

Travis Freeman says being a first-generation student is like being dropped in the woods with a machete and no trail.

While he might have felt lost at times, there were times in his life that set him on his path to Missouri State.

The first was financial hardship.

When Freeman was 7, he, his brother and mother were on food stamps. He became absorbed with understanding money.

“It was more of a fascination about how money can affect someone’s life and how it can control someone’s life, instead of the other way around,” Freeman said.

He did not want it to control his.

Then, in high school, Freeman was in a car accident and broke his neck in two places. Once he paid off his medical bills with an insurance claim, Freeman had a little money left over. He decided to invest it.

“I met a financial advisor. And that’s when I really realized, ‘OK, this is definitely the route I want to take.’ And later that financial advisor turned into my business partner after I graduated,” Freeman said.

BUILDING A LIFE FULL OF BLESSINGS

Freeman’s fascination with money led him to study in the College of Business at Missouri State.

In 2006, he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in finance and economics.

He started his own financial planning practice in St. Louis and quickly built a clientele.

In 2018, Freeman and his team merged with Moneta Group, a \$23 billion wealth management firm.

Today, Freeman is a partner.

He has financial freedom and helps others achieve theirs.

“You get to take something that’s very complex and allow people to just focus on what they want to in life — the fun stuff, the family stuff,” Freeman said. “They outsource it to us so that they don’t have to worry as much. You’re bringing clarity to something that’s very unclear.”

Freeman is a frequent television guest on local stations and has been quoted in publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*.

He published a book, “*Make Your Money Work*,” and is working on a second.

He and his wife, Marina, have twin

sons. In their spare time, the family loves to travel.

A few years ago, they became more involved with the university, helping with events and supporting funds. Freeman is also active in the Missouri State Alumni Association.

In 2020, the family decided to establish the Travis and Marina Freeman Family Endowed Scholarship for a College of Business student.

Preference is given to first-generation Bears.

“Frankly, I didn’t think we’d have half the things my wife and I have today. I mean, at 36 and 37, we are completely blessed. And this is one of the reasons that we felt like this was a good time to do it. We weren’t sure if we were going to do it this year, but we said, ‘What the heck, if there’s going to be a year that people need help, it’s this year.’”

GIVING OTHERS HELP HE ONCE HAD

Freeman grew up in Defiance, Missouri, a rural community outside St. Louis.

At Missouri State, Freeman found mentors in the finance department.

The professors were encouraging. They recognized hard work and went out of their way to help students.

“It went beyond the classroom,” Freeman said, who still keeps in touch with his former advisor and other professors.

On campus, he became involved with the Financial Management Association, and eventually became the group’s president. During that time, he got to know Dr. James Scott, who is now retired. Freeman received a \$300 scholarship funded by Scott.

It meant the world to him.

“There was a period of time in my life during adolescence where there weren’t a lot of people who believed in me or my abilities, and maybe there were some reasons for that, but when I got that scholarship from Dr. Scott, that was very emotional for me,” he said. “And the fact that I could now turn around and do this for students into perpetuity — folks that I may never meet — is a really cool feeling.”

He looks forward to helping students like him — students who are eager to blaze their own trails.

“Some first-generation students out there that have had to get the machete out and figure out their path on their own,” Freeman said. “They deserve help and recognition.” □

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PROFILE

“The foundation folks made it easy. They didn’t make it about the nuts and bolts or the dollars. It was about: ‘What do you want it to mean to your family? How do you want this to operate decades in the future?’ That was an aspect that I underestimated. And frankly, it was a little emotional when my wife and I looked at each other at dinner and said, ‘This is something that’s going to outlive our family.’ It’s pretty neat.”

TRAVIS FREEMAN

A close-up portrait of a young man with short brown hair and green eyes, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a red necktie. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with warm lighting.

From food stamps to financial freedom:
**Alumnus carves a path for
fellow first-generation students**

This is a story about how a man from Defiance, Missouri, defied the odds. Travis Freeman was a first-generation student who has become a highly successful financial planner. At 36, he established a scholarship to help Bears like him.

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PHOTO BY LANCE TILFORD