As an activist, filmmaker and co-founder of The PeaceJam Foundation, Michigan native Dawn Engle is set to release a much-anticipated documentary, The Dalai Lama Scientist, which made its world premiere at the 76th Venice Festival at the end of August and will be streaming on Amazon.com and other streaming media May 19th, and is also currently available for pre-sale.

Featuring extensive rare and never-before-seen footage, The Dalai Lama - Scientist tells the very human story about an important and fascinating side to the Dalai Lama that few people know. In this documentary, which was written & directed by Engle, the Dalai Lama tells his own story in his own words about his lifelong journey from the world of Buddhism into the world of modern science. Through historical footage and interviews that she filmed over a span of several decades, we learn how the world has changed as a result of this intersection between religion and science.

As co-founder of The PeaceJam Foundation, Dawn Engle also managed to assemble 14-Nobel Peace Prize winning Laureates, including the Dalai Lama, to serve on foundation's Board of Directors in order to unite upon a mission to develop young leaders and engage adults and youth in their local and global communities. In addition, she co-authored the book, “PEACEJAM: A Billion Simple Acts of Peace”, which was published by Penguin in 2008, and directed the award-winning documentary films, Rigoberta Menchu: Daughter of the Maya, Desmond Tutu: Children of the Light, Adolfo Perez Esquivel: Rivers of Hope, Oscar Arias: Without a Shot Fired, Betty Williams: Contagious Courage, in addition to this latest work about the Dalai Lama.

One of the most recognized global leaders on the planet today, most people know the Dalai Lama as a man of peace and advocate for humanity, in addition to serving as a great Buddhist teacher. With this film, however, Engel explores a side of this iconic man few of us have been exposed to. For the last 35-years, he engaged in an ongoing series of dialogues with leading, world class scientists, physicists & biologists, covering several subjects ranging from quantum mechanics physics and cosmology to neuro-biology and destructive emotions. The Dalai Lama - Scientist immerses the viewer into these profound dialogues, explores the correlations between science and Buddhism, and shares personal life experiences from the Dalai Lama that have carried a deep impact upon his development as a world leader.

Narrated by actress Laurel Harris (Odd Thomas [2013]), the documentary features a number of prominent figures from the worlds of Buddhism and science, among them: psychologist Paul Ekman; mathematician and geneticist Eric Lander; neuroscientist Christof Koch; astrophysicist George Greenstein; biologist, philosopher, and neuroscientist Francisco Varela (1946–2001); professor of psychology and psychiatry Richard J. Davidson; Susan Bauer-Wu, president of the Mind & Life Institute, which serves as a catalyst and community builder for the contemplative sciences; Michael J. Meaney, professor in biological psychiatry, neurology, and neurosurgery; writer and Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard; Zen Buddhist teacher Joan Halifax; and Zen Buddhist and professor emeritus of medicine and founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Jon Kabat-Zinn.

The Dalai Lama has initiated numerous interdisciplinary dialogues with scientists, experts, and spiritual leaders over the decades to discuss the intersection of scientific and spiritual disciplines with regard to critical issues facing contemporary society and the modern world.

In an essay penned in 2005, His Holiness stated: “Although my own interest in science began as the curiosity of a restless young boy growing up in Tibet, gradually the colossal importance of science and technology for understanding the modern world dawned on me. Not only have I sought to grasp specific scientific ideas, but have also attempted to explore the wider implications of the new advances in human knowledge and technological power brought about through science. The specific areas of science I have explored most over the years are subatomic physics, cosmology, biology and psychology. I am grateful to the numerous eminent scientists with whom I have had the privilege of engaging in conversations through the auspices of the Mind and Life Institute, which initiated the Mind and Life conferences that began in 1987 at my residence in Dharamsala, India.”

This new release is the sixth in PeaceJam Production's award-winning “Nobel Legacy Film Series,” which began with the premiere of the life story of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Children of the Light at the Monte Carlo Television Festival in June 2014.

Married and living in Colorado with her artist husband now, recently I had the opportunity to discuss this fascinating film with the former Michigan native.

