

4 The Human Spider

February 17, 2009. Workers on the 48th floor of the Citibank skyscraper in Hong Kong were amazed to see a man crawling up the glass wall of the opposite building to the 62nd floor.



This unbelievable climb was just another regular workday for Alain Robert, nicknamed the “French Spiderman”. Robert is a free-solo climber who climbs tall glass and steel buildings. Free-solo climbers climb alone and only use their hands and legs to climb. They don’t use ropes or safety equipment. Most free-solo climbers climb rocky cliffs; Robert, however, prefers climbing city structures.

Although he climbs for his enjoyment and for the personal challenge, Robert also makes his living this way. Companies pay him to climb their buildings as a publicity event. For example, in March 2011, Robert was invited to climb the Burj Khalifa in the city of Dubai. The Burj Khalifa, 828 meters high, is the highest tower in the world. Robert climbed it in six hours.

Born in Valence, France, Robert discovered his talent for climbing when he was 12. One day he was locked out of the family apartment, so he climbed up to an open window on the seventh floor to get in. Soon after that he began free-solo climbing, and eventually his enthusiasm and love of the sport led him to climb the most difficult cliffs in France.

Robert began to climb buildings by chance. Because he was an excellent free-solo climber, he was asked to appear in a documentary on extreme adventure sports. Robert was filmed climbing a 59-story skyscraper in Chicago. The experience was so thrilling that he became hooked on climbing city buildings. Since then, he has climbed over 80 of the world’s highest structures, including the Empire State Building (381 meters) in New York and Petronas Towers (452 meters) in Kuala Lumpur.

Robert must deal with other difficulties besides the risk of falling from great heights. Climbing city skyscrapers is illegal if a person isn’t working for a sponsor. As a result, Robert has been arrested several times and paid large fines. In addition, his body has suffered permanent damage from three serious accidents and the physical stress of climbing. His doctor thinks it’s a miracle that Robert can still walk and is amazed that he manages to climb.

Will Robert give up his dangerous sport soon? Probably not. As his wife, Nicole, explains, “It’s not his job, it’s his passion.”

Reading Comprehension

Getting the Facts

- Complete the sentence. (lines 1-3)
The workers were amazed by the climber because
- What is free-solo climbing? (lines 4-10) Tick (✓) the TWO correct answers.

..... a. climbing by yourself d. climbing without ropes
..... b. climbing in nature e. climbing for free
..... c. climbing with a partner	
- Robert’s job is to free-solo climb. Copy the words in the text that show this. (lines 11-17)
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- When did Robert first discover that he was good at climbing? (lines 18-22)

a. He appeared in a documentary.	c. He took the sport at school.
b. He forgot his key and had to climb into his apartment.	d. He wanted to climb the cliffs in France.
- Apart from injuries, name two other problems Robert has faced due to climbing. (lines 29-34)
 1. 2.

Putting It Together

- Complete the chart with information about the places Robert has climbed.

Building	Height	City
1.	828 meters	2.
Empire State Building	3.	4.
5.	6.	Kuala Lumpur

- Name one publicity event Robert took part in.
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- Robert’s wife says climbing is “his passion”. (line 36) Copy a sentence from a different paragraph in the text that supports this.
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Personal Response

- Would you like to try free-solo climbing? Why or why not?
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