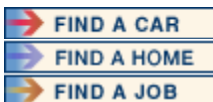


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Writer has passion for didgeridoo, too

Tampa columnist



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By [ERNEST HOOPER, Times Columnist](#)

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Maybe if Darren Liebman had tried to become a fitness trainer, model, photographer and musician, he would have ended up being an outdoor adventure writer.

Instead, Liebman has aimed his sights on being a freelance author of firsthand accounts about sports such as barefoot skiing. The pursuit has resulted in an array of jobs and an overwhelming passion for one of the world's most unique instruments.

Liebman, 29, has developed a performance training regimen into his own company, Hardball Fitness Training. He also works as a freelance Internet photographer, and he spent several months as a model for Home Shopping Network.

Most important, Liebman says, he fell in love with the didgeridoo, a bassoon-like instrument from Australia.

"It's a crazy world," Liebman said. "Every day I'm alive I can't figure it out. I just know you have to expect the unexpected."

In 1997, Liebman moved to Tampa to chase the dream of writing about participatory sports. In 2 1/2 years as a sportswriter for the Winter Haven News Chief, he realized he was more interested in doing than watching, and he shuddered at the thought of developing a stereotypical sportswriter's physique.

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In other words, he didn't want to end up looking like me, but that's a different story.

Yet waiting on tables while he waited for freelance jobs wasn't paying the bills. A relative suggested he become a personal trainer. After gaining Jason Weintraub, a budding high school pitcher, as a client, Liebman came up with an approach that helped Weintraub develop into a major-league prospect.

Last summer, Weintraub was drafted in the sixth round by the New York Mets.

In the interim, Liebman found other ways to pay the bills, including photography and modeling everything from scooters to Tae-Bo for Home Shopping and the now defunct Home Shopping Espanol. In fact, he actually had to get a pedicure before modeling sandals.

"As soon as it was done, I just wanted to go rub my toenails on a tree and regain my manhood," Liebman laughed.

So where does the didgeridoo fit in all of this? Well, the various jobs allow Liebman to embrace his real passion: introducing America to the didgeridoo, which has little familiarity in this country beyond its mention in the Rolf Harris song Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport. It's not even listed in Webster's New World Dictionary.

With relatives in Australia, Liebman has gone down under five times and become fascinated with the instrument, which produces a vibrating vocal sound heard on commercials and in the original Survivor theme.

He started playing during his fourth visit in 1999, but sounded like a "wildebeest with pneumonia."

On his fifth visit, in December 2000, Liebman actually bought a didg (as he likes to say), made of eucalyptus wood. After months of practice, he put his Florida Gators baseball cap down on Pier 60 in Clearwater and made his first street performance.

"That night, I got \$4.50 and I cannot tell you the high I got ... from playing this instrument well enough that anyone appreciated," Liebman said.

The passion led him to the Siesta Key Drum Circle, a

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weekly Sunday night gathering of percussionists, belly dancers and various performers. There, he met another didgeridoo addict, Jeremy Lembo, who would later introduce him to Lindsey Dank.

The trio now make up the Didg Revolution (www.didgrevolution.com). Liebman markets the group for performances and seminars, Lembo maintains the Web site and Dank makes and sells didgeridoos.

The group will appear at MOSI at noon Saturday to help introduce the museum's new IMAX film Australia: Land Beyond Time. People will be able to touch the didgeridoos while the trio plays, and learn during break to play it.

All three have careers, but who can say where their passion for the didgeridoo may take them? Maybe we should expect the unexpected.

That's all I'm saying.

-- Ernest Hooper can be reached at (813) 226-3406 or Hooper@sptimes.com.



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