Review: So tell me, how did a female growing up in Michigan come to be so connected with such a divergent range of world leaders and Nobel laureates, which has been a common thread tying all your documentary filmwork together?
Dawn Engle: My Dad worked for Ford Motor company and I'm originally from Detroit. I was born at Henry Ford Hospital and attended Western Michigan University and ended up being selected to represent the State of Michigan after I graduated from college in 1976 for a Bicentennial year semester in Washington, DC, during which I met Senator Griffin from Michigan. He offered me a paid internship so I stayed for three more months and ended up working for 13 years on Capitol Hill.

One day somebody started talking to me about the situation in Tibet and how the Chinese were forcing all these Tibetan Buddhists out of their homeland, so they were forming an International Relief Campaign for Tibet because of all the horrible human rights violations going on.

I was one of the first volunteers and met the Dalai Lama 30 years ago. I remember at the time I was sharing a bathroom with Richard Gere and the whole pilgrimage there changed my life. I took away what I had learned in Washington, DC about being a leader and tried to use it for something good while I was in Tibet. Eventually I moved to Colorado, raised two small children, and started the PeaceJam Foundation as a fundraising vehicle 25 years ago. The Dalai Lama was the first Nobel Peace Prize winner to serve on our Board and now we have 13 of them listed.

Review: How did you develop the idea of approaching this film when trying to showcase the intersect between science and religion that informs the Dalai Lama, along with the scientific dialectic that is also incorporated into the Buddhist philosophy?

Engle: Actually, it wasn't that hard to fuse them together because there are many analytical similarities in Tibetan Buddhism that incorporate scientific research into their meditation techniques. Personally, I am both a Christian and a Buddhist, but for many people they feel they have no religion; and for many in the scientific world their approach towards religion is more agnostic because they feel evidence of a higher power is lacking; but one thing most people do not realize is that Tibetan Buddhists have their own science.

When this dialogue first started, I was there when different world-renowned scientists were going to teach what they knew to the Dalai Lama, who's own religion is over 1000 years ago - so I was able to witness these men become fascinated with each other. I thought it would be a good story to document and was amazed at the insights he displayed approaching their collaborative research - designing experiments and forging close relationships with one another.

Eventually, this became the most important thing in his life and was quite transformational for all the parties involved. Through these interactions, the Dalai Lama has incorporated changes into Buddhism for the first time in 2000 years. For example, changes have been made in the Buddhist curriculum to incorporate these new discoveries in ways to create their own applied sciences. And I believe this is important for that collaboration to continue when the Dalai Lama is no longer here on the planet earth, so there will be a whole generation of young scientists and Buddhist scholars who can continue this type of dialogue and incorporate scientific studies into managing planet earth better.

Review: One segment of the film that I found fascinating was when the Dalai Lama talks with these physicists about how nothing that we perceive exists objectively; and how if you take the most microscopic things in the world, such as a grain of sand - or better yet, bacteria, which is smaller than a grain of sand - suddenly it can invert its influence and power over the entire chain of life by moving from the lowest level of life to the top of the chain - which is pretty much what we're dealing with now in terms of the COVID-19 crisis.

Engle: That's exactly right! The yin-and-yang and powerful influence and intersection between polar opposites is a common thread in both quantum mechanics and Eastern religions. The notion that we must constantly balancing dualities in life in order to ascertain the truth is an important thing for people to grasp, whether one deals with science, religion, or politics. Science should always be in the center of humanity and in service of humanity to alleviate suffering.

At our recent premier at the Venice Film Festival back in August, a noted scientists came up to me and said that when he was younger he always wanted to use science to help people; but when his grant money ran out he lost that humanitarian spirit that he possessed when he was younger to save the world with science, and now felt he was only functioning like a bureaucrat. It's interesting because while capitalism is great when it comes to creating wealth, you also get a lot of casualties along the way; so I think it's important to have the heart and soul and care for humanity at the core of whatever you're doing in science.

Trailer for Dalai Lama - Scientist