

Diving Into Passion

By Nikola Pawelski

My earliest memory of the ocean is when I was really young, and my mom had brought me far out past the big waves. I was so little, with my first pair of goggles sitting on my face. I would keep dipping my head underwater and telling my mom all the sorts of cool things I had seen beneath the surface. I was so proud, and I was so full of joy and happiness. I had no idea what the world had in store for me for the future.

Starting a little before my first memory of the ocean, and for a long time after that, I took swimming lessons.

“When you were a baby,” my mom would say, “You would walk into the water and just keep going forward. Even after your head went under the surface!”

The day my love of the water really clicked was the day I learned the backstroke. My dad taught me when I was six, possibly younger.

“Do your backfloat,” he told me, “Now move your arms over your head,”

He described how to use my arms and launch myself forward. I was so proud of myself, and it made me want to do more with water. A couple years later, I decided that I should join the swim team. I convinced myself that the swim team would be amazing. After all, I love the water, and I remembered how happy I was when I learned the backstroke. I was already taking tae-kwon-do, so I quit.

Turns out, the swim team wasn't for me. I felt that I was having more bad days than good days. I wasn't bad at it, I just didn't like it. When I told my mom I was quitting again, she seemed concerned. “Don't quit because things are hard,” she had told me.

I didn't like the swim team as much as I thought I would, because swimming was not what I liked most about water. I love to swim, I just liked what was in the water even more. I remembered my first memory of the ocean. I remembered seeing bubbles and fish under the surface.

I learned about a thing called scuba diving. You could dive deep down and see all the different sea life. Of course! This is what I had been wanting to do all this time! It was perfect! I could go down and see everything up close, way under the surface.

As soon as I learned about scuba diving, I had been begging my parents to let me try. They always would respond, "When you are older." I was sad that I had to wait, but I decided to be patient. It would all be worth it.

I can't believe how fortunate I am. If my parents didn't come from a long line of scuba divers, and if they weren't willing to spend the money, my dreams would have never come true. But they did. On my eleventh birthday I learned that I would get to start my scuba diving career. You would never imagine how happy I was when I learned that.

In order to scuba dive, and even get in the water, you would have to finish an online course. I did not like the online course. Hours upon hours I read about scuba gear. For me, that was such a waste of time. But I had to for the final test. The final test was super lengthy and if I hadn't studied all those hours I would have never passed. It was so hard that my mom couldn't even figure out some of the questions. And yet, I still passed.

The first time I dove is a memory I could not possibly forget. I felt I was exactly where I belonged. Huge schools of fish would circle around me, and I would watch with amazement while I circled around with them, letting them tickle my fingers as they went past. I knew I had to do something with sea creatures when I was older.