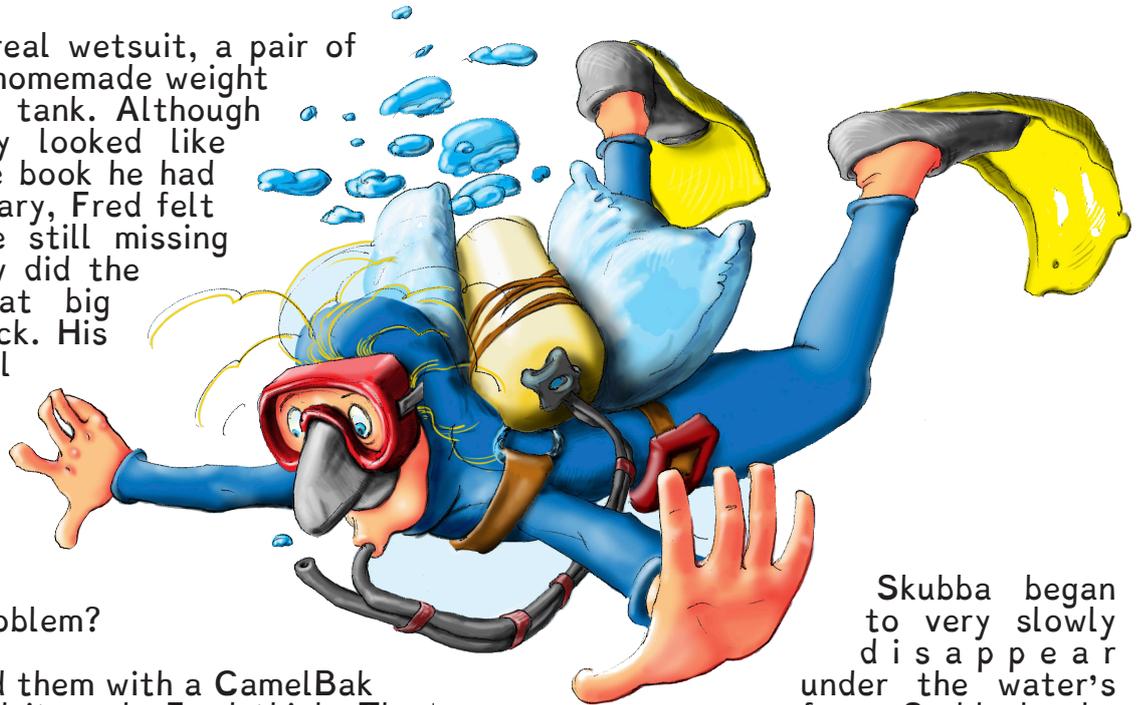


REAL DIVERS

STORY BY PATRICK VAN HOESERLANDE ILLUSTRATION PETER BOSTEELS

Skubba had a real wetsuit, a pair of fins, a mask, a homemade weight belt and an air tank. Although Skubba already looked like the diver in the book he had seen in the library, Fred felt that they were still missing something. Why did the diver have that big thing on his back. His friend had all the things the diver in the illustration had except that. Could this be the last solution to Skubba's problem?



A runner passed them with a CamelBak on his back and it made Fred think. The runner could drink through a tube. You could also blow air through the tube if you wanted to. If Skubba could blow air into the bag while underwater, he would ascend. If Skubba could blow enough air into it, he would not sink into the mud, but float above it.

There was only one thing to do and that was to try it. Fred took his father's CamelBak and fixed it on the tank's belt. With a strong tape found in the toolbox, he secured the CamelBak's hose to the one coming from the tank. That way Skubba would easily be able to switch between breathing from the tank and blowing air into the bag.

If this worked, Skubba would have everything he needed to be a Scuba diver. The boys could not get to the waterfront fast enough. Today Skubba would be a real diver. It was as if they had almost reached the end of a long journey. They were close to the point of seeing the finish line.

Skubba rapidly got dressed while Fred got the rest of the material ready. With his suit donned, fins on his feet, weight belt fitted and the tank's belt over his shoulder, Skubba waddled into the lake until the water had reached his hip. Fred then handed him his mask.

Skubba began to very slowly disappear under the water's surface. Suddenly, he popped back up to the surface.

"There's too much air in the bag and I can't sink!" he yelled.

Fred suggested to inflate the bag above the water and to let the air out bit by bit as he went down. Once he started to sink, he had to wait until he reached the bottom. There he had to blow a little bit of air into the bag. And a bit more, until he began to float off the bottom's surface. Skubba dove again. Fred had heard the hissing from the hose and had seen his friend sink to the bottom. Skubba did not return to the surface this time. It seemed to be working.

Fred became more and more nervous. Skubba stayed away longer than expected. Fred occasionally saw a few bubbles emerge. His friend was diving! He saw that Skubba was swimming quite quickly because of the long distance between the bubbles breaking the surface. It had worked!

His hopes had been confirmed when Skubba surfaced and told him that he had done a real dive. He had managed to blow enough air into the CamelBak so that he hovered above the bottom. He could follow fish. Fred jumped with joy at their success!