

ChicagoTribune

# Style



## It's a leap of faith at Lake Forest camp



Under a gray sky in a wooded area of the Lake Forest Academy in Lake Forest, a solemn young girl stood wearing a safety harness and helmet.

"I, Serra, choose to do this event," said 12-year old Serra Morrison of Lake Bluff, slowly turning to face "The Pole," a high, narrow tree trunk topped by a disc about a foot around. Mumbling something about a fear of heights, she slowly proceeded to climb up the pole, then to perch unsteadily on the disc, some 30 feet above the ground.

"Way to go, Serra," came a shout from below.

"Go for it!" encouraged another voice.

So, face rigid, Serra went for it and jumped—and snared with both hands a trapeze 5 feet away, 30 feet off the ground.

As she was lowered to the ground in her safety harness, her eyes filled with tears. "I'm so excited. I can't believe I just did it," she cried.

Serra is not a preteen recruit in a marine boot camp. She is a participant in the rope course on Day 4 at

SuperCamp, a 10-day accelerated learning program that, unlike the Darwinian "survival of the fittest" boot camp, emphasizes nurture over nature, according to program representative Joelle James.

At the tuition (including room and board), mostly middle- and upper-class parents who, James said, "feel their children could be doing better socially and/or academically" send their kids to one of seven camp locations across the country.

"Our goal here," said James, "is to teach students how to learn and how to make choices in life in an informed and confident manner."

In 85 hours of instruction, students learn tricks and techniques of memorization and comprehension, notetaking and problem-solving and test-taking and writing. Through a series of intense mental and physical challenges, SuperCamp hopes to teach self-confidence, teamwork and especially how to recognize and surpass barriers to success.

Above: Blair Regan and Chris Clark brace each other while walking along diverging ropes at SuperCamp. Left: Martha Gilbane gets congratulatory hugs after a giant leap.

Back at the pole, a young boy huddled frozen near the top, one foot on the disc, the other on the pole. "I can't, I can't," he whimpered in response to encouragement from below. After five excruciatingly long minutes, he jumped from the tree and was caught by his safety harness. Safe on the ground, the visibly upset child was consoled by other campers who patted him on the back and said, "Nice try."

"Nobody is a failure," said James. "There is no given successful way to do this. Just having the experience of doing something physically different is the goal here."

SuperCamp makes no guarantees of longterm success or happy endings, but one thing is certain: When asked what she learned from her the experience, battle-weary but exuberant Serra Morrison replied, "I'm not scared of heights anymore."

For more information on SuperCamp, call 1-800-285-3276.