

LOS ALTOS *Hills*

ROBERT FREEMAN WITH
A VILLAGE ELDER IN KENYA

IMAGE PROVIDED BY ROBERT FREEMAN

Robert Freeman:

Helping Los Altos Hills Residents
Change the World

LOS ALTOS HILLS INVITATION:
AUGUST CAR SHOWS IN MONTEREY

STONE FRUIT SEASON

WATERMELON GAZPACHO



At the opening of a new medical clinic in Nepal.



Robert Freeman at a medical clinic in Nepal.

Robert Freeman: Helping Los Altos Hills Residents Change the World

By Abbie Burgess | Images provided by Robert Freeman

In 2007, Robert Freeman was a Los Altos High School social studies teacher with a goal: to teach his students that they actually had the power to change the world. All he asked for from each student was one dollar. Funded entirely by these students' donations, Freeman built a school classroom in Naro Moru, Kenya the same year. That was just the beginning.

On the heels of that success, Freeman started the nonprofit One Dollar For Life (ODFL). The organization is founded on the principle that if we all do the smallest bit, the effect is enormous. Since then, the organization has completed 110 more projects in the 13 of the poorest countries of the world. These include classrooms, medical clinics, computer labs, libraries, water wells and more in Africa, Asia, and Central America. "Over their expected lives, the projects will help hundreds of thousands of the poorest children in the world have just a slightly better chance at life," he says. Mundane things we take for granted--clean water and classrooms, for example--can have a big impact.

On the cover: In the village where ODFL built its first classroom, Freeman met a former Mau Mau rebel who had vowed never again to cut his hair after Kenya won independence. Upon learning that the classroom was funded with \$1 donations, he said "Even the greatest waterfall starts with a single drop of water."



A Kenyan school before ODFL renovated it.



The school after. This project was funded by Los Altos Hills residents.

Freeman knows what it's like to be in need. He was once a homeless high school student himself when his chemistry teacher took him in and let him sleep on her couch. He made her a promise: he would pay her back once he had made it. And pay it back--and forward--he has. "That's why I went into teaching and subsequently founded ODFL: to give a leg up to children who had nothing and nobody to advocate for them."

Tangible Benefits

One Dollar For Life projects are chosen for their ability to dramatically improve the lives of

some of the most disadvantaged people in the world. Birthing centers in Nepal reduce maternal and fetal mortality rates by over 90%, Freeman says. ODFL's Girls' Equality Project provides washable sanitary supplies to thousands of girls in Africa and Asia, enabling them to stay in school for three more years. Three milk cows serve daily protein to orphans in Kenya at a cost of only \$2 per child per year. "Human beings blossom just from having been given a chance to improve their own condition," he says.

These projects have the potential for tremendous impact on the life chances of people in developing nations. But it has an equally important impact close to home. Through his work, Freeman says he made a significant discovery: the projects help the donors as much, or maybe even more, as they do the recipients. "Many people have said, 'This is the first time in my life I've done something to help somebody besides myself.'"

His biggest inspiration is observing what happens to people in Los Altos Hills and other affluent communities who discover the impact they can make. "You can just see the joy it gives to people

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Developed by



At the commemoration of a medical clinic in Nepal.



here when they realize the goodness they can bring into the world by the smallest contribution," he explains.

He quickly realized that the longing to give back to the world wasn't limited to just high school students. In fact, he now believes it may be one of the greatest longings in our affluent, technological world.

"These are specific, tangible projects, with specific, tangible benefits—for the donors!" He comments wryly, "The need 'out there' is almost infinite. The need here at home may be even greater."

In 2014, he retired from 18 years of teaching at Los Altos High School to pursue his nonprofit foundation full time. While the name of the nonprofit has stayed the same, Freeman expanded the scope to account for donations far larger than one dollar. A \$5,000 donation can build a library in Nicaragua, or a playground in Brazil, he says. A \$10,000 donation funds the construction of a classroom in Nepal or Kenya. These projects can be funded by individuals, churches, or even towns. The 7,000-person town of Brevard, North Carolina recently raised \$6,000 to build a Birthing Center in Nepal. Freeman reports that the residents of Brevard, themselves not especially affluent, are ecstatic with being able to help others who really need it.

Though One Dollar for Life has moved far beyond its beginnings in Freeman's Los Altos High School classroom, teens still have the chance to be involved in an impactful way. Each year, the

Building a classroom in Nicaragua



Summer Service Trip program sends groups of 12-18 students with teacher chaperones to work on projects overseas for two or three weeks. "ODFL has sent over 300 Los Altos and Los Altos Hills high school students into the developing world to build classrooms, medical clinics, and more," Freeman says. This summer, 30 more students are traveling to build either a classroom in Kenya or a library in Nepal through One Dollar For Life's Summer Service Trips.

A student wrote this comment about their participation in a 2017 Summer Service Trip to Nicaragua: "I thought that this was a very transformative experience and I have become even more thankful for what I have. I have realized that you don't have to feel bad about privilege, but it is so important to recognize it." A student who went to South Africa the same year wrote: "I realized that in California we focus so much on ourselves and our own future that we take life for granted...I truly want to use my life to help other people instead of just myself."



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ODFL Birthing Centers in Nepal are reducing the number of women dying in childbirth by more than 90%, and the number of babies dying by more than 95%.



Birthing Center, Nepal

Teacher of the Year

Freeman had a full list of accomplishments long before his 11 years as Founder and Executive Director of One Dollar For Life. He graduated with an MBA from Stanford and had a successful 19-year career in the tech industry, rising to become Vice President, International Marketing for Sybase (since acquired by SAP), one of the largest software companies in the world. He received the SF 49ers' "Bay Area Teacher of the Year" award in 2012 and coached a Speech and Debate team student to win the U.S. National Championship in 2006. He has authored nine books on U.S., European, and world history.

Freeman was in the Merchant Marines when he met his former wife while in port in Oregon. Their daughter Robyn graduated from the University of California San Diego and works with McKinsey Consultants. Daughter Rachel graduated from the University of California Los Angeles and followed in her dad's footsteps--she is now an elementary school teacher in Los Angeles.

Amidst running the nonprofit, Freeman finds time for hobbies. He swims one mile every other day which adds up to roughly 180 miles a year. After traveling to the farthest reaches of the earth, one of his favorite places is still his backyard garden. He calls himself a prodigious gardener and canner. "I canned 182 jars of tomatoes last year and 115 jars of jam, from my own garden."

He is a big fan of Mahatma Gandhi for his deep commitment to principle and relentless action. "Our need is not for more 'stuff,'" Freeman astutely observes. "We have more of that than any people in the history of the world. What we are longing for is more *meaning*, for a belief that we can individually improve the human condition," he says. "We can."



Girls' Equality Project, Zambia

ODFL's Girls' Equality Project (GEP) provides washable sanitary supplies to thousands of girl in Africa and Asia. The \$5 kit, free to the girls, helps them stay in school for three more years.



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