the blue blurted: "Zoo-Wee MacKinley is sinking!"

Henceforth, it's just pure commotion and confusion.

Rowley made me see what's outside, so I opened the door to find a dozen kids going berserk as if it's the end. Obviously so; I saw WISPS OF SMOKE toward the ceiling, and the towels won't last long.

Some are gathered together, while others are crouched or lying down, sometimes tugging on other's legs or doorknobs, or just trying to keep on their feet.

I had seen enough. So, I slammed the door and told Rowley all about outside and how he shouldn't chuck any more of this right at me ever again.

By 9:30, I was noticing moving was beginning to get HARDER.

I tried to joke that it's just a training simulator on the wrong ship and wrong time, praying my friend's desperation was still kept at bay.

But instead, I set him off.

"This isn't a simulator, Greg! This is the real deal! It's getting ridiculously bad, so I really want to get off NOW!"

In fact, to make sure he stayed true to his words, he grabbed a chair and CHUCKED it against our room's riveted-in porthole as HARD as he could.

The chair didn't crack the window AT ALL, and it fell back WAY more damaged.

I looked outside out of curiosity, and I saw a cutter in the distance, and I saw fishing boats approaching us. But the cutter wasn't doing anything, somehow.

Fregley and Alex Aruda stumbled asking for life vests because there aren't ENOUGH. I'm not giving mine up for safety, while Rowley gave it away without hesitation.

Fregley didn't take it any well. It's just not fair, because as soon as Alex laid his hands on it, Fregley LEAPT and attempted to STEAL it in the most BARBARIC manner imaginable.

He started a fight to just to wear the vest. Eventually, Fregley smashed Alex's glasses, and Mrs. Sheldon had to drag the weirdo back to his cabin.

But Alex couldn't even wear it as the zipper got stuck midway now. I somehow managed to unzip it for the labels. I found an alarming one:

"Made in the U.S.A.; 07/27/1992."

I unzipped mine and found the same EXACT label.

I think this company is killing us. But I have gotta still wear the vests as it's PROTOCOL.

Finally, to add insult to all this, 5 minutes later, everyone started smelling rotten EGGS - not The Cheese - EGGS.

It made me think of the worst: a gas explosion.

To confirm my fears while trying to keep distress at bay, I asked Rowley.

"Hey, Rowley, is it just me or does it smell like gas?!"

Rowley might've witnessed a gas leak because as a result, he started BREAKING DOWN in tears while shouting he doesn't want to die and he wants to get out.

Well, it's better late than never to make use of time.

I called Mom and she picked up, entirely relieved with the rest of my family.

They were watching our ship live on TV when I called, and so I told my account. Of course, she sounded extremely anxious when she made sure I followed the rules.

"OK, Greg, just stay in your cabin; if you listen to the adults, you will be alright."

I couldn't talk her out right then and there because it'd be a waste. But In case I DO listen to the adults, we bade our final farewells to everyone. I took the chance to utter my dying wish to my brothers.

"Rodrick and Manny, please! Never go on a field trip involving ships ever again! Because if you do, you would end up like your brother."

Finally, I said the literal LAST thing to Mom:

"Mom and Dad, if I don't return, I hope you'd reflect; try not to be too overbearing, nor too ignorant, nor defend your youngest child 24/7; and change for the better."

While Mom relayed what I said to Rodrick and Manny, my brothers were heartbroken.

Rodrick: "IF YOU DIE, THEN WHERE WOULD ALL MY PRANKS GO?!"

Manny: "BUBBY! I'M REALLY SORRY!"

Rodrick: "GREG, I WON'T SELL ANYTHING OF YOURS ANYMORE, OK?!"

I didn't wait for Dad, so I hung up the phone for the last time.

Then, I let Rowley bid his goodbyes. Before he hung up, Rowley muttered to Mrs. Jefferson something about me, but it was nearly drowned out.

Judging by the phrase I could BARELY make out, which is "...not trust what Greg says...", I wondered if Rowley is starting to HATE me.

By 10:00 sharp, it's getting even more HARDER to move, I'm starting to see dark smoke seeping, and the smell is getting CHEESY! Even so, we weren't EVACUATED at all!

I now flat-out no longer believed the captain. He's leaving us to DIE.

"Rowley! This tilt is TOO STEEP! We have to leave NOW!" I called out.

But he suddenly SLAPPED me hard in the face.

"For goodness' sake, Greg, I don't care how much the ship is tilting! Though the Coast Guard is here, we couldn't say no to dad nor the captain! Can't you just WAIT?!"

Rowley was ADAMANT on taking the leap of faith - repeating the same excuse again and again, no matter how many times I yelled at him.

Just when I thought about ditching him alone, Rowley got sick of waiting, stood up and walked out of the cabin unannounced.

He was at the doorway when it hit me: Rowley was going WITHOUT me!

I aggressively shouted: "Rowley, are you leaving me here?!"

Rowley then confessed with the 2 sentences that BRUTALLY kicked my hornet's nest:

"I'm abandoning you, Greg. I'm absolutely FINISHED with your slavery of me."

I was FUMING. HARD. He had taken our 4 years of playing around and stretched it all the way to SLAVERY, and now he's BETRAYING ME?! AFTER LYING TO ME?!

To vent my anger at Rowley, I grabbed a vase of china from the bedside table, charged at him, and I did the unspeakable to my sole "best friend":

I WHACKED it on his head... hard.

Rowley tried to run away, but he couldn't get away in time.

Even though there were a couple of boys next to me, they were too distraught.

Just as I reflected, strong guilt flushed my last 4 years down the toilet. I had a horrible vision where I was fried on an electric chair if I were to abandon him.

