SKUBBA

FEATURE PATRICK VAN HOESERLANDE ILLUSTRATION PETER BOSTEELS

Look at him over there. Standing there.

The skinny 10 year old boy with curly hair.

The boy with an unusual name. Why had mom and dad given him this name?

When he asked his parents, they replied, "Skubba comes from a complicated acronym that has something to do with water."

It is not surprising that they had given him this name; from his very first day, he was all about water.

His mother had chosen the name because he was born under the zodiac sign Aquarius. She could not show him the sign in the night sky. "How can you be sure that I was born under Aquarius, if you do not know where it is?", asked Skubba. His mother did not know how to answer him.

During his first bath, he fell out of the hands of the nurse holding him and he fell into the water. The nurse's and daddy's screams were not of joy. He still does not understand why they took him out of the water so quickly.

The family used to have an aquarium in their living room. Dad loved those fish, but he had to sell them. He had to, because on a Saturday afternoon, Mom found Skubba swimming in the big tank amongst the fish and water plants. Again, he did not understand why she screamed when she found him. And why she took him out. He wondered why grownups were afraid of water.
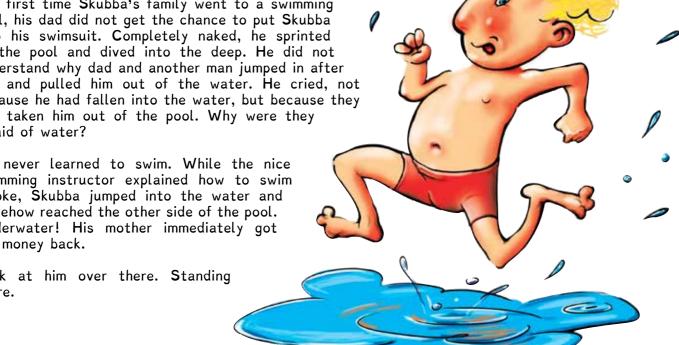
Water was his friend. While classmates jumped into puddles after the rain, he dove into them. Flat on his belly. When it rained cats and dogs, it did not make Skubba sad. No, he walked to school whistling all the way. The wetter, the better.

His mother tried for years to make him wear a raincoat. Finally she gave up. He never did put a jacket on.

The first time Skubba's family went to a swimming pool, his dad did not get the chance to put Skubba into his swimsuit. Completely naked, he sprinted to the pool and dived into the deep. He did not understand why dad and another man jumped in after him and pulled him out of the water. He cried, not because he had fallen into the water, but because they had taken him out of the pool. Why were they afraid of water?

He never learned to swim. While the nice swimming instructor explained how to swim stroke, Skubba jumped into the water and somehow reached the other side of the pool. Underwater! His mother immediately got her money back.

Look at him over there. Standing there.

MEETING FRED

FEATURE PATRICK VAN HOESERLANDE ILLUSTRATION PETER BOSTEELS

On a beautiful summer's day on the waterfront, as always, Skubba tried to dive in search of fish and water plants. Unfortunately, everything looked a little cloudy. However he tried to see with his eyes, he could not see anything well.

"Grandpa, why are you wearing glasses?" he asked when his grandfather came to visit.

"To see better, Skubba," grandfather replied.

"Can I also have glasses?"

"Why?"

"Because I want to see better too."

The old man gave a friendly laugh as only granddads can do. A week later, Skubba saw his grandfather again. He had an old pair of glasses for Skubba. To see better.

What grandfather did not know, was that Skubba wanted to see better underwater while diving.

Skubba took the old glasses and tied them with a rubber band around his head.

The glasses stayed very well on his head, but he could not see through them. The glasses that made grandfather see better, did not help Skubba see better underwater. What was wrong?

"What are you doing there?" he heard behind him.

He turned to see a sporty kid with a wise expression on his face.

"I'm trying to see better underwater."

"And do you?"

"No, it's still murky."

"Then we have a problem," the other boy continued. "Oh, by the way, my name is Fred. Who are you?".

"My name is Skubba. Why do you ask?"

"I've been watching you for a while and I was wondering what you were trying to do. What is the problem?"

"When I'm underwater, I cannot see very well. My grandfather sees better with his glasses on, so I tried it out underwater. But it does not really help. Can you help me?"

"I think so,"and gone was Fred.

What a strange fellow, Skubba thought just before he put his head back underwater. Maybe he needed to squint underwater?