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## **Q & A with the Co-founders of PeaceJam Dawn Engle and Ivan Suvanjieff**

### **1. How did you come up with the idea for PeaceJam?**

IVAN: During Denver's Summer of Violence in 1993, I had some young neighbors who I'd see carrying guns. These guys were my neighbors and they'd lived across the street from me for years. I told them I wanted to talk to them, and I asked about the guns. They told me they had a 'business' and that they needed to 'protect their turf.' I told them that having a business takes brains, but I'd never seen them going to school.

I asked them who the President of the United States was, and they didn't know or care because, "The President of the United States doesn't represent our interests." We kept talking and somehow came to the subject of South Africa, and the kids got excited. "Desmond Tutu stood up to The Man, got thrown in jail, never carried a gun and he's this little guy!" I was stunned that these kids holding guns in the street seemed to idolize a man who used non-violent methods to change his country.

DAWN: Ivan had a huge revelation that if hard core gang members in a city street could get excited about Desmond Tutu, then anyone could get excited about non-violent change. He didn't know who to take the idea to until he remembered meeting me, and he drove me crazy for weeks telling me, "Nobel Peace Laureates and kids – youth with Nobel Peace Prize winners could work!" Ivan didn't believe that I had contacts with the Dalai Lama from my days in Congress and working on the Free Tibet campaign, but I contacted the Dalai Lama's chief of staff and was told we could address him with our idea – in India, of course.

IVAN: I had literally \$1.79 in my bank account at the time, so we had to go asking all of our friends, "Hey, how's it going? Listen, I want to go speak with the Dalai Lama about an idea I have – can I borrow

some money for the plane tickets?” Somehow we made it to India, and the Dalai Lama liked the idea and said he was willing to participate – provided that we found a way to involve some of his Nobel Peace Laureate colleagues and friends, as well. He thought that the stories and experiences of many Nobels would offer different perspectives on the world.

DAWN: We came back to Denver so incredibly excited about the fact that the Dalai Lama wanted to work with us that we never really realized exactly how difficult this might be.

**2. How did you approach the Nobel Peace Laureates to sign on to your project?**

DAWN: We actually ended up in Ivan’s unheated Denver loft in the dead of winter trying to cold call Nobel Peace Laureates on the telephone.

IVAN: I didn’t know how these things worked. I would call up information for South Africa and ask, “Can I have the number for Nobel Prize Winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu?” You can imagine the reactions we got.

**3. Why did you decide that the Nobel Laureates would become the Board of Directors?**

DAWN: We wanted this organization to be the Nobel Peace Laureates’ educational outreach program to the youth of the world, and this structure has really worked brilliantly. It is absolutely unique – there is no other organization like PeaceJam in the entire world, with so many Nobel Peace Laureates working side-by-side to create this kind of program for young leaders.

**4. How do you gather young people to join with the Laureates to work on projects? What are some of the service projects that they have created?**

IVAN: PeaceJam’s young people work with our Nobel Peace Laureates most often in person through PeaceJam’s youth conferences. At full two-day conferences, the youth not only work side-by-side with a Nobel Laureate on PeaceJam Global Call to Action projects, but they also address the Nobel Laureate with presentations detailing a PeaceJam Global Call to Action project (or projects) that they are already working on. We’ve had projects

ranging from simple things such as having a documentary screening to raise awareness of world events or holding ‘Dining for Darfur’ events to raise money and awareness of Darfurian genocide, to large scale projects such as planning for and installing a water pipeline and tap for villages that don’t have any access to clean water at all.

**5. What does a young person have to do to work on a project with the aid and encouragement of a Nobel Peace Laureate?**

DAWN: All they have to do is go to our website, [www.peacejam.org](http://www.peacejam.org), and sign up to become part of PeaceJam’s Global Call to Action. It is as simple as that.

**6. How has the organization expanded over its 10 years?**

DAWN: Only 12 years ago, PeaceJam was myself and Ivan working in that unheated, asbestos-insulated Denver loft alongside a handful of dedicated volunteers. Since that point, PeaceJam has developed programs for young people from kindergarten to college while expanding out from the Rocky Mountain Region to include seven U.S. affiliate regions, as well as six well-established international affiliates. We’re still expanding with more U.S. and international chapters in the works.

**7. Where are you located and do you have other offices?**

DAWN: PeaceJam Foundation headquarters are located in Arvada, Colorado, which is just outside Denver. We’ve also expanded to have seven other affiliate offices within the United States, as well as six international affiliates, which are located in Argentina, the United Kingdom, Costa Rica, Guatemala, India, and South Africa.

**8. What are the 10 core issues the Nobel Laureates created for the Global Call to Action?**

- Equal access to water and other natural resources
- Ending racism and hate
- Halting the spread of global disease
- Eliminating extreme poverty
- Social justice and human rights for all
- Rights for women and children and their role as leaders
- Restoring Earth’s environment
- Controlling the proliferation of weapons, including nuclear weapons

- Investing in human security
- Breaking the cycle of violence

**9. Who have you partnered with to expand on your idea?**

DAWN: We are actually doing a lot of work with Penguin Publishing and the Pearson Foundation around the August release date of our book, *PeaceJam: A Billion Simple Acts of Peace*. We're also working with Public Television to put a *PeaceJam*-themed television series on the air in 2009, with the generous support of the Fetzer Institute, an incredible group of people based in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

**10. What is new at PeaceJam this year?**

DAWN: In September of 2008, Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles will host the second *PeaceJam* Global Call to Action Conference. This conference will bring together six of *PeaceJam*'s Nobel Peace Laureates to officially launch *PeaceJam*'s Global Call to Action 10 year movement. Coinciding with that conference will be the release of the book *PeaceJam: A Billion Simple Acts of Peace* as well as the September launch of a new interactive *PeaceJam* Global Call to Action website which will allow the global community to get involved in *PeaceJam*'s Global Call to Action.

**11. How will the youth involved in the projects communicate with the Laureates?**

DAWN: In a host of ways – at our *PeaceJam* Conferences (we have held 149 of these regional events to date), via our new interactive *PeaceJam* Global Call to Action website, through the *PeaceJam* Global Call to Action Challenge, and of course with the incredible inspiration of their words of wisdom and personal life stories in *PeaceJam: A Billion Simple Acts of Peace*.