So, I was dead-set on delicately pulling every shard out. I thanked my lucky stars I packed all the first aid stuff while I wrapped the bandage around his forehead.

If carrying 2 backpacks and a duffel bag is grueling, then carrying a boy is IMPOSSIBLE. So, I punched on the door across us to be greeted by Bryce, behind him was Michael Sampson and Chirag who were totally beside themselves.

Julian Trimble was even FARTHER from himself on the telephone.

I straight-up convinced Bryce we have to abandon ship NOW. He has to carry Rowley across both our arms to the lifeboats, no questions asked.

Plus, I relayed instructions to Bryce, and they go like this:

"Bryce, would you mind relaying this: "Michael and Chirag, you both go and kick on doors to convince anyone inside to leave their rooms as the captain is a liar. Tell the occupants to repeat what you said.""

I soon found myself carrying Rowley across Bryce's and my arms up the forward staircase, with Julian closely following behind.

We tried coaxing passengers on-the-fly, but in the end only 4 followed us: Patty Farrell (I couldn't talk Bryce out); Fregley Clermont (THAT Fregley); Collin Lee; and Richard Fisher.

Richard and Julian saw smoke down the halls and booked it as Bryce hurried me into the stairs.

For God's sake, the smell was becoming unbearable, and I swear to God it smells like a campfire! And smoke is making our climb HARDER! That's when I finally, fully realized our ship is on FIRE.

The farther up we go, the more thicker the smoke is. I had even caught glimpses of FLAMES! To be honest with you, we didn't WANT to know what happened... But we DID.

Patty stumbled upon a boy on fire. She tried to find the extinguisher, but caught fire herself on the carpet. Finally, that snitch has got third degree burns not even stitches will help! I couldn't help but smile a bit!

Like I said, the smoke is heavy, and it's definitely not just me. As soon as we stumbled onto the Empress Deck, all of us coughed that we're literally DYING.

I felt my breathing becoming a bit harder. There's nothing I could do. No alarms were blaring, and no sprinklers were activated.

If the saying "out of the frying pan and into the fire" doesn't fit my situation perfectly, then I've got no idea what does.

"Have any of you ever been in Death Valley?" I broke the ice to keep insanity at bay.

Fregley TOTALLY lost his marbles. At the top of his lungs, he hollered out:

"I REALLY WANNA GET OUTTA HERE!"

I tried calling out for him, but ended up watching as Fregley booked it. He snatched a nearby vase, smashed the window open FIRST try, and flung himself out.

He made the crowd grab the heaviest items they see and brutally chuck them against the windows. It's our EARLIEST golden opportunity!

So, I bit the bullet and BOOKED it.

"CHANGE OF PLANS - I'M LEAPING! GOODBYE!"

I leapt out of an already-broken window and cannonballed SMACK dab onto a fishing boat.

That was literally the HIGHEST and FARTHEST jump I've ever taken in my life! I was SO glad to finally breathe fresh air for once that I thought it was God's BLESSING!

I glanced back toward the cruise ship and SWEET JESUS!

Flames are eating the middle part up, paired with blood-curdling screaming everywhere along with leaping. Some were killed upon impact.

I learned the easier way if we went to the lifeboats as planned. A lifeboat was being lowered, and it caught fire almost immediately.

A COAST GUARD helicopter was flying right above us. It just circled around the disaster below like a hawk.

The boat's owner pulled passengers onto his boat, with passengers pulling others aboard. It's the same story on the FISHING boats next to us.

Two Coast Guard boats sailed past us, but I knew way better. They waved for the boats, but the Coast Guard never even noticed. I think this is a PLOT.

I turned around, just in time to see Rowley's body being chucked out of a window and splashing in the water close to both boats.

Bryce followed soon after, and both emerged fine. Bryce confessed that he intentionally threw Rowley that way to not kill him. Sounds passable.

Just when our boat was getting pretty cramped, we're off at last!

Jesus Christ, the ship is EXPLODING!

5:04 p.m.

Boy! That knockout REALLY took a serious toll on my brain! I don't think my brain is even the same anymore. Video games and girls now felt like a dream unreachable even by a transpacific flight to either Haneda or Narita. How on EARTH did I know these airports?

Whatever, couldn't say for sure now.

When the ship exploded, the disaster had already SCARRED me as-is. So needless to say, that explosion was yet another traumatizing insult to injury.

I shed tears of joy for surviving, and simultaneously of sadness for the victims. I can confidently say I wasn't TOTALLY blinded by it from 5 miles away.

The scene looked like someone had dropped an ATOMIC BOMB; crap was flying literally EVERYWHERE.

One moment you're looking at a still image; the next, you shut your eyes to a blinding flash, and slowly open them again; and the final, you're being ambushed by a deafening explosion.

That's EXACTLY what I saw right at that moment.

I think my ears were blasted back there. Just then, I noticed one pretty BIG piece flying at supersonic speeds right TOWARD me, and it knocked me out HARD.

I then had a scarring nightmare where I heard that Rowley died in the New Hanover Hospital's ICU for the vase incident. Mrs. Jefferson called me saying so.

As tears pooled around me, I heard my voice being yelled.

"Greg! Greg Heffley! Are you OK?!"

Eventually, Bryce forced me awake with a literal slap in the face.

He had wanted to announce that we have already arrived ashore. It was 4:32 p.m. when I woke up. We're at Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. I'm still here.

I laid my hand over the wound to find bandage over it. Bryce told me to not untie it at all.

I prayed that by some miracle I didn't bust my head open and spilled my brain out, but what about Rowley? Is he also alright?

