

## Introduction

The poet Theodore Roethke said, “What we need is more people who specialize in the impossible.” Meet Ivan SuvanjiEFF and Dawn Engle. The duo—part high-octane kinetic energy, part boardroom savvy—are the creative forces behind PeaceJam, an international education program featuring twelve Nobel Peace Prize laureates working together for a common cause: our children. Through the program, high-school-aged youth learn about the life of various Nobel laureates. Then, through service projects, the youth give back to the community. Regional PeaceJam Youth Conferences, where laureates work side-by-side with youth, highlight the year-long program.

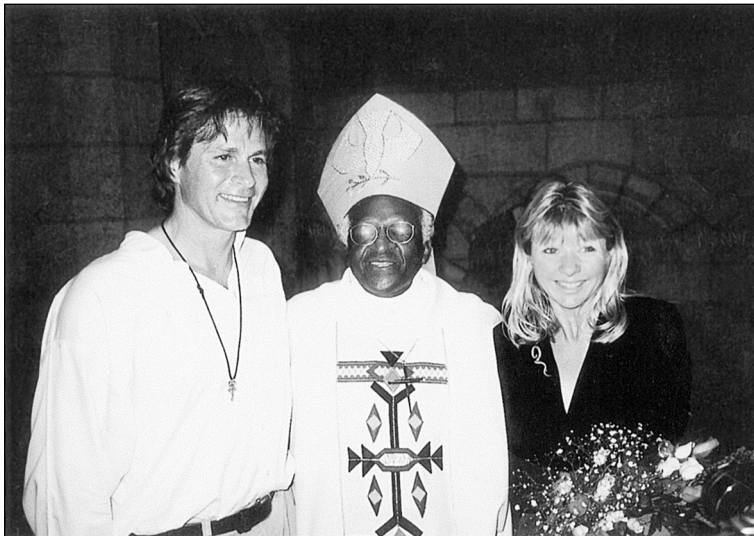
The serene inspiration known as PeaceJam was conceived on the gritty, gang-infested streets of northwest Denver in the summer of 1994. SuvanjiEFF, an artist, musician, and relentless dreamer, was talking with Latino gang members at the corner of Thirtieth and Wyandot when he discovered that these rough-and-tumble youth not only knew who Archbishop Desmond Tutu was, they appreciated his nonviolent efforts toward change.

SuvanjiEFF was blown away. In a prevailing atmosphere of disaffection, apathy, and hopelessness among young people, there was also an acute awareness of and appreciation for human greatness. The dreamer in SuvanjiEFF emerged and he envisioned Nobel Peace

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Prize laureates working shoulder-to-shoulder with youth. It was an idea so brash that some scoffed. Could he entice the laureates to jump on board? Could he really help young people regain a sense of meaning and integrity in the world?

Suvanjieff's vibe was infectious, though, and he soon sold Dawn Engle on the concept. Engle, a former Washington politico and cofounder and chair of the Colorado Friends of Tibet, was granted an audience with the Dalai Lama, and she and Suvanjieff spoke with unabated passion about their brainstorm. The Dalai Lama liked the idea and suggested they bring in other Nobel laureates. One by one, twelve laureates—the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, President Oscar Arias, Aung San Suu Kyi, Jody Williams, Máiread Corrigan Maguire, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Bishop Carlos Belo, José Ramos-Horta, Betty Williams, and Sir Joseph Rotblat—learned about the PeaceJam vision and asked, “Where do I sign up?”



**Ivan Suvanjieff and Dawn Engle cofounded PeaceJam, but their partnership doesn't end there. The two were married in South Africa in 2001, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu performed the ceremony.**

Photo by Brett Engle. Used by permission.

There's a cool spirit about PeaceJam that makes it attractive to both youth and the world's leading peacemakers. The purpose is to build peace in three ways: (1) by inspiring hope, (2) by showing kids how to be peacemakers in their own communities, and (3) by demonstrating that with courage, one person really can make a difference in the world. But PeaceJam is not a run-of-the-mill program where kids eat cookies and sing "Kumbaya." It has an edge to it, a real-life feel that teens find appealing.

PeaceJam realizes that peace is hard work. It is a program where students:

- Participate in year-long, ongoing leadership training, in which they roll up their sleeves and immerse themselves



**The Dalai Lama was the first Nobel Peace laureate to embrace the PeaceJam program.**

Photo by Ivan SuvanjiEFF. Used by permission.

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in provocative issues like violence, racism, and human rights.

- Study the lives of the Nobel Peace laureates. The curriculum is taught by trained community leaders, teachers, and mentors through high schools and community-based organizations. The average group has twelve students who make up each PeaceJam Club and spend thirty-six hours participating in the curriculum.
- Attend two-day PeaceJam conferences led by the Nobel laureates. Seventy-five PeaceJam conferences have been held in the United States and in Guatemala, Costa Rica, India, and South Africa. Six months after the conference, the PeaceJammers, as they are known, attend a one-day PeaceJamSlam, a conference where they receive more in-depth leadership training.
- Learn firsthand wisdom and strategies for dealing with conflict. The lessons make an impact. As one PeaceJammer succinctly stated, “I learned that I can be a leader and voice for people.”
- Implement service projects in their communities. PeaceJammers have created teen centers, diversity programs, AIDS prevention projects, conflict resolution workshops, aid for the homeless, violence prevention programs, and meals for senior citizens, and their work continues.

The story of PeaceJam is really about the young people. Since its launch in 1996, more than fifty thousand teenagers worldwide have participated in PeaceJam. Jes Ward was one of them. So were Rudy Balles, Richard Castaldo, Shannon Myers, and Shelby Myers. This book tells their stories. From the homeless child with an alco-

holic mother, to the full-fledged gang member, to the high school shooting victim, to the twins born of an interracial marriage, their dramatic life stories will both move and shock you. All had a moment that changed their lives forever—the murder of gay student Matthew Shepard, an attempted suicide, the carnage at Columbine High School, the death of a father who overdosed on drugs. Yet they have transformed into young people of purpose and conviction, not violent ciphers. Jes, Rudy, Richard, Shannon, and Shelby are a powerful antidote for a generation clamoring for hope—living, breathing examples of what can happen when life is touched by both evil and greatness.

This book offers a compelling look at the stark realities of growing up in the world today. Chances are you will see your children, your students, or your neighbors reflected on these pages. Perhaps you'll even see yourself. This book also details the incredible personal stories of the twelve Nobel laureates. You'll hear their words, feel their passion, be consumed by their hope. Chapter One examines the roots of violence and feelings of hopelessness. Chapter Two offers a dramatic illustration of how to begin to heal communities torn by intolerance. The next two chapters focus on human rights and the violent atmosphere that young people live in every day. Chapter Five depicts how Jes, Rudy, Shannon, Shelby, and Richard discovered the path to nonviolence, and Chapter Six describes how one person can make a difference.

In addition, this book offers a sample of the PeaceJam curriculum and training activities that can be used in the classroom. The concepts can be easily implemented by teachers, youth leaders, and anyone else who wants to promote peace in their communities. It is structured so that each chapter stands alone. You can draw on it intermittently to incorporate concepts into your teaching and your life or read it cover to cover—or both. Regardless, the issues explored here are no longer uncommon, and the conflict resolution tactics are practical and easy to use.

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With PeaceJam as the vehicle, the inspiration born on the corner of Thirtieth and Wyandot is spreading hope in our schools and communities. It is also alive on these pages, and it resonates as we strive for peace and understanding in the world. Use this book to find inspiration. Talk to young people about nonviolence. Get involved. Start a PeaceJam club. Make the world a better place. After all, one person really can make a difference.