



GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

One woman doesn't just protest on weekends — she's made a career out of peace



START UP

In a small group, talk about ways young people can help work toward peace.



Forty-four-year-old Reena Lazar has long wanted to be a peace builder, “someone who brought together both sides of a conflict so they could gain an understanding of each other.” But it wasn’t until 2004 that all of her life experiences came together in the creation of Peace it Together, an education program that brings 30 Palestinian, Israeli