I don't know, and honestly: I don't WANT to know.

When I came to, parents were whimpering and sobbing across-the-board. They were trying to beg to officers to let the parents go out to sea. Some near by me were huddled together in blankets, praying.

CPR is all useless no matter how hard the lifeguards performed. The innocent children had already died bloodied. It's a scene I wish I'll never see again.

Bryce told me he had been standing watch of me the whole time WITHOUT taking me to the EMT for some reason. When he was done rambling, I asked this:

"Bryce? What EXACTLY knocked me out?"

Out of the blue, he ECSTATICALLY pulled out some poor kid's singed and bloodstained copy of my OLDEST JOURNAL, apparently written under the name "Jeff Kinney".

"Greg, why still wish for all that fame when you're ALREADY famous?!"

Dang it. I guess it must be Rowley's last-ditch-effort of revenge. Oh, well, I'd better chug things along all for Bryce's sake.

"Exactly! And by chance have you known anyone who got their hands on my "Diary"?"

I asked that in an unusually reluctant tone, but Bryce kept that same enthusiasm!

"Dude! The whole school's been talking about you behind your back! You just don't know how famous are you yet! How could anyone not know-"

"Bryce... I don't care about being famous no more. But, thanks for reminding me, I guess."

He's reminding me of all these, most I no longer even give a GRAIN OF SAND about.

As I lay there, I pondered for a moment about what was the root, and then it hit me:

My parents.

They have ruined my life, so I ruined Rowley's life! Why didn't I realize it early on? Why was Rowley still best friends with me? Why can't he just ditch me forever after that broken arm? Maybe I really should've died in that explosion.

But then again, if anything's better than being an orphan, then it'd be returning to the same old reality back home under the Heffleys' roof. Also, I want medical attention ASAP.

For what felt like hours, I trotted around the beach, shivering hard. The literal first thing I wanted to do once I meet them was to find out if they had REALLY felt guilty, and only then do I want medical attention.

I overheard a woman screaming at an officer at the top of her lungs. It's not just her, it's also DOZENS of other parents as far as the horizon.

"MOVE OUTTA MY WAY! LET ME SEE ABBY AGAIN! LET ME GO TO SEA, YOU STATUE!"

I was thinking of giving up, but I continued a bit further anyway for good measure. To my interest, I saw not one, not two, but FOUR familiar faces by the sea.

Mom was rocking Dad back and forth in distress, while Rodrick and Manny tried their best to calm my parents down.

Now, I should've been ecstatic to show my parents I'm alive, but instead I somehow felt bitter. I felt bitter because I'd be reuniting with oppression.

I crept up to them very slowly. It must've felt like an agonizing hour before I paused about 6 feet away. They were too distraught to notice me.

That's when I proudly exclaimed:

"Mom, Dad, I'm here. Can you see me?"

My parents paused, and ran dead-straight at me once they had realized. I could feel a billion tear droplets on my head at that moment. I literally felt like I was suffocating because the hugs were so darn tight.

Despite that, I just managed to break out what I've been thinking of saying this entire time.

"Have you guys even **CHANGED** at all? Just like how I told you?!"

To my greatest of surprise, my parents did a U-turn, something that I had least expected since as far as I could remember. Mom was sobbing **REALLY** hard.

"Gregory, let me announce this: I've reconsidered what I've done; rambled with Mrs. Jefferson. I just wanted you to grow up well, as a preschool teacher, but the whole time I didn't realize my ways don't fly well with you."

Yeah, as if a **MERE** brief confession's gonna cut it. Where is Mrs. Jefferson?

"So, Gregory, I'm wholly sorry for everything! It's true! Now, I'm determined to treating you the logical way and won't funnel you to a T, so does your Dad; after all, you're still my son! And I'll be sure to treat everyone equally! Even Manny!"

I'm gonna give it a proving flight for the first month.

Mom then worriedly advised me something that I knew of right off the bat.

"Gregory, you **HAVE** to be in the hospital **NOW**. I have to bring you there **NOW**."

At least common sense was in that statement.

I'm not sure if anyone else immediately changed their hearts. Manny still apologized in that same passive manner I still remember. But as if I cared.

Rodrick will (maybe) still be my Sid Phillips, but he openly admitted that I **ONCE** was **WAY** more despicable than him to me; he'd proved it right from Barnes & Noble.

At first, I refused to believe it until Rodrick made me mine deep into my memories.

Of course, it unearthed regretful shenanigans. That broken arm, and the Safety Patrol incident, all to name a few. All culminating in my forcibly yanking Rowley away from Abigail Brown. Literally. It was like we were in a PACT.

On the way to an ambulance, I saw Mrs. Jefferson jerking Rowley while crouching over that poor kid. She almost had a heart attack from seeing Rowley waking up with a MASSIVE start, and ME.

I saw her, she saw me, and I saw her boiling up. I guess Rowley must've dropped the court archives right then and there.

At that point, I knew I was burnt toast. I was half-correct.

Mrs. Jefferson got up and CHARGED right at me. She grabbed a Bible out and BASHED it on my head THREE times... HARD.

But then, Mrs. Jefferson calmed herself down and just cried in front of me. It strangely was of joy. She somehow was thankful her son just managed to survive the ordeal.

Turns out, she just wanted me to snap out of it by banging my head three times, or in her words verbatim: "chase your old, evil self out of you."

The whole time I tried to shut Mrs. Jefferson up because I'm losing even MORE time. But nonetheless, she was adamant on telling me what will happen.

Rowley will DIE for sure. All because I tried to save him. As that Linkin Park song said: "I tried so hard and got so far. But in the end, it doesn't even MATTER."

