



Follow your talents: Multi-lingual, award-winning swimmer, violinist Emmanuel Bishop shares his inspirational story

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Twenty-year-old Emmanuel Bishop has several talents that he shares with the world, inspiring others and sharing that everyone has a talent and can succeed.

Bishop has played



violin around the world, including during a mass at the Vatican in Rome, one of his most proud moments. Playing since he was six, Bishop performed his first international recital at the age of 12. He has also toured Turkey, Albania, Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, among many other countries.

This young man also speaks four languages: English, French, Latin and Spanish. At the age of six, Bishop delivered a welcoming statement in three languages and has become a worldwide renowned self-advocate speaker.

At 10, Bishop began swimming and he is also an avid golfer. He has won 28 gold, 9 silver, and 4 bronze medals in both sports.

Emmanuel and his parents, Victor and Gloria, live in Grafton. They are proud of his accomplishments. Yet it wasn't always easy for Emmanuel. Emmanuel was born with Down Syndrome.

"My son is the protagonist in this story. He has many God given talents," said Victor Bishop proudly about his son. Victor believes that Emmanuel doesn't owe everything to his parents, as he has worked hard for all his accomplishments.

"I do believe that each child with Down Syndrome has at least one relative talent that they can work and succeed on," says Emmanuel's father. Victor adds that his son honed his skills and talents independently as he and his wife do not read music or competitively swim or play golf.

Emmanuel was an early sight-reader and when he was young his favorite flash card was a golf ball. That prompted him to begin playing at age six.

His very first presentation was at age three, when he sight-read flashcards in French. The presentation at age six in three languages was at the National Down Syndrome Society Annual Conference. At 12 the young Bishop gave a breakout session presentation and played the violin at the 10th World Down Syndrome Congress in Ireland.

For World Down Syndrome Day Bishop was invited to Turkey to perform with the Antalya Devlet Senfoni Orkestras and Bando Komutanligi Orkestras in 2012 and 2013, respectively, and gave his presentation "My Abilities" at the Karincanin Yolu Konferansi.

Emmanuel gave his speech in Spanish at the Simposio de Sindrome de Down in 2014. He gave the keynote address in French at the Congres Canadien de la Trisomei 21 in 2016. And he played with a string quartet from the Montreal Symphony Orchestra.

At the 9th Festival Internacional de Mentes Brillantes in 2016, Bishop spoke in Latin on the value, dignity and full humanity of people with Down Syndrome.

Emmanuel set six World Junior Down Syndrome (DSISO) swimming records at age 13, is the current Junior DSISO 800 and 1,500 meters world record holder and has won multiple State Special Olympics gold medals in golf.

Bishop started violin at the age of six. Vera McCoy-Sulentic, Director of SIUE Suzuki Strings program, recalls having Emmanuel in the program.



“Another student with Down Syndrome of mine, Christian Bristol, and I went to perform for the Riverbend Down Syndrome Group in 1997. Mr. Bishop was there and was inspired to start Emmanuel. He started violin with Joseph Bradley” in the late 1990s, she said.

McCoy-Sulentic adds that Bishop attended private and group lessons with SIUE Suzuki for several years and “has accomplished so much and performs beautifully since being with his teacher Clare Kukielski” who also went through the program.

Despite all his obstacles, Bishop’s largest challenge was overcoming stuttering with complete blocking, which was much more debilitating than the Down Syndrome itself, said his father. Emmanuel was enlisted in the Lidcombe program and SIUE speech department and in 12 months, the issue was resolved.

Riverbender.com asked Victor Bishop what he suggests to a parent to help his child find his or her talent. He responded, “Be observant.”

He cautions to focus on the talents rather than the holes. “This platitude is important because the Early Intervention deficit model makes parents focus on weaknesses, not strengths, so they are not trained to be on the lookout for innate talents.”

When asking Emmanuel on what is most important in his self-advocacy, he simply replies, “My right to be born.”

