

Diving deep

Filip Markuš, a 17-year-old free diver who loves underwater exploring

BY ADELINE DODD

Talon Staff Writer

A 17-year-old boy lays face down in a pool, playing the piano with his hands on the deck. A man stands over him giving directions.

“Raise your right hand,” he says. The boy raises his hand with no delay. His coach hovers over him carefully observing his movements. Safety is of the utmost importance. Especially in this last one-minute stretch.

Filip Markuš, an exchange student and senior at Minnehaha Academy, lays in the pool thinking about nothing. He hasn’t taken a breath in three minutes. This exercise, called a static-breath hold, helps free divers practice remaining calm and focused on their body. Markuš’ breath holding record, about four minutes and ten seconds, didn’t happen comfortably.

“It starts to become a real fight because [you start] getting contractions. Your diaphragm contracts as your body’s reflexes basically breathe in,” said Markuš. “For me the four-minute mark, it’s just like you don’t think about anything. You’re just hanging in there.”

Competition

For the past two years, Filip

has spent two nights a week doing static-breath holds, active-breath holds and technique practice. The other nights are spent doing dry-land training and stretching.

Free diving, a sport similar to scuba diving, requires huge amounts of dedication, bravery, and training. As opposed to scuba diving, where divers wear masks and oxygen tanks that allow them to breathe while underwater, free divers must hold their breath during both their descent and ascent from the water. The divers need the ability to hold their breath for minutes at a time in order to stay safe and alert while diving tens of meters underwater.

Compared to most other sports, the free diving community’s growth only began recently. In fact, Filip is the youngest on his team by more than a decade. Possible freediving locations need to be cleared by professional free divers before use, and for Filip, who lives in an Austrian suburb of Bratislava, Slovakia, in central Europe, this means a lot of travel.

The dangers of the sport include blacking out and, in extreme cases, death. The most important rule of the sport: Never dive alone.

“I cannot compete yet,” said Markuš. “They don’t allow people who are under eighteen into competitions because of safety rea-

sons...it’s a dangerous sport, and it shouldn’t be attempted without proper training and instructions.”

Travel

“When you’re in the ocean or in the sea, it’s really just an awesome feeling that you have to get used to,” said Markuš. “It’s completely silent...it’s one of my favorite things. The silence of it.”

Family vacations allow Filip to practice free diving in the sea. In fact these trips launched his desire to take free diving lessons.

“As a family we used to go to Croatia, to the sea a lot and when we were by the sea we just used to snorkel a lot,” said Markuš. “It kind of came naturally to dive down and snorkel. And then at some point I realized ‘oh, this is a sport, I can do this.’”

Diving in Egypt

Over Easter break last year, he traveled to Dahab, Egypt, to practice freediving at one of professional freedivers’ favorite locations. For six days, he and fellow divers attended safety briefings, practiced their static breath holding as well as their free dives.

“It was the first time I went



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down like twenty-six meters,” said Markuš.

Filip’s whole family enjoys water sports. His younger sisters swim for the Slovak Artistic Swimming National Team. Filip’s father has wanted to take freediving lessons with him but hasn’t been able to yet. His whole family enjoys snorkeling, especially in Croatia.

“As you become a better freediver, it gives you the freedom to go deeper and to see marine life and all the beautiful things,” said Filip.

Up for air

Filip has reached the final stretch

of his static breath hold. He devotes his whole concentration to remaining calm and holding his breath for just a little longer. The diaphragm contractions get worse. His coach continues to speak and asks him to lift up his left hand. He delays for a moment, and then finally raises it.

“Ok, come out, come out,” his coach tells him.

Filip finally comes up for air. Sometimes his coach has to drag him out [Not because he’s unconscious, but because he wants to keep going beyond his coach’s limit.]

“[You] come out and then you breathe a few times,” said Markuš. “And you’re fine!”



Discerning passion is key, but difficult

Young people are blessed with opportunities yet challenged with making choices

BY KYLE GARAY

Talon Guest Writer

Perhaps the most unsolicited piece of advice given to our youth is to “pursue your passions!”

But...is that actually a good idea? It is definitely much easier said than done as there are several different factors, “Is this passion sustainable as a career? Do I truly enjoy doing this?” Just to name a few.

With so many opportunities available to our youth, it can be hard to discern what to pursue, it is simply expected that you figure it out sooner, rather than later.

To first understand how to distinguish your passions, it’s essen-

tial to know and understand what a passion even is. To upper school counselor Christine Paton, a passion is a timeless activity that can be enjoyed no matter the circumstances.

“When I think about the word passion I feel like it is something that you love so much that it never feels like work, you can just get lost in something for a good amount of time,” she said.

But what are the benefits?

According to Laura Vanderkam, a productivity expert, doing what you love for a prolonged period of time can increase your productivity levels, lower stress, and improve your happiness though the process itself might be grueling.

“People often overestimate what they can do in the short term,” Vanderkam explained in an interview with the New York Times, “and underestimate what they can do in the long run.”

So while passions can be extremely rewarding and challenging, it can be hard to determine what you enjoy doing.

In an interview, Upper School A-K Counselor Blake Mayes explained that people tend to gravitate towards things that they have a natural gift or talent, but there can be a few exceptions.

“I think people a lot of times are passionate about the thing they’re good at, they just happen to have

a natural gift or talent at it,” said Mayes, “where there are other people [who] have to try really hard. They’re not naturally super good at it, but they put in the work and the effort because they find joy from doing it.”

If you, however, don’t find yourself being passionate about anything, *it’s not too late*. While our mini passion projects can be deeply fruitful for our overall health benefits, not all of us had the luxury to be exposed to certain experiences early on, or had the opportunity to work alongside parents, or simply aren’t passionate about anything at the current moment.

The answer is actually quite

simple, try new things, be creative, follow your instinct, as cliché as it might sound, it’s extremely easy.

However, if you have a variety of passions but can’t quite decide on what to pursue as a career, it might be helpful to look at where your passions may intersect. For some, that may be simply majoring or minoring in a particular field, for others it can be about finding an employment assign but the situation is vastly different for each person.

“Your passions don’t have to all be for work, they don’t have to all be for money” Paton said. “Sometimes you’d be surprised on how much you can integrate all your passions into your job.”