So I broke away from Mrs. Jefferson the first second she was done. I wanted to apologize to Rowley for EVERYTHING, and to see him for the last time.

"Wait! Don't take Rowley away! Please! I have SO much left to say to him!"

But the EMT already carried him away on a stretcher into an ambulance.

I just stood there watching as the ambulance drove away to God knows where other than a place off-limits to me: the E.R., then the O.R., then the ICU and perhaps the coffin.

And soon, I will also have to go. Mom is dragging me to another ambulance.

My final wish for ANYONE who is reading this is this:

DO NOT MAIL THIS TO JEFF KINNEY! MAIL THIS TO THE NTSB ASAP!

FAREWELL!

THE BOSTON GLOBE

SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 2008

IT'S THE SECOND HALIFAX!

MCKINLEY LEFT BY CAPTAIN TO EXPLODE OFF N.C. COAST; 124 RESCUED BY FISHING BOATS; ABOUT 860 DEAD; WIMPY KID SAFE; JEFFERSON MAYBE; CAPTAIN TO DEATH ROW.

Diary of a Wimpy Cruise Ship Captain

By Howard Campbell

GLOBE STAFF

WILMINGTON - On the afternoon of April 5, over 300 8th grade students of Plainville's Lawrence Mack Middle School excitedly boarded the TSS *McKinley* at the Port of Baltimore en route to Walt Disney World. Their ship, sailing for 48 years, was a death chamber under captain Francis Kenneth Lee.

On the morning of April 6, the *McKinley* capsized at 8:49 a.m., and exploded into a massive fireball nearly 2 hours later at 10:32 a.m., killing 261 students, all 14 teachers, all 10 parent chaperones, 123 unaffiliated passengers, 447 brave crew members, and 8 fishermen; all within a quarter-mile radius, tallying to at least 863 dead.

The cause is presumed to be a mix of a gas explosion and cost-cutting maintenance, as told from various firsthand accounts from the surviving passengers and crew members, though NTSB investigation has just begun.

The *McKinley*, designed for around 17,000 tons of cargo, was loaded with around 52,720 tons on the voyage by Seaboard & Eastern Cruise Lines, exceeding the capacity by over 3 times. None of which were even tied down at all. It was reported that the Rivera Deck was illegally redesigned by the company to make way for additional cargo holds.

To compensate and avoid scrutiny of inspectors at Baltimore, the crew drained 4,520 tons out of 5,125 tons from the ballast water tanks, so that the *McKinley* was carrying only 605 tons of ballast water, which made the vessel more susceptible to instability.

"Ask me: is an explosion worth all the extra money?! To those pigs, it is - or rather, was!" Frank Heffley, father of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* celebrity Gregory Heffley cried out upon being interviewed. "I thought Greg would return from his best days in Disney, and he returned, alright, battered. I don't care if my wife [Susan Clark Heffley] has 'changed my mind' or whatnot. If she hadn't sent my son away, then none of this would've happened to him!"

To make matters worse, at 8:48 a.m., helmsman Herbert Price was ordered by third mate Joseph Fairfield to steer the ship 10 degrees toward starboard, from a heading of 225 to 235 degrees. The heavy freight slid toward port and weighed it down. Without the much-needed ballast water, the *McKinley* started to capsize a minute later.

The cargo hold later burst into flames, and a gas leak scent could be smelled throughout the entire cruise liner half an hour later. The fire slowly spread upward through the ship, with the gas leak remaining unchecked. To add to the chaos, a PA announcement blared on loop instructing anyone to not move in any manner, lest danger occurs.

The Coast Guard station at Wilmington was called by the *McKinley* in confusion, and the Coast Guard arrived at 10 o'clock. What is outrageous is that the first people rescued consisted of captain Lee and 14 other crew members on the bridge.

This therefore meant that the rest of the passengers, over 900 of them, had to fend for themselves or die, but most remained in their cabins because their chaperones sternly instructed them to. "They told us not to go. They were frauds!" A scarred 14-year-old student Aiden Gibbs said. "But in the end, it's not their [the chaperone's] fault."

Even when the passengers ventured out, the escape ended up in sheer bloodshed when a crazed student Frederick Langley Clermont charged out the Upper Deck's promenade window to his death, leading hundreds to do the same at their lives' expense.

According to 13-year-old student Chelsea Fairfield's account describing the catastrophe, which is just about the same as all the others, "The ship was burning, with the helicopters just flying above watching the scene as if everyone was safe, but in reality all of us were way far from safe. I saw my classmates' skulls splatter open and the Coast Guard didn't even flinch!"

Conversely, 82 were saved in time by fishermen, including captain Lee, who has been charged with over 860 counts of murder and negligence at the local court, and will be sentenced to death at the North Carolina Central Prison on Monday, April 14.

Out of the 82 survivors, 59 had to receive at least 1 operation at the Novant New Hanover Hospital near Wilmington. Rowley Jefferson, a 13-year-old student, had to receive an intense head operation for a fractured skull due to a vase hit by another student, 13-year-old Gregory "Greg" Heffley, to save Jefferson's life.

Heffley, ever since April of 2007, is a nationwide celebrity for his published journals entitled *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* under the name Jeff Kinney. He personally owns at least eight journals, including two that has already been published, plus one that last night just been mailed to the NTSB as evidence of the disaster.

