

WELCOME TO THE POOL

STORY BY PATRICK VAN HOESERLANDE ILLUSTRATION PETER BOSTEELS

Skubba and Fred were all geared up and checked in. The lady had told the boys that signing in was necessary for their safety. They were now ready for their first pool session.

The diving equipment's explanation had made Skubba even more enthusiastic about learning how to dive. He would learn to swim with fins, to use a mask, a weight belt, a BCD jacket and tank... just like a real diver. He longed for the moment he could dive in the lake, but Nella explained that he first had to learn how to use the equipment properly before he could do that. It was like learning to ride a bicycle for the first time. You can travel much further and faster with it than on foot, but to do so safely, you have to learn to cycle properly first. It is the same with diving.

He eagerly stood at the side of the pool for instructions.

"In diving, we must remember two things! When you rise, you must blow air out. Always!" Nella told them. "Lungs are like balloons. What happens if we overinflate a balloon?"

"It explodes," Fred said.

"Right, and what do we have to do to prevent it from exploding?"

There was a moment of silence. Skubba looked questioningly at his friend.

"We let air out?!?" Fred finally answered.

"Right, yes, that is why we let air escape out of our mouth when we go up underwater".

"Has anyone ever dived in a deep pool?" was her next question.

"Yes, I have," Skubba exclaimed.

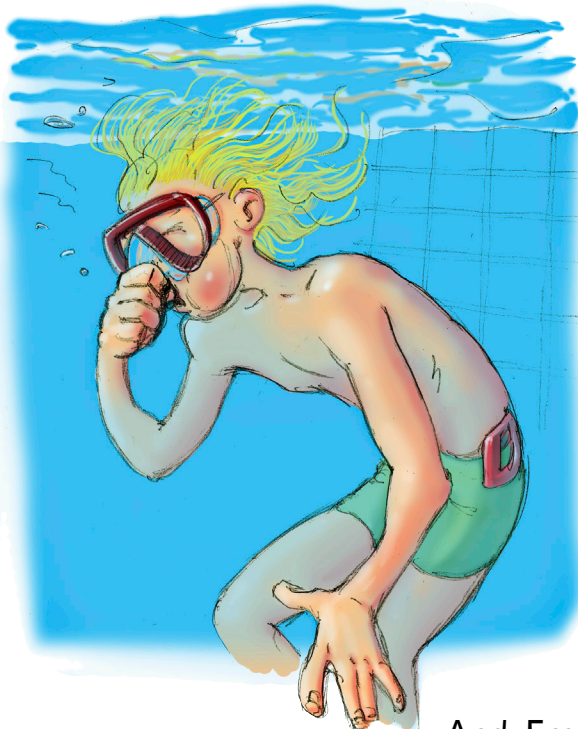
"What happened to your ears?"

"They started to hurt a bit".

"That's because the water pushes against our ears when we dive to the bottom. We do not want to dive with painful ears, nor do we want to damage them, so we must pinch our nose and make round cheeks. Like this. Yes, you too."

"I feel something in my ears", Skubba said.

Skubba and Fred had already experienced a few pool sessions and they enjoyed it every time. This was diving! Skubba had the time of his life. It could not go fast enough. He wanted to learn everything as fast as possible: jumping from the side into the water, filling the mask with water and then emptying it, snorkelling...



And Fred stood by and tried to understand everything that happened underwater. After every session, he read up on it in books and on the internet so he could explain it all to Skubba the next day. He also asked Nella what they would do the following week so that he could prepare himself beforehand. This went on for four weeks until Nella called the boys with the next step. "Skubba, if you want to continue to learn how to dive, then you have to go and see the doctor."

"See the doctor? Am I sick?" he asked her.

"No, not because you're sick, but to be sure that you can dive safely," was her reply.

'Dive safely', these words continued to wander around through Skubba's head.