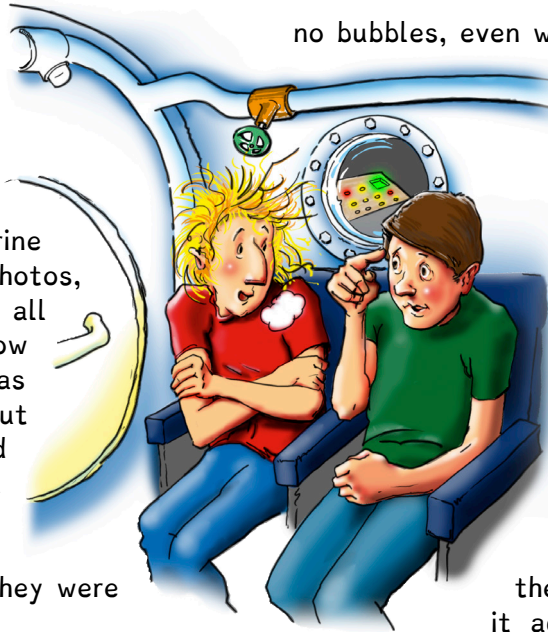


DECOMPRESSION

STORY BY PATRICK VAN HOESERLANDE ILLUSTRATION PETER BOSTEELS

After months of Skubba being in and out of the water, he and Fred thought they knew everything there was to know about diving. With Fred's help, Skubba recognised all the marine animals, was able to take photos, and search for objects, all underwater. They did not know everything though, this was not true. The nice thing about diving was that a new world always opened up to you, and that world was very, very big. There is always something new to learn about. Today, they were going to dive dry.



no bubbles, even when he took the cap off.

“Well, if a diver dives deep, much deeper than you, and stays there for a long time, he becomes a bit like this bottle of sparkling water. If he wants to surface without bubbles appearing in his body, he has to rise very slowly and stop from time to time. But sometimes things go wrong, and that is when we help the diver. It is as if we close the bottle and then slowly open it again so that no bubbles are formed.” Fred nodded, but Skubba was looking through the window at the rooms. Would it be scary in there?

Skubba thought that meant that they would learn how to dive with a dry suit. He had read that such a suit existed, but Fred said that this was not possible because as youth divers, they were not yet old enough to dive with such a suit. It had to be something else.

They were taken through a large gate and walked over to a big building. The building was filled with pictures of divers and doctors. They were given a drink and they were then given an explanation of what happens in this place. The building contained large metal rooms that could be pressurised. That way people could ‘dive’ without having to get into water. However, the intention was not to put pressure on divers, but rather to ‘de-stress’ them gradually. These special rooms were called decompression chambers.

Skubba and Fred did not understand what this meant. The doctor in the front took a bottle of water and asked if anyone saw bubbles. There was no reply from anyone in the group. He took the bottle to a machine for making fizzy water and put gas in it. Everyone saw the bubbles go in and he closed the bottle.

“What will happen if I open this bottle?” he asked.

“Bubbles,” they all said together.

“Right! But if I slowly open the bottle, nothing happens. Look,” he said. And indeed, there were

After the explanation, they were all allowed in a decompression chamber. The doctor closed the heavy door and then spoke into an odd-looking phone.

“Everybody ready? They are going to pressurise us. Start clearing your ears,” he advised them. Suddenly it got warm in the room. The doctor said that this was because the air was being compressed. After a while, he told them that they were now 5 metres deep. This was Fred's very first dive ever. How strange.

They looked through the windows at the people sitting in front of the large displays and operating the various levers. The doctor explained that they could also put a hospital bed in this room to make their patients more comfortable while they went through their decompression treatment. Diving is safe if you do it safely and correctly.

“And now we are going back up.” Suddenly fog appeared in the room and it started to feel a bit cooler, and they were soon back on the ‘surface’. The door of the dry submarine opened and the first person stepped out. Skubba liked it, but diving in water was much more fun. Fred found everything inside the room interesting and this kind of dry diving was something he could really get into. Could he learn how to dive in this?