Heffley also had to undergo a head surgery at the same ward as Jefferson, except in Heffley's case it's a general case of blunt force trauma allegedly by his own book, his fellow classmate Bryce Anderson clarifies.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Malcyon Days

EARLY DRAFT

Andrew Zhong, Dec. 29, 2024 - Halted on Feb. 22, 2025

Rodrick, in an interview with *The Boston Globe* on April 12, 2008, noted Gregory went through a "brain transplant" after receiving blunt force trauma from his own book, and was especially noticeable after his surgery soon after the sinking. This journal serves as undeniable proof of Greg's state after. It was mailed by Rowley's mother Linda Jefferson to his then-17-year-old first cousin Bryan Clark, who later scanned it, in their hometown of Dayton, Ohio, in September 2009. These scans are published with his permission.

APRIL 2008

Sunday, April 13

As promised for once, Rodrick didn't mail my last journal to Jeff Kinney. Instead, he promptly mailed it to the NTSB as crucial firsthand evidence.

I had JUST BARELY survived last week, but I'm not sure about Rowley.

I had to go through head surgery at the same hospital as Rowley, in a different O.R.; the trauma by my book was pretty blunt. Thank God the surgeons saved my life in the nick of time.

I was discharged yesterday after some serious recovery work, and at the Raleigh-Durham Airport I was SWARMED by paparazzi. I think they tried to prod everything about my "Diaries", but I couldn't force anything out.

My parents went out of their way to shut the crowd up by falsely lying to everyone that:

"Greg hates it when you guys shower him like that; he's only 13!"

Anyway, the flight back home to Boston was STILL an ordeal of people showering me like I'm John Lennon or something. I had to shove in headphones connected to Rodrick's iPod and crank the volume ALL THE WAY UP.

I don't give a damnation about what kind of deafening heavy metal crap was playing; all I wanted was a sense of peace.

I tried to reminisce my happiest memories to pass time. But all I ended up getting were entirely UNRELATED questions from literally NOWHERE.

"Was N707TW involved in an accident?" alongside "Will this airframe get involved in an accident?" "How many corners are cut in this recession?" "How old is this thing?" and "Are the pilots even seasoned to fly this?"

I ended up crying myself to sleep bathed in these questions.

Monday, April 14

Today my parents didn't wake me up. It was 10 a.m. and I should've been at school long ago. I went up to Dad, and I stupidly asked him why school's out.

He matter-of-factly explained that we're still mourning, and that we'll return on May 1, to pay our tribute. Normal education will resume on June 2; the second-to-last Monday.

I checked the mailbox, and when I opened it it's SARDINE-JAMMED with letters. I had to arduously yank out the school's letter like pulling a nail from a plank, and sure enough, school's closed like Dad said.

Now, I know what you have been thinking: I'd go spend all my halcyon days just playing Twisted Wizard and watching TV all day and slacking off.

But in reality, now, I'm too TRAUMATIZED to return to myself. I couldn't even COPE with it.

I went up to Rowley's house to check up on him, only to find a note at the door saying that Mrs. Jefferson is still down in North Carolina.

I shrugged it off, and I went back home to find out what the fuss is about.

That's when I saw MY NAME specifically on EVERY SINGLE LETTER:

Gregory Heffley

12 Surrey Street

Plainville, MA 02726

And the return address has SO MANY UNFAMILIAR NAMES and CITIES. HERE is a PARTIAL SNIPPET listed, without actual home addresses for privacy:

Kenneth Gaines in Burbank, California;

Lindsay Kimball in Durham, North Carolina;

Trista Price in Fort Worth, Texas;

Matthew Gallagher in Albuquerque, New Mexico;

Lawrence Jefferson in Dayton, Ohio;

Albert Daland in Vancouver, British Columbia;

Julianne LeGrande in Montreal, Quebec;

...and SO. MANY. MORE.

I even got a letter from MELBOURNE in AUSTRALIA.

Most of me wanted to burn all my fan letters down on a BBQ, but a MINUTE part of me screamed at me to "OPEN THOSE ENVELOPES!" And it took over me.

I ripped 3 of them open, and boy, did they kill me.

Good morning, Greg.

I have EXACTLY 7 questions for you:

1. Can you name all my state's counties?
2. Will you ever get a girlfriend?
3. Should a 12-year-old like you be allowed to disown Manny?
4. Can you even bear seeing dairy? After The Cheese Touch?
5. Why didn't you change minds about Rowley?
6. What other video games do you play?
7. Could you come over by my house? I've got a BROAD selection of Wii games!

From your loving fan, Ken Gaines.

And here's Julianne's. I'm guessing she'd struck JACKPOT in her English class.

Dear Greg Heffley.

I've read your diary and I've gotta say that you're truly a dear open book! Pun intended! I'm actually thinking of COPYING your idea so we can be on the same boat. The things you did along with Rowley is otherwise funny if I stepped in your shoes. I saw a few of the same stuff in my grade 6. But to be honest, if I were you I wouldn't make light of such a broken arm for popularity. It's just greedy. Also, the word "moron" my school considers inappropriate, just so you know. But anyway, I'll fly down to your house someday!

Spill it all out, asks Julianne LeGrande.

In the backside is a MASSIVE drawing in MY ART STYLE of Rodrick shoving me off a cliff, only at the bottom there's a crowd of rabid fans, and OF COURSE Julianne is the "bullseye"!

The third one from Gerald Sullivan in Melbourne is just a sheet filled with pencil doodles of me doing various stuff, all redrawn STRAIGHT from MY 1st AND 2nd JOURNALS.

There are only 2 short sentences, which for some reason makes it WORSE:

My fellow schoolmate up there.

I brought a copy of your book down home. Are you proud of yourself?

From Gerald Harold Sullivan.

I quit opening envelopes after that.

Then, I sorted the mail into 2 piles to dump into my closet: fan mail that's to be burned, and actual, GENUINE mail. I ended up finding ONE postcard from Grandpa who's on vacation in the French Rivera, and a couple newspapers, and the rest is just ADS.

