

GETTING INTO THE SWING OF THINGS

Students create own game of tag using obstacles built amongst the branches of their backyard trees

Joanne Cayabyab
STAFF WRITER

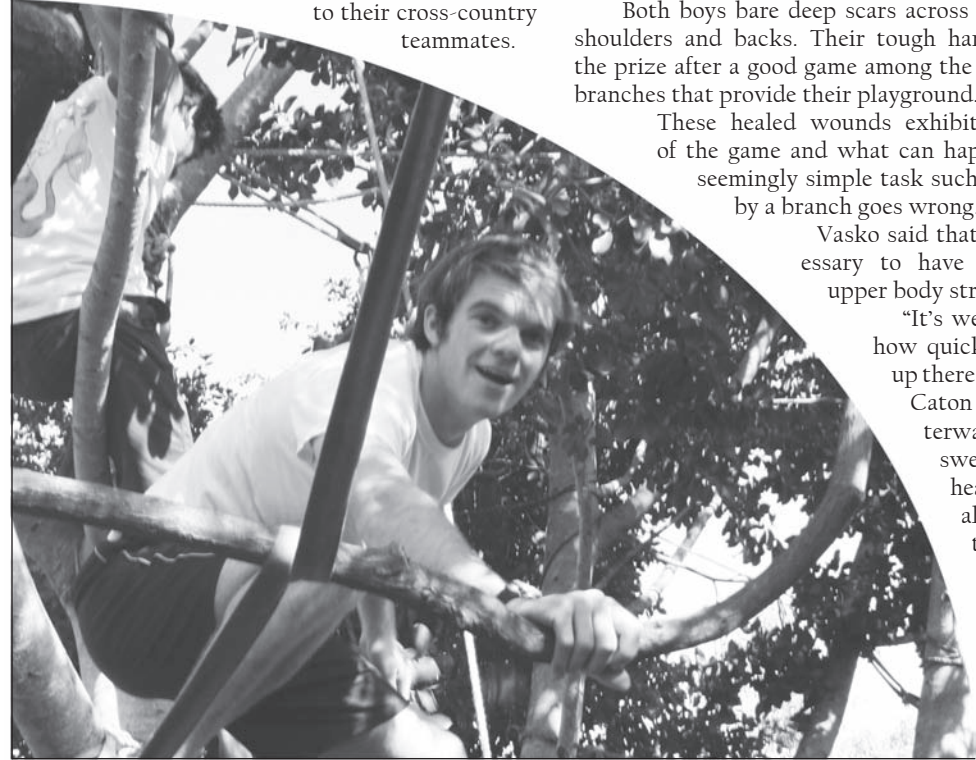
"If in the end you don't have a single scratch on you, then you didn't try hard enough."

It started when they were in kindergarten. Andrew Caton (12) had the luxury of having his father build him a treehouse in one of the three massive backyard trees.

Caton and his best friend from Mt. Carmel, David Vasko, have been climbing up and down the enormous branches sprouting from the sturdy trunk of the trees since they were in kindergarten. As the boys grew older and their bodies stronger, the simple task of climbing a tree transformed into a game.

With the help of Caton's father, the boys added a series of hanging pieces of ropes and bridges shooting up about 15 feet into the air. This was the beginning of Caton and Vasko's unique hobby: Tree Tag.

Once the boys created and perfected the game's rules, they immediately introduced it to their cross-country teammates.



Cree Farnes (12), above, steadies himself and prepares to evade capture. David Vasko, top right, swings from tree to tree in order to tag another unsuspecting player below.

When Caton and Vasko explained tree tag to Cree Farnes (12), he was skeptical at first.

"It was the scariest thing I have ever done," Farnes said. "I thought to myself, if I fall, I will snap my neck. And there is no way these branches can support my weight."

The game of tree tag is simple, one player is "it," and the rest (up to six people can play at a time) run, swing, jump and strategically climb away to avoid getting tagged. In order to keep the game fair, whoever is "it" must tag everybody. The last person to get tagged is "it", giving everybody a chance to run.

The most important rule of tree tag is that you can't touch the ground.

"Think of the movie 'Avatar,'" Caton said. "We're swinging and running through trees for about an hour or so. We're like monkeys."

Suspending themselves that high in the air on unstable branches is not only a strategy for Caton and Vasko, but also a risk that they have trained for their entire lives.

Both boys bare deep scars across their chests, shoulders and backs. Their tough hands serve as the prize after a good game among the sharp-edged branches that provide their playground.

These healed wounds exhibit the extent of the game and what can happen when a seemingly simple task such as brushing by a branch goes wrong.

Vasko said that it isn't necessary to have phenomenal upper body strength.

"It's weird to think how quick [we move] up there in the trees,"

Caton said. "Afterwards we're sweating and heaving and all of that and the workout was just fun for us."

Caton said it was his father who encouraged them to play in their

trees in the first place and is the reason why the game has evolved to what it is today. It is one of the reasons why Caton and Vasko have stayed such good friends.

"We've been friends since kindergarten and it's just been one of those things that no one else has," Caton said. "No one else has this unique sport that we made and play, so being able to do it often and get better at it with all our friends makes tree tag that much better."

Vasko said that although they have fallen from breaking branches, they are experienced enough now that he and Caton can catch themselves easily.

"You have four points of contact with your hands and feet," Caton said. "If you miss a branch with your feet, you still have your hands holding you up. You learn to catch yourself by using what you have available."

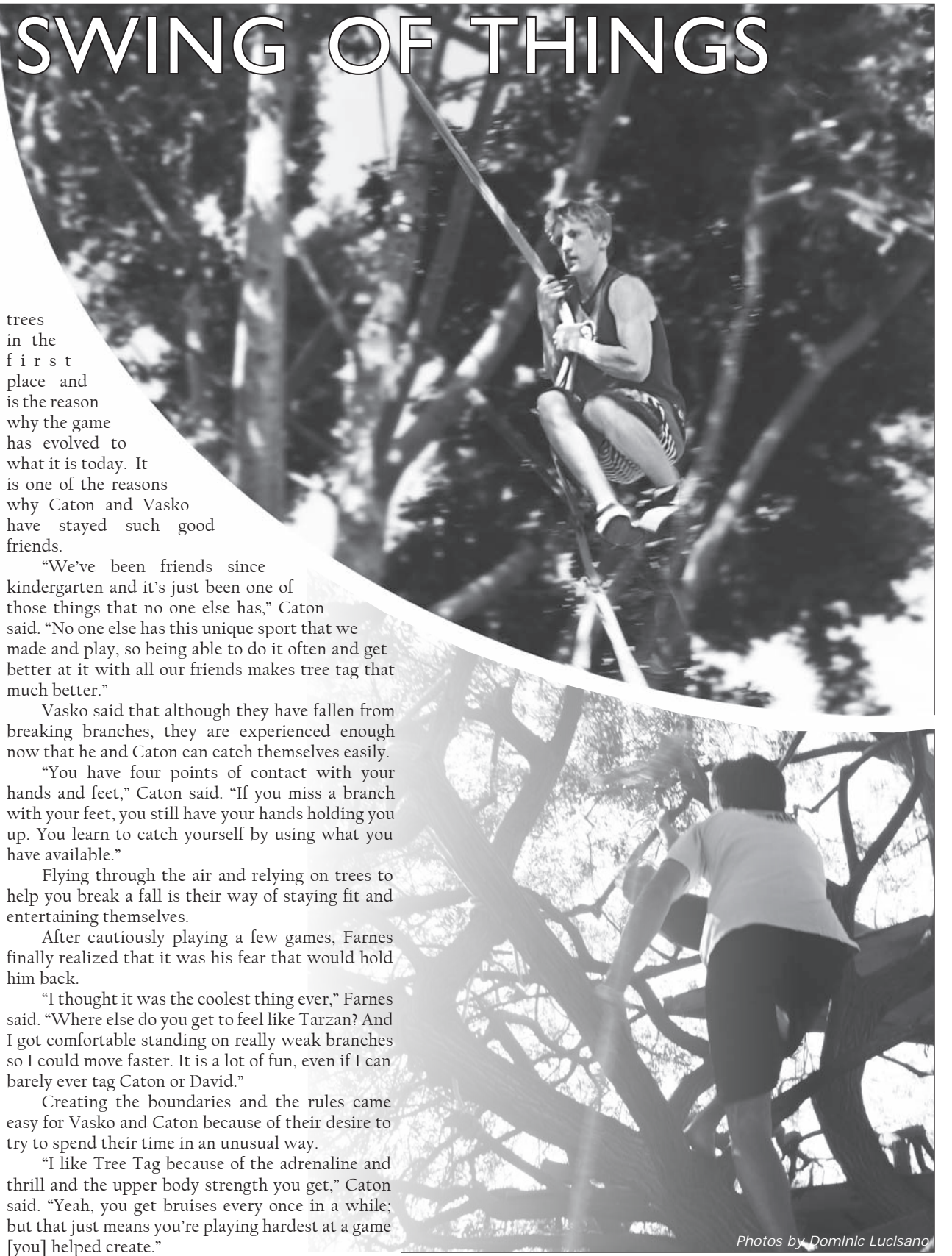
Flying through the air and relying on trees to help you break a fall is their way of staying fit and entertaining themselves.

After cautiously playing a few games, Farnes finally realized that it was his fear that would hold him back.

"I thought it was the coolest thing ever," Farnes said. "Where else do you get to feel like Tarzan? And I got comfortable standing on really weak branches so I could move faster. It is a lot of fun, even if I can barely ever tag Caton or David."

Creating the boundaries and the rules came easy for Vasko and Caton because of their desire to try to spend their time in an unusual way.

"I like Tree Tag because of the adrenaline and thrill and the upper body strength you get," Caton said. "Yeah, you get bruises every once in a while; but that just means you're playing hardest at a game [you] helped create."



Photos by Dominic Lucisano

Song adopts religion of own accord

Michelle Song
STAFF WRITER

Taking a walk with her mom, Jessica Song (12) couldn't comprehend what her mom was telling her. Her mom had noticed Song reading the Bible a lot and explained to her that she shouldn't get too involved in church.

But to Song, God was the only constant thing in her life after the move, and she didn't want to end that. It was a silent walk home after that.

After her family moved from Santa Rosa in eighth grade, they were all invited to go to church with her dad's former college friend. Song's first time in a church would change her life from that day on. She went to church without knowing who God was. However, as she listened to the worship, she was filled with an unfamiliar, yet content feeling and knew in that moment that God was real.

"I think that it was the Holy Spirit that really got to me that night and for some reason I never got that feeling before," Song said. "But after that night, I was just really hooked and I started to seek God after that."

Because of that night, Song started attending CBC, Chinese Bible Church. Along the way in building her relationship with God, Song met her best friend, Lauren Darrow (12), that year. Darrow is also a Christian, and at the end of 8th grade, she invited Song to go to her

church, Maranatha, with her and her family. Song now says Darrow is her heaven-sent best friend.

"I think one of the greatest things that I've learned from my best friend is to look at life through the eyes of Jesus; things seem to fall together for the glory of God and for His ultimate purpose," she said. "She's also one of the few who can see the tears in my fake smile before they even come, and is always there willing to cheer me up, pray with me and pray for me."

The summer before her sophomore year, Darrow invited Song to church camp, which was another way for her to grow closer to God. This is where she studies the Bible, prays and has fellowship with others.

Song first attended church camp with Darrow in Estes Park, Colorado.

"I loved the camp because the getaway from home helped me to see that God is everywhere, that His beauty is everywhere and in everything," she said. "Apart from just that, I loved becoming closer to God in a more intimate kind of relationship. It was like I got on a plane to meet God, being able to surrender to Him, feel His presence, meet other people from across the U.S. who also love Him, rejoice in Him, praise Him, worship Him, and [are] filled with the Holy Spirit."

For Song, creating good relationships with fellow Christians has strengthened her friendships.

"I have sets of friends who are non-Christian and Christian, and when it's with Christian people, I think

there's more of a feeling of unity," she said. "I think it's filled with a lot more pure happiness and when we're going through daily problems, we know that we're there for each other and we know it's part of God's plan and so we're not as worried about so many things. It helps to pray with each other."

Being a Christian has affected Song's life at home because she's the only one who has accepted God. Sometimes at the dinner table, when a Bible reference or God comes up, Song's parents and sister glare at her, asking that she not mention God around them.

Because she doesn't drive yet and her parents are unable to take her to church, on the days that she doesn't go to church, Song finds other ways to worship God.

"If I don't get to go to church, then I just read my Bible and then go on the Internet because there are sermons there or on T.V.," she said. "There are live ones that air."

Although Song is the only believer in her family, she puts her faith in God and continues to build her relationship with him in her daily life.

"After meeting God, my life has really changed," she said. "I don't think that happiness is always constant, but I think it's definitely something we can define our life around and that's how it is for me because I know I can see the work that God has done in my life and the work that he continues to do. Without Him, it'd be so empty, like it was before."

Koch fishes for thrills in the deep sea

Melissa Truong
MANAGING EDITOR

Kevin Koch (10) studied the calm, shifting waters 80 miles up the coast from Mission Bay, savoring that deep calm that only fishing brings him.

His hands were loose on the rod as he listened to the waves lap against the side of the boat.

But suddenly, he snapped into focus as he felt a tug on the end of his line.

No, it was more than a tug. To Koch it felt more like a trashcan, not a fish that was on the other end of the line.

Immediately, he started reeling in what promised to be a big fish, but he didn't get very far before his line jerked down again.

Forget the trashcan. This felt more like a dumpster was on the other end of the line.

As he braced himself on the railing along the boat, Koch hollered "Gaffe" over his shoulder. Blindly, he grasped the 20 foot long bamboo pole with the hook at the end. He knew he needed the gaffe to bring his catch on board or else his pole would snap from the weight of the fish. Struggling with the weight, with one final effort, Koch hauled his catch out of the water.

As he lifted it into the boat, he almost dropped his rod. That wasn't a fish on the end of the line, it was a shark.

A Mako shark, to be exact, five-and-a-half feet long. It took a

few seconds for Koch to get over his initial shock, but once he did he noticed the thrashing shark had tore into the fish that had first grabbed hold of his line.

"It was a heck of a fight," Koch said. "I wasn't really fishing for the shark. It turned out that there was actually a good-sized fish on my line, but the shark tried to eat the fish as I reeled it up."

Catching the shark was one of Koch's most exciting fishing experiences. But, truth be told, he would have felt a thrill even if he had only gotten a small fish. That's because ever since Koch went fishing for the first time with his grandfather, he's been hooked. He was five years old, sitting on the dock which overlooked one of the many lakes in Minnesota.

"I felt a tug on my pole and I freaked out," Koch said. "It was a one-pound bass, and I thought that it was the coolest thing in the world."

And ever since he caught that first bass, Koch has never stopped fishing. During the summer, Koch is out on the water almost every other day.

But these days, Koch is not just restricted to lake fishing.

Though he still goes fishing at Lake Cuyamaca or in Minnesota, he has moved on to deep-sea fishing. Koch mostly goes fishing with his friends and groups leaving from Mission Bay.

"We'll go three or four times a month," Koch said. "We'll leave Mission Bay and go up the coast for the bass in the kelp. Sometimes we go up to this place, Nine Mile Point, for squid, or go for Rockfish in the water off the Catalina Islands."

Although his grandfather taught him lake fishing, there's a whole new skill-set involved with deep-sea fishing. Koch said that he mostly learned by watching the deckhands and other fishers around him.

"We use a jig, which is a hook that glows in

the dark and weighs about four to five pounds," Koch said. "We'll fish at around 900 feet. You drop the hook down and reel it up slowly. When it feels like you've caught a trashcan, you've got one."

Sometimes before school, Koch will load his fishing gear into his truck so that he can hurry to Mission Bay before the boat leaves at 4 p.m. In these instances he's still deep-sea fishing, but there's one major difference—it's at night.

During his first night trip, even though he couldn't see much beyond the boat, Koch still stared in wonder.

It was pitch black out on the ocean and he was astounded by how different it was from the daytime waters he was used to. Looking out, he saw fish that looked like snakes, writhing on top of the water.

"It's really interesting being out there at night," Koch said. "You can't see anything so you don't know where you are out there. We have to rely on the GPS and radar. You see all kinds of fish that you can't see in the day."

However, Koch's fishing is not just restricted to the waters off the coast of California and Minnesota. His fishing has also taken him to excursions off the warm waters of Mexico during the summer. Since the climate is different than in San Diego, Koch said that you see completely different fish.

"I went on a two-day trip this summer, pretty much non-stop fishing," Koch said. "It was awesome because I caught a 50-pound Bluefin Tuna."

Although he fished almost non-stop in Mexico, Koch never got bored. He said it never gets boring out on the ocean because there is always something to do, from fishing to de-scaling to helping others get their catch on-board.

"It's just great being out there and away from everything," Koch said. "Just out there on the boat, having a good time fishing on the ocean with some good friends."

Reviews in short

Tom Caruana *'Enter the Magical Mystery Chambers'*

Music: ★★★★★

Tom Caruana, the somewhat obscure British hip-hop producer, set out to create a mash-up mixtape of Beatles songs and various Wu-Tang tracks after watching an interview with WTC member Ol' Dirty Bastard, in which the rapper said the Beatles had a big influence on his music. Caruana proceeded to take acapella versions of tracks from Wu-Tang albums and various WTC member solo projects and backed them with Beatles-influenced beats.

Whereas Danger Mouse, in his Beatles/hip-hop mash-up success, "The Grey Album," was a little less subtle in his Beatles sampling, most of Caruana's beats only vaguely resemble actual Beatles' songs. Caruana's beats are original, and for the most part, pretty solid. Songs like "Daytona 500" and "Run" are good examples of Caruana's ability to effectively complement the Wu-Tang tracks.

On the other hand, Caruana takes away a big part of what made WTC so great: RZAs production. I found it hard to tolerate many of the classic Wu-Tang tracks being thrown over Caruana's flashy beats, completely obliterating RZAs haunting effect on the music that made it some of the best hip-hop of all time.

The album is very creative. Further, Tom Caruana flashes his prowess as a producer and makes some pretty good tracks. But alas, as is the case with many mash-up albums, the tracks fail to live up to the originals, and are therefore disappointing. I applaud Caruana for his creativity and guts, but it takes a little more than what he offers in *Magical Mystery Chambers* to make a truly great mash-up project.

-Jacob Nitti

'Dear John'

Movie: ★★★★★

Two weeks together was all it took for them to fall for each other, and those two weeks would alter their lives forever.

"Dear John," directed by Lasse Hallström and adapted from the Nicholas Sparks' novel, follows the story of John Tyree (Channing Tatum) and Savannah Curtis (Amanda Seyfried), a couple who tries to hold on to their relationship through the letters they write as Tyree is deployed in the army.

The chemistry between Tatum and Seyfried is perfectly believable, but not enough of the movie is spent showing the development of their relationship. This leaves a lack of depth or real connection between the two, making their time apart seem less heartbreaking.

The twist in the plot comes with a lack of explanation of the background of Curtis' relationship with her close friend, Tom. This makes her life-altering decision which involves Curtis, Tom and Tyree seem unnecessary, though it is the pivotal point in the movie. Because Curtis and Tom's relationship is unclear, the ending has less of an impact and provokes far less emotion than the book.

But one relationship that is extremely powerful in the movie is between John and his father (Richard Jenkins). Jenkins' performance is a highlight of the film as he portrays a single father trying to overcome slight autism to show his son he loves him. The element of a father and son's ability to overcome the past, before it's too late, becomes one of the most powerful messages of the movie.

In the end, the powerful acting is able to overcome the broken plot and provides for a good movie with a moving message of the power of unconditional love and the unpredictability of our lives.

*All reviews rated out of four stars -Anna Buckley



Joanne Cayabyab