

[New Kenyan library dedicated to late U of MN alumnus](#)



The Dr. Amos Odenyo Library is located in the Kenyan village of Got Regea, where Dr. Odenyo was born.

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“When one builds a library, one closes a prison.” That is what my Aunt Agnes told me when we opened our first library in our Kenyan village of Got Regea in March 2012.

I named the library “Dr. Amos Odenyo Library” after my father, who was born and buried in Got Regea. He was a pioneer and an inspiration to us all. The first in his family to board an airplane (via the

Kennedy Airlift), he found his way to the American Midwest in 1961. Nearly a decade later, in 1970, he became the first person from Got Regea to obtain a doctorate degree, from the University of Minnesota.

The son of a lay minister and school headmaster, he spent the next 37 years uplifting his family and community by providing educational and developmental assistance. In July 2007, with less than one hour left to live, Dr. Odenyo requested that we, his American family from Minnesota, never forget his home village in Kenya.

It was his final wish, and his life’s example, that inspired us to try and build Got Regea’s first library. The village had few educational resources beyond mud-walled school buildings and cracked chalkboards. Students walked nearly five miles, often barefoot, to nearby towns for the chance of finding books to read.

We knew that in America people simply threw away books when no longer needed. If we found a way, perhaps we could bring these books to our father’s village and make a real difference in the lives of its students. But how?

Ideas came and went, but in 2011 I came across the website for “The Book Thing.” What a

wonderful organization, I thought. It collected used and overstocked new books, and offered them free to the public. I was in luck. The Book Thing was located in Baltimore, just an hour away from my new home.



Inside the library, founded in March 2012

Photos courtesy of Odera Odenyo

The next day I slowly drove away from The Book Thing with my Honda Pilot weighted down with all the textbooks, novels, encyclopedias and

dictionaries that I could carry. I made several more trips back to Baltimore, turning my living room into a sea of books. My mother, a former teacher and University of Minnesota graduate, helped me sort, pack, and ship the books to Kenya. We wondered what would arrive first — the books or the modest library building that we were constructing on the African land that we had inherited from the late Dr. Odenyo.

Nine months later I stood in front of our completed library, with scissors in hand, ready to cut the red ceremonial ribbon across the front door. Villagers, students, and clergy had come from far and wide to witness this historic occasion.

I kept my speech short, telling the students that the library was an extension of one Kenyan's dream of pursuing education in America for the benefit of his community in Africa. Even at their age Dr. Odenyo did not own a pair of shoes, but he possessed a hunger for knowledge. When given the chance to study, he turned the opportunity into a means to uplift himself and others. Now that Got Regea had this library, and this knowledge, they too had the opportunity to pursue their own dreams.

Now officially opened, the large crowd filled the new building and inspected the books with awe and admiration. For most, it was the first time they had ever entered a library. Few thought that a library could ever come to their rural village in their lifetime. They also inspected the world maps on the wall, asking questions about America and speculating on what routes the books had taken to reach East Africa. Motivational posters lined the walls. In one poster, my father held his University of Minnesota doctorate degree, along with an excerpt of his 1970 graduate thesis that began by thanking his own father (and headmaster) for teaching him the meaning of perseverance.

I knew that maintaining and expanding this new library would bring me my own new challenges. However, with perseverance, the help of the community, and the inspiration of my father and grandfather, this library's future looked bright.

For more information about the Dr. Amos Odenyo Library, go to www.nyanzasun.com/educational-projects.html

Odera Odenyo is the son of Dr. Amos Odenyo.