But all the while, I wish Rowley was still okay.

4:12 p.m.

Greg: "Hello?"

Mrs. Jefferson: "Greg, it's Mrs. Jefferson here. My son, Rowley... he's... he's..."

Greg: "Mrs. Jefferson, tell me what happened NOW."

Mrs. Jefferson: "The surgery was MOSTLY successful, but... he had a CONCUSSION... from the porcelain! It's SEVERE... the doctors did everything they could... but... your best friend Rowley, he..."

Greg: "Please, Mrs. Jefferson. I want to get this call over and done with. Go on."

Mrs. Jefferson: "Rowley... has left this world! He passed away in the ICU! He had flatlined half an hour ago, and he was pronounced dead 5 minutes ago! Funeral will be on April 27 at your Baptist Church, OK?!"

Greg: "No... no... you have to be joking with me, right? It can't be! He shouldn't die!"

Mrs. Jefferson: "I'm very sorry for your pain, Greg, but... it's all TRUE! The hospital told me so! I'm gonna give you his death certificate as proof when I fly home!"

Greg: "HOW THE HECK COULD THIS HAPPEN TO ME?!"

For the rest of the call which was about a grueling minute, we both just sobbed.

4:25 p.m.

Rowley's officially dead. My nightmare had come true. You can't convince me otherwise.

I can't accept it (for now), but I'm not planning to kill myself; I've got common sense.

But what I never got was an ACTUAL chance to apologize to him back at that beach. I'll never get to bury the hatchet with him. I'll never see him ever again. That was my only chance! And I blew it!

The hospital didn't do me any kind, either. They didn't let me see him when I was discharged, and now he's in the morgue. All the way down in North Carolina. The only good thing that came out of missing the chance was that I had survived.

So now, Rowley, if you can read the letter I'm gonna write, I'm gonna "make it up".

Dear Rowley.

I hope you forgive me with this letter in Heaven.

The last 4 years have been pretty turbulent between us from first sight, but let me tell you: I'm just an immature, wimpy kid, and you are - or rather, were - too.

You always say I'm just jealous that you get to do whatever little kid stuff you do, and in hindsight, you're probably right. I was selfish after all. I can't predict what will happen next, like that broken arm accident. You won't blame me, will you?

My parents were horrible to Rodrick and I, so Rodrick essentially made me relay his torture of me to you. I was frustrated.

Remember your "Zoo-Wee Mama" comics? Remember that time the entire school went mad over them? My friend, I'm thinking of continuing your success in my name. My mind has been mentally disfigured beyond recognition, but in a positive way.

But, despite how horrible I was, you were always my best friend because for me and you, that's called immaturity. I still have common sense at times, like back when I lied that I got the Cheese Touch, but not all the time. We all have our ups and downs.

Basically, everyone has their own opinions, and I'm fine with that. But now, ahead the tail lights, I have realized that you're just trying to be respected for once. Especially last month when you were considering getting Abigail.

I should've let you go, but because of my state of mind at that time I was completely adamant you will be my best friend forever. I admit that I "hypnotized" you to follow my orders, no exceptions. Though now, you've left this earth.

You left because I hit you in the head with that vase in a last ditch effort to save you, but I also should've let you go. Alas, in the end it doesn't even matter. If I had died back on the ship, would you be happy? Or would you be depressed just like me?

So now, my resolution is this: I will try to socially interfere with school the least possible, without suicidal plans. I now know that intentionally goofing off only backfires, though it's 3 years too late to regret.

All I ask now is this: Can you see me? Can you deliver a letter to me from Heaven?

I'm sorry for everything, Rowley, and I miss you, Rowley. I hope we reunite again when I'm old.

Your afflicted best friend, Gregory Heffley.

Tuesday, April 15

Last night was the WORST night I've ever endured. I've heard the news, and I'll never get to unhear it. Rowley's dead, and that was the Cheese over black ice.

I cried the ENTIRE night after hearing the news, thank you very much. I barely even spoke unless it was ABSOLUTELY necessary.

When I got to sleep early, my mind was filled with nothing but the slowly fading memories of Rowley. Never mind the McKinley and the initial trauma I got from it; all I thought of was Rowley.

I liked to imagine that Rowley was by my side when I slept, having heard of my letter in Heaven. He's now my guardian angel despite everything I have ever done.

I even dreamed of him, twice.

He was on the other end of a bridge between 2 clouds. I ran right at him as fast as I could, and the first time he hugged me in his arms while we sobbed. He then sincerely forgave me now that he had received my letter.

After which, the same scene repeated. But this time, halfway across the bridge, it gave way under me and I fell down to Hell.

I fell smack into a boiling cauldron as I was shoved in by Rowley as a demon, all the while I uselessly pleaded and apologized and everything at the top of my lungs.

And then I woke up with a start, in my frankly cold bedroom at 5 in the morning.

I STILL have COMMON SENSE; so I have NO PLANS to get drunk or addicted to drugs, and I have NO SUICIDAL THOUGHTS whatsoever.

Earlier today I got my newspapers out from my closet for curiosity's sake, and lo and behold, THIS was on the Boston Globe headlines the morning after.

IT'S THE SECOND HALIFAX!

MCKINLEY LEFT BY CAPTAIN TO EXPLODE OFF N.C. COAST; 124 RESCUED BY FISHING BOATS; ABOUT 860 DEAD; WIMPY KID SAFE; JEFFERSON MAYBE; CAPTAIN TO DEATH ROW.

