

WITH A VIEW OF WATER

FEATURE PATRICK VAN HOESERLANDE ILLUSTRATION PETER BOSTEELS



The bucket with the ropes and the weight was now floating on the water's surface, but the window was no longer visible. That looked good! Skubba understood the intentions and jumped in. He inhaled a breath of air and dived. Fred looked on and saw the bucket moving up and down and occasionally it turned. What was happening underwater?

With much noise, Skubba surfaced. Thrilled, he told Fred that he could now see underwater. He could really see. He even thought he had seen a fish. He was not sure, but it could be! He rambled on. Before Fred could say anything, Skubba was back under.

He took a good breath of air in and found his way between the ropes and stuck his head into the bucket. Once there, he could breathe just fine. He could even see to the left and right when he used his hands to turn the bucket. He could go on for hours. And that's what he did. Again and again.

After a while, he began to feel light-headed. Some dives later, this turned into a headache. Despite the increasing pain, his enthusiasm stayed high. Though, he knew that after a while he would be forced to stop.

Only after the tenth, or was it the twentieth dive, he surfaced to ask Fred if this was normal. His friend told him about some ox gas he inhaled and cardboard boxes he exhaled. After a few dives, the air in the bucket would contain too much of that cardboard. He did not know where that cardboard came from, but he knew by now that if his friend told him something, then it was true. Fred would somehow find a solution for this too.

And yes, Fred had a simple solution: they had to make sure that the air in the bucket was regularly refreshed. This could be done by picking up the bucket and turn it upside-down. Oddly, Skubba had to collect fresh air by keeping the bucket in an upside-down position. But due to the weights hanging on the bucket, this proved a difficult task. The first attempts all ended up with a bucket full of water. Yes, the cardboard was surely out of the bucket but the ox gas was out too.

"Fred? Why don't I see the cardboard in my bucket?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Well, my father has a whole collection of stuff in cardboard boxes in the garage. You cannot miss them. Why can't I see cardboard in my bucket then?"

"Why would you see cardboard?"

"Well, I exhale the cardboard box that we are trying to get rid of."

"Ah, the carbon dioxide! You misunderstood me, this is not a cardboard box, but a gas. Air is a mixture of nitrogen and oxygen. We need oxygen to live. In air without oxygen, we suffocate. The oxygen we use turns into carbon dioxide. Too much of that gas, gives you a headache."

It began to make more sense to Skubba. "So if you breathe the same air for a long time, you will use up all the oxygen and you're left with only nitrogen and carbon dioxide. You then get a headache and may suffocate. Is that right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Then we have to find an easier way to refresh the air than turning the bucket."

"Yes. Indeed."

"But how, Fred? Fred!!!" Fred was gone, again. How could he turn that bucket around without water coming in?