

Roger “Monty” Freeman obituary

Roger “Monty” Freeman, 71, a retired State Department Foreign Service officer, died on Aug. 17, 2024, in Eugene, Ore. The cause of death was acute myeloid leukemia. Born in Olympia, Wash., to Roger Adolf Freeman, who was at the time working for the governor of the state of Washington, and Emily Harpster, an English language teacher, Mr. Freeman accompanied his parents on their job-related moves to Bolivia, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and California. During his junior year at Beloit College, he studied geography at Sheffield University in the U.K. There he met Kay Jackson, a British fellow student, and the couple married a year later.

Mr. Freeman’s interest in the Foreign Service was sparked by Beloit College’s diplomat in residence, who had endless fascinating stories about serving in Chad. After obtaining an MBA from the University of Southern California, Mr. Freeman took the Foreign Service examination, becoming a Foreign Service officer in 1978. Throughout Mr. Freeman’s 20-year career with the State Department, he focused on assisting developing countries to build trade capacity. His first assignment (1979-1981) was as an economic and commercial officer in Côte d’Ivoire. Subsequent overseas State Department assignments included Bamako, Rabat, Colombo, and Cairo. In Bamako, Mr. Freeman worked with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank on Mali’s first economic reform and structural adjustment program and coordinated the sale of Air Mali’s last remaining Boeing airplane to FedEx.

While Mr. Freeman worked at the embassy, his wife, Kay, began her USAID career. As an early joint State-USAID tandem couple, they dealt with many logistical challenges, including spending significant time in domestic assignments. The highlight of their time in Mali was the birth of their first daughter, Laura Antonia Freeman. In Rabat (1988-1990), he worked initially as a general services officer (GSO). He was then assigned as an economic/ commercial officer (1990-1992). In 1991, his family, now including their second child, Heather, was evacuated ahead of the first Gulf War, but Mr. Freeman remained in Rabat because his experience as a GSO had given him useful knowledge about the embassy building.

After transferring to Colombo in 1992, he organized the country’s first American Trade Fair in 1993, featuring the film premiere of “Jurassic Park,” attended by Sir Arthur C. Clarke.

Back in Washington, D.C., he served as energy policy officer involved in multilateral negotiations of the law of the sea and the Antarctic Mineral Regime, was part of the State Department delegation responsible for China–World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, and worked on development of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. In 1999, Mr. Freeman was assigned to Cairo, where he focused on building Egyptian trade capacity in textiles, infrastructure, and professional services. Upon return to Washington, D.C., in 2000, he became director of developing country issues in the office of the U.S. Trade Representative, coordinating analysis for WTO trade policy reviews for 22 countries.

In 2003, as a result of a pre-retirement medical exam, Mr. Freeman was diagnosed with mantle cell lymphoma, a non-Hodgkins lymphoma with an extremely high mortality rate. This was successfully treated at Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore, where he received a stem cell transplant.

When well enough to work again, he spent three months in Mongolia on contract as a USAID international trade specialist. He then served as USAID's senior trade economist in Indonesia from 2005 to 2007. The highlight of his time in Indonesia was successfully developing a master's degree program in international trade policy at the University of Indonesia. He then transferred to the USAID trade program in Cairo, where he continued to work on trade policy issues. Back in Washington, D.C., he served for almost 10 years as an anti-corruption adviser for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. As his final contribution, he provided support to atrocity prevention programs around the world.

Mr. Freeman retired for a second time in 2018 to Eugene, Ore., where he enrolled in university classes and earned his fifth and final college degree, a BA in psychology. In 2023 he was diagnosed with blood cancer, myelodysplastic syndrome. This cancer often results from stem cell transplants and eventually developed into acute myeloid leukemia that was ultimately untreatable.

Mr. Freeman is survived by his daughter Laura Freeman, of Eugene, Ore.; his daughter Heather Freeman (and spouse Ethan Amarant), of Bellingham, Wash.; his sister, Chrissy Freeman, of Grass Valley, Calif.; and his former wife, Kay Freeman, of Eugene, Ore. Donations can be made in Mr. Freeman's memory to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society at <https://www.lls.org>.

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