You see how I'm famous EVERYWHERE, even latching the attention of the news? They LITERALLY mentioned my title in the big fat subtitles, and even had AT LEAST THREE PARAGRAPHS DEDICATED TO ROWLEY AND I.

Here are the last 3 paragraphs the front page has to offer!

Out of the 82 survivors, 59 had to receive at least 1 operation at the Novant New Hanover Hospital. Rowley Jefferson, a 13-year-old student, had to receive an intense head operation for a fractured skull due to a vase hit by another student, 13-year-old Gregory "Greg" Heffley, to save Jefferson's life.

Heffley is a national celebrity for his published journals entitled *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* under the name Jeff Kinney. He owns at least eight journals, with two having already been published, and one had just been mailed to the NTSB as evidence of the disaster.

Heffley also had to undergo a head surgery at the same ward as Jefferson, except in Heffley's case it's a general case of blunt force trauma allegedly by his own book, his fellow classmate Bryce Anderson clarifies.

MCKINLEY DISASTER, PAGE A2

Let me spill it all out: Rodrick had mailed my oldest journal to Jeff Kinney just after the Leisure Towers bathroom incident in August 2006 to HUMILIATE me, and turns out he was telling the TRUTH after all.

That night, I taped the word "DIARY" up with masking tape for all my journals, but unfortunately Rodrick was smart enough to rip them off. The next morning, my first journal went missing. You all know where it went.

After I had a huge beef with Rodrick, I tried taping them again and hid them all in a random spot around the house every month so Rodrick won't find them for a MILLENNIUM.

Finally, in early April 2007, Rodrick, apparently after a trip to the bookstore, not only told told his friends my journals, but also our ADDRESS.

His friends told their siblings, then to their friends and so on, and out of the blue the WHOLE country knows me.

When I started 8th grade, I found yet ANOTHER journal missing. Guess what, it's now where my oldest journal is! Rodrick told me that he has this commitment where he won't stop "ruling over" me until he chucks EVERY last journal behind my back.

I wonder how did he know where I hid them? Did Manny SNITCH on him?

Anyway, my readers didn't know I'm now a loner, and I don't blame them. All they see is a 11- or 12-year-old who horses around with his best friend who's now no longer here with him.

And then I got hit with THIS from today! Also from "The Globe"!

CAPTAIN LEE DIES!

JEFFERSON DIES! WIMPY KID, TO ALL MEDIA, FIES!

All I can say is: Did WWIII break out?! Is this Jeff Kinney's gossiping paper now?!

I don't even NEED to read past the headlines to get the gist of it. From what I can tell, at least I'm glad the captain is dead, so that's only ONE plus.

But, in the end, curiosity killed the cat. I had already read the first paragraph by ACCIDENT when I went to chuck the damned newspaper into my closet.

This is a TINY snippet. I had to LITERALLY punch my head twice to snap outta it!

A massive week for Plainville: death, closure, and affliction

By Andrew Cook

GLOBE STAFF

RALEIGH - Yesterday, April 14, greeted everyone with relief as the cruise ship *McKinley's* wimpy captain Francis K. Lee was lethally injected that morning at the North Carolina Central Prison at 10:00 a.m. for at least 863 counts of murder as well as negligence of all passengers. Lee's last words were: "I have nothing to say other than 'all this was for my own safety, but it doesn't matter'. Go on, warden."

That same day at precisely 4:00 p.m., to the grief of all who heard the news firsthand, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* celebrity Gregory "Greg" Heffley's best friend & Lawrence Mack Middle School cartoonist Rowley Jefferson passed away in the Novant New Hanover Hospital, officially due to a traumatizing concussion.

Although Heffley in his *Diary of a Wimpy Kid's* first volume stated that he wanted "to be rich and famous", now that's no longer the case.

When his 18-year-old brother and heavy metal band Löded Diper drummer Rodrick Heffley was interviewed by *The Globe* as the Heffleys were leaving the Boston Logan Airport on April 12, he sincerely commented: "Greg was, you know, the one kid you'd always relate to because he's just your run-of-the-mill kid. It honestly hurts to say this... but he's like he went

through a brain transplant. Please don't prod him [referring to Greg's life and journals], at least this month. He hates it, more than how he hated me back then [before the *McKinley*]."

Good grief. All I need is Rodrick to change his mind, pick the lock, and spread the word later on, which fortunately didn't happen. Yet.

Thursday, April 17

I so badly had this comic idea I wanted to mail to the school papers as tribute, but it might wait until I get to Crossland High. I have this early draft for it and I hope it flies well:

The first panel had me and Mrs. Jefferson reminiscing the good old days with Rowley.

I exclaimed, "Gee! I could REALLY use a cheerleader today!"

Mrs. Jefferson solemnly sympathized, "Me too, if only my son was here..."

The second panel had Rowley suddenly pop right up while exclaiming like it's any other day.

"Howdy, guys! I'm still here all along! You just didn't see me yet!"

The third panel had both of us (Mrs. Jefferson and I) collectively exclaiming out of surprise while laughing along with Rowley.

"ZOO-WEE MAMA!"

Below the comic, I wrote a caption explaining that though Rowley's gone, his spirit will always remain as the cartoonist who made the entire country laugh out loud.

Friday, April 18

For this past week, I spent all of my spare time just sketching or doodling silently in my room. The Xbox is now in my closet. I have zero plans on using it again. In fact, I'm thinking of giving it and all my games to Manny when I graduate high school.

But for now, paper is slowly piling up on my desk as I was dumping my mind away.

I somehow gained an interest in real-life tragedies: the Back Bay collision, the Sampoong Mall collapse, the Halifax disaster, China Airlines flight 642, THE HOLOCAUST, you name it.

