PeaceJam Was Created to Win Kids to Peace — Now It Could Win the Nobel Peace Prize

At the Dalai Lama's eightieth birthday party.

PeaceJam

Patricia Calhoun  |  July 16, 2015  |  8:40am

Ivan Suvanjieff and Dawn Engle didn't start PeaceJam so they could see their names on the big screen, or hobnob with royalty in Monaco — though they've definitely done both. And they certainly didn't start the Denver-based organization so that they could win the Nobel Peace Prize. But now, two decades after they started PeaceJam as a way to help kids avoid getting caught up in violent lifestyles, PeaceJam and its offshoot, One Billion Acts of Peace, could really win the big award — after being nominated eight times.

Betting sites all over the world are giving respectable odds — 14 to 1 — for PeaceJam and its founders winning the Nobel Peace Prize, and yes, pools bet on things like peace.

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"The Nobel Peace Prize winners are very excited; some of the laureates are thinking we might win," says Engle. "Not only for all the work we've done in the past, but they're very excited about the One Billion Acts of Peace," a program that challenges youth around the globe to commit acts for peace and has already logged 4.1 million projects.

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Ivan Suvanjieff and Dawn Engle (left) in Monaco with Adolfo Perez Esquivel (right).

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When they were with Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu in San Francisco for Earth Day, she told them: "You've already earned the Nobel Peace Prize, and all of us know it."

The idea behind PeaceJam was simple: Put Nobel Peace Prize winners together with kids so they can mentor them and show them ways to promote peace, not violence, and become "global citizens." But from that simple idea — devised by Suvanjieff after Denver's so-called Summer of Violence in 1993 — it took a lot of hard work and weathering hard times to get PeaceJam where it is today. Thirteen of the Nobel Peace Prize winners are now on the PeaceJam board, and they're featured at youth events around the globe as well as in the Nobel Legacy film series that Engle and Suvanjieff started a few years ago.

The couple are just back at their Arvada office (and their Idledale home) after attending the preview of Adolfo Perez Esquivel: Rivers of Hope, the debut of one of those films in Monte Carlo. They were also in South Africa, attending Desmond Tutu's sixtieth wedding-anniversary celebration. And in Los Angeles for the Dalai Lama's eightieth birthday party. And soon they'll be heading to Mexico, where they're about to launch another PeaceJam program; they also introduced one in Morocco this year.

"It's around the globe, everywhere," marvels Engle. "These are crazy, awesome developments."
Rigoberto Menchu on Earth Day.

PeaceJam

Find out more about the One Billion Acts of Peace — and how you could win a trip to New York — here.

**Patricia Calhoun** co-founded *Westword* in 1977; she's been the editor ever since. She's a regular on the weekly CPT12 roundtable *Colorado Inside Out*, played a real journalist in John Sayles's *Silver City*, once interviewed President Bill Clinton while wearing flip-flops, and has been honored with numerous national awards for her columns and feature-writing.

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