



Our Community VIPs

Fighting for Freedom

Peggy Callahan makes ending human slavery her mission

Written by **Nancy Sokoler Steiner**

When South Bay resident Peggy Callahan read the book *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, she was shocked. A television reporter who covered social justice issues such as poverty, racism and the death penalty for two decades, she was outraged to learn slavery still exists around the globe today. In fact, more than 40 million people are currently enslaved—the greatest number in human history.

“I grew up in South Carolina, and I thought Abraham [Lincoln] had taken care of this,” she says. “I was infuriated. How could we live in a



world where we allow this to happen?”

Callahan tracked down the book’s author, anti-slavery activist Dr. Kevin Bales, and connected with another anti-slavery activist, Jolene Smith. In 2000 the three founded Free the Slaves, an organization dedicated to reducing people’s vulnerability to slavery, helping those in slavery achieve their freedom, and transforming the political, economic, cultural and social circum-

Television reporter Peggy Callahan has covered social justice stories her entire career, but was outraged when she encountered the facts about human slavery and trafficking.

stances that make slavery possible. Since its founding, Free the Slaves has helped more than 14,000 individuals escape the bonds of slavery. It has also enabled the arrest of more than 300 human traffickers and brought awareness to more than 450,000 who live in trafficking hotspots.

Callahan filmed and built the world's largest video library documenting modern-day slavery. She also created and produced The Freedom Awards, an internationally-covered event recognizing champions of the anti-slavery movement.

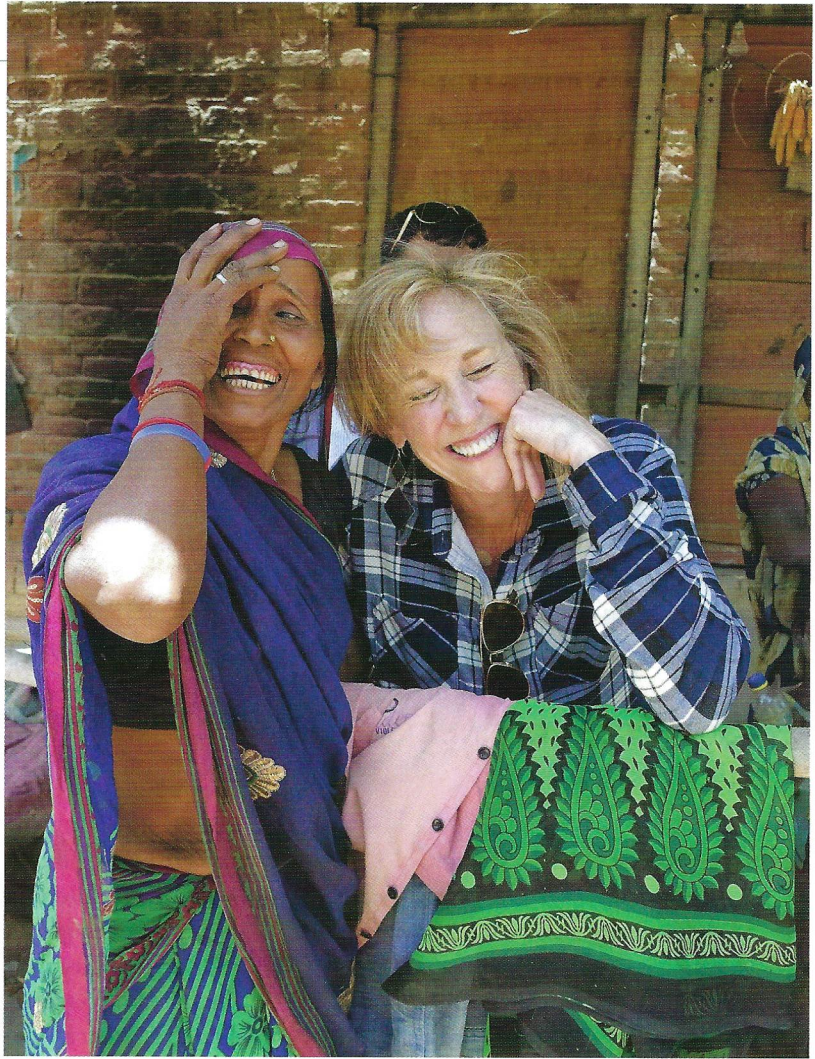
After helping build Free the Slaves into a global powerhouse, Callahan cofounded another anti-slavery organization, Voices4Freedom. It combats slavery in Northern India by building schools where children learn to read and write and adults learn about their legal rights.

"We find the best partners in the world and build on what's already working," she says. "There are great programs in India for desperately poor people, but desperately poor people—as in all over the world—don't know how to access them."

Once the people in one village become empowered, they share their knowledge with other villages. "Freedom is truly contagious," says Callahan. Since its founding in 2013, Voices4Freedom has built 30 schools, freeing more than 3,500 people as a result.

Callahan's latest project involves freedom of the spirit. She is producing a documentary inspired by *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and author Doug Abrams. Callahan spent five days in Dharamshala, India, filming the two holy men as they swapped stories, teased one another and shared spiritual practices. "It was the greatest honor ever," she says of the experience.

Whatever projects she pursues, Callahan will continue her work to end slavery. "At this point, slavery is a failure of will," she says. "We have all the tools to get rid of it."



➤ Above: Peggy Callahan has cofounded organizations to combat slavery in villages worldwide. Below: Callahan shares a laugh with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

