



## Why I Free Slaves: Actress Virginia Williams

Virginia Williams, a Los Angeles television actress, did not seek out Free the Slaves. She was actually wary at first. Seven years ago a friend invited her to the [Freedom Awards](#), a FTS ceremony honoring the world's best anti-slavery work. A presenter told the audience there were tens of millions of slaves on the planet today, more than at any other time in human history. "I remember thinking I didn't hear that correctly," Williams says. "Is this a scam? This can't be right."

That staggering figure stayed with Williams long after her initial disbelief. "I just couldn't shake it," she says. "I couldn't stop thinking about it." Once she knew about the global pandemic of slavery, she was changed forever. Today she is a committed FTS supporter.

"I free slaves because I believe we are all created equal. I just can't think of anything that has a higher purpose than putting value on human life. I just love that Free the Slaves does such a great job of gathering communities, gathering people together, and giving them the information, arming them, educating them. That's how we're going to change the world."



On a trip with FTS, Williams met two young women who had been trafficked into slavery in an Indian circus as children and forced to work for many years in dangerous, distressing conditions. To imagine enslaved children broke her heart. About a year ago, Williams had a baby boy. Photographs of her family adorn her black piano. "As a new mother, I feel an even higher responsibility to make sure that this doesn't happen to other children."

Williams was at first shaken by what she heard about trafficking—then she was moved to unmask the many faces of slavery today.

## Seeing the Faces of Slavery

What is at the root of the tragedy of modern slavery? As Williams dug deeper, she saw that each vulnerable community faces a unique set of challenges. Each village has a different set of needs. Free the Slaves fights to change the particular conditions that allow slavery to persist. In Nepal, slavery is rampant, but people living in different areas are trapped in different kinds of slavery. “Everyone needs to get involved in this fight because it’s not limited to any one thing,” Williams says.



In the capital city of Kathmandu, women and girls are trafficked into sexual slavery. FTS works with community leaders to help them find proper jobs, earn a living wage, gain self-respect, and give back to their communities, to help save other young women from the same terrible fate.

In the tiny villages of northern Nepal, Williams saw rural communities with no running water and no work. Desperate families unwittingly traffic their

children into domestic or labor slavery overseas, falling victim to the common lie that a good education and nice job await them in another country.

“Time and time again these families are devastated to find out that their children have been trafficked to who-knows-where,” Williams says. “They may not ever see them again.”

Williams has seen many faces of slavery—many more wait to be revealed. “There are so many ways it exists in the world,” she says. “It’s everywhere. It’s right under our noses, even in this country. We have a responsibility to help those around us and help others in need.”

## Listening to the Voices of Slavery

Williams knew meeting slavery survivors would be hard. Her friends wondered if listening to their stories would be too horrible to bear. They wanted to know if, on her trip, she had cried every night. But what she actually witnessed, while difficult and complicated, was strangely uplifting. She looked into the eyes of freed people, toured their villages, visited their homes, met their children.

“People love telling their stories, even if they’re very, very sad ones,” Williams says. “People love to communicate and express.” She realized: what the survivors she met needed was not pity or heartbreak but compassion, acknowledgment, and action. Former slaves want to tell their stories—and we need to hear them. “Let me hear your story so I can go back and tell other people. Your story’s not in vain.”

Williams learned a key lesson in Nepal about fighting slavery. A one-size-fits-all approach will not ultimately succeed—working within communities, by listening to local voices and focusing on local needs, is what truly gives oppressed people a sustainable path to freedom.

## Spreading the Word

In Williams' view, there is one simple way to get involved in the fight against slavery: talk about it. "I talk about it with anyone who'll listen," she says. "I'll talk about it with someone at the grocery store. I'll go to work and have a conversation about it. Just have the conversation. People who know better, do better."

As an actress, Williams has [performed](#) starring and recurring roles on acclaimed television shows such as *Fairly Legal*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Mentalist*, and *Veronica Mars*. Her position in the entertainment industry affords her a platform to empower anti-slavery activists on a bigger scale. She wants to give slavery a voice everywhere.



Several years ago Williams asked a philanthropic group to which she belongs, [The New Hollywood](#), to support Free the Slaves. The response was beautiful, and substantial. The group came together to host fundraisers, [stage cabaret shows](#), and hold events to raise awareness about the epidemic of slavery.

Social media is a particularly powerful tool. "Follow people who are abolitionists," Williams says. "Follow FTS. Do whatever you have to do. Get out there. Spread the word. We very much have a problem, and we very much have to fix it."

## The Gift of Hope

People are born into circumstance. Some are fortunate: privileged with legal rights and economic stability. Others are destitute and defenseless. "Most of us, particularly in America, go about our lives and just don't think about how privileged we are and how much suffering there is in the rest of the world," Williams says.



She believes that to those much is given much is required. "People are people. We're all humans, and we have to help each other out."

In her travels, Williams met many people who had broken free of slavery with the help of FTS. "While there are horrific stories, everywhere we went there was hope. There was joy." Williams saw mothers and fathers who, for perhaps the first time, were excited for the future, and for their children's future.

FTS compels lawmakers and politicians to craft legal structures that protect victims and punish perpetrators. FTS partners with local leaders to teach people how to protect themselves and educate their fellow villagers. We help slaves break free and stay free. “That’s why a lot of these people now have hope,” Williams says. “They can see firsthand what FTS has already done and how things are moving in a better direction for them and their families.”

In Nepal, Williams found the people gracious and giving. Even the poorest, and the ones who had suffered, opened their hearts to her. “It was just such a great reminder that money doesn’t buy happiness,” she says. “Whatever they had, they gave.” What Williams offers in return is the promise to carry their stories with her, forever, and to tell the tale of modern slavery.

**Free the Slaves needs your help.**

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**We Don’t Free Slaves, You Do!**

