

## 'I like the solitude.'

It's a **touching** tale. Bob Redman, brought up by his mother in a tiny Manhattan apartment, had always been addicted to trees. When he was 14, he went into the park and built himself a tree house. It was the first of 13 houses, each one more elaborate than the last. 'I like to be in trees,' Redman explained to a reporter from *The New York Times*. 'I like to be up, away from everything. I like the solitude. I love most of all to look at the stars. The view at night of the city lights and stars is beyond description.'



## A five-room split-level home

His final house was the grandest of them all. Constructed at the top of a huge beech tree, it was what an estate agent would describe as a 'five-room, split-level home, commanding spectacular views of the city skyline and Central Park'. It included ladders and rope bridges leading to an **adjacent** tree, as well as wooden benches and tables. Who can imagine what the rent might be for such a house?

## Friends come to visit

Redman **went to great pains** to hide his tree houses, building them in neglected corners of the park and camouflaging them with branches and green paint. Friends used to come to visit him, sometimes as many as 12 people at a time, bringing sandwiches and radios and books and torches. Certain rules had to be obeyed: no breaking branches, no litter, no fires, and no loud music – except his brother Bill, who sometimes brought a set of conga drums and played them very late at night, giving rise to the rumours of a tree-dwelling tribe.

## The party's over!

Although the park authorities quickly became aware of his activities, the houses would often go **undetected** for long periods of time. Some lasted as long as a whole year before they were found and destroyed by officials, with a **mournful** Bob Redman watching from a distance. His magnificent final house went unnoticed for four months before Bob was awoken one morning with the word: 'Come down! The party's over!'

He climbed down and was met by Frank Serpe, Park Director, and ten officers of the Parks Enforcement Patrol. Mr Serpe had been hunting Redman for years. But he was generous in his praise for the houses. 'We **marvelled** at the spectacular workmanship,' he said. 'The floors were strong enough to hold a truck, and not one nail was driven into the tree.' And when Bob offered to help **dismantle** the tree house, 'Well, he walked up the tree' an officer said. 'It was amazing!'

## The perfect job!

Mr Serpe concluded that rather than lock him up, they should offer Redman a job. He is now a professional pruner and tree climber for the Central Park Conservancy. However, he has had to promise not to build any more tree houses. He says he cannot believe that a job so perfect for him could possibly exist.

This story just goes to prove that America is still a land of opportunity, where dreams can become reality. And, in the hectic, competitive world of New York, it is comforting to know that a man like Bob Redman exists.

## Postscript

When a New York writer called Shira Boss needed her tiny Japanese maple tree pruning, someone suggested a man called ... Bob Redman. They are now married, with two sons, and Shira has written a children's book telling Bob's story, *Up In The Leaves*, which was published in 2018.



## Roleplay

Work in pairs. **Student A** is Bob Redman. **Student B** is a journalist. Act out an interview with Bob Redman.

Tell me Bob, when did you build your first tree house? And why exactly?

Well, I was 14 and ....

## What do you think?

- If you were Park Director, would you have allowed Bob to build tree houses in the park? Why/Why not?
- What are the pros and cons of living in big cities? Why do cities have parks?

▶ Watch a video about the excitement of being high up in the treetops.