I've STILL got NO idea WHY I even became interested, but I did, and now I'm sketching them out in painstaking detail. I also don't know HOW I even got that style.

Every so often, I'd also painstakingly sketch what I saw in the McKinley now that I've got more time on my hands. My "Wimpy Kid" art style was COMPLETELY out the window.

I'd also play fitting music including but not limited to "I'll Stand By You", "Unchained Melody", and "Heaven" on Rodrick's iPod to fit my situation.

Mom has been genuinely concerned about me while I doodled Rowley and me together, all over in my "Wimpy Kid" art style at almost midnight last night. I just dismissed her because I STILL couldn't come to terms.

"Greg, what's wrong? I've been worried about you lately."

"Mom, please just leave me alone. I'm fine."

Manny has genuinely been noticing something wrong with me.

That same night, I just sobbed continuously. Manny would repeatedly come into my room and tug me while repeatedly yelling "BUBBY!" or something, and maybe trying to present some gift or something he made for me in kindergarten.

But it was as if I even care at all. I didn't, and I was SO DISTRAUGHT that I didn't even realize Manny was even THERE.

Saturday, April 19

Truly, I've been too wimpy to read the news this whole time because I'm starting to HATE myself for those journals Rodrick mailed away. But at the same time I'm DYING to know what happened next, so long as my name isn't mentioned.

Even Rodrick sensed my dread at breakfast today, which was very off about him to do so. That's because he afterward wanted me to fetch the EXACT paper for April 7.

"(Sigh) Rodrick, have you been SNOOPING in The Globe THIS WHOLE TIME?!"

"Yeah, Greg. I mean, how else could I know? Live TV? A week later? Anyway, go get your butt out there and fetch it NOW." Rodrick matter-of-factly commanded.

To shut him up I reluctantly stormed upstairs and YANKED the paper from my closet, then I rushed downstairs and CHUCKED it RIGHT at his face.

"THERE, HAPPY?!"

My parents were UTTERLY SPEECHLESS. So, I abruptly proved my point:

"What, I'm just afraid Rodrick's gonna humiliate me again! Even now, I still don't want nothing to do with him!"

Mom announced that she's gonna take me to a therapist the Saturday after the funeral, and I simply had to go to my room now. That's all.

At least that's all I got.

Tuesday, April 22

Rodrick busted into my room today with that newspaper in hand, as well as the paper for April 8 from his basement. He could no longer stomach it; he had read it all, and now I have no choice but to know it.

"Alright, little bro. Here's what you've missed out on."

It wasn't that much of a waste, actually.

So, basically, the night of the disaster divers were sent out to try and salvage any intact bodies ASAP. Parents and divers alike went aboard the cutter "Diligence" to ask what the fuss is about.

They caught the Coast Guard frantically pointing at random maps in a "press conference", and their divers jumped into the water, swam around for 5 minutes, and returned aboard. It was like seeing an ARMED FORCE PRETEND working for SHOW.

The parents couldn't BELIEVE what they saw, so they interrogated the crew asking what they did during the sinking.

The Coast Guard LIED saying they've rescued over 500 of those passengers, but the parents were obviously not buying any of this scam. Long story short, the verbal fight followed afterward was mostly from the parents' side, with the Coast Guard CALMLY threatening the police on the parents.

In the end, the parents stormed off when the Coast Guard excused themselves to go to another sham of a press conference, and the former stayed in a hotel planning the next day.

The next morning, President Bush and Vice President Cheney came to Wilmington. The both tried giving a speech expressing their condolences, but what they got instead was being chased out with open water bottles thrown in their faces.

Bush couldn't run next year anyway.

Sunday, April 27

Today everyone attended the LARGEST funeral ever in Plainville, and even the Norfolk County history. Of course, my family isn't exempt.

At the cemetery, I was presented with a mass burial in front of about a HUNDRED deep parallel strips as graves on a wide field where a huge lighthouse monument will stand.

Pallbearers paraded to the field and one by one coffins were lowered after their respective eulogies. It's TORTURE to listen to them after like the 5th one. I've seen enough tears being shed to lives no one else CARED. But what other choice do I have?

When Rowley's coffin was presented, I let Mrs. Jefferson step up to the mic. He's even more dear to his mother than to me, of course.

"Rowley... was my only son. He was so charming seeing him play around with littler kids; so innocent. He was my only one left after the McKinley. And now that he's gone, I've got nothing left. Bob's gone, and now Rowley. All I can say is: Dear God, let both their souls rest, Amen."

When it came to me, my brain's SCREAMING at me to read my informal Heavenly letter verbatim out loud after my formal, concise version, but I fortunately managed to stomach it.

I didn't wanna screw around and find out in such a serious moment, even if it's first try.

"Rowley Jefferson was my dearest friend. Although our 4-year-long relationship was turbulent, we were just immature, that's all..."

My brain: "GREG, YOU'D BETTER READ IT OUT LOUD! YOUR EULOGY'S TOO STERILE, SO YOU'D BETTER BREAK OUTTA THE BOX! JUST GET IT OVER WITH! NOW! I TELL YOU! THERE'S NO HARM, SO DO IT!"

I actually saluted as Rowley's coffin was being lowered.

Long story short, the funeral lasted the ENTIRE daytime. It was sunset by the time the last coffin was laid. That was for none other than Principal Bottoms. As they always say, women and children first, then authority goes last.

(P.S. Nowhere have I heard the surname "Hills", but as if I could care any less.)

**AS OF FEBRUARY 22, 2025, THIS FANFICTION
HAS BEEN SCRAPPED. NO FURTHER WORK
WILL BE DONE.**