TREETOP PERSPECTIVE

AS A KID, I FELL OUT OF TREES AT LEAST TWICE THAT I REMEMBER. FORTUNATELY, I DIDN'T split my skull open and these incidents didn't curb my enthusiasm for scaling trees. Like many of you, I spent a lot of time climbing trees and enjoyed gaining that elevated perspective they provide. There was always a sense of accomplishment in pulling myself from branch to branch and reaching a spot high above the ground, where I could peer through clusters of leaves and see beyond the usual offerings.

These days, I tend to keep my feet on the ground and seek out trees for their shade. However, I also live in the trees vicariously through our 9-year-old daughter, who skillfully climbs in flip-flops, regularly ascending one of our maple trees and disappearing in the greenery. Admittedly, because of my history, I regularly warn her that we don't want to visit the emergency room, but love the fact that she is a kid creating her own fun. Besides her expeditions, thoughts of rambling about in the trees stuck with me in this issue of the magazine as I read about the Play Perch, a magnificent tree house designed and built for the Jownio School in Syracuse by a group of architecture students (see page 4).

For the students, members of the SU chapter of the American Institute of Architecture Students Freedom by Design team, the project exemplified the ideals of community collaboration. They worked tirelessly with the preschool, which serves youngsters with a wide range of abilities, raised funds, and navigated their way through the issues and obstacles that accompany designing a tree house for children with physical disabilities, holding steady to their creative vision. And in the end, they accomplished their goal, providing the kids with a spectacular place where they can enjoy the outdoors and have fun with one another.

As we often fret nowadays that the only exercise children seem to get is working out their thumbs on video games, it's always welcomed news when we learn about them leaving the electronic devices behind on the couch and escaping to the great outdoors. It's also important to remember that the more opportunities we create for them to explore and be a part of the natural world, the more they'll appreciate it. And on warm summer days, when leaves rustle in the slightest breeze, hopefully there will be laughter and excitement up there off the ground. It's a world where children can be themselves and put their imaginations to work, or just relax and take in the surroundings. Looking back years later, they'll cherish those moments and remember the fun when their own children size up a climbing tree or perch in a tree house and make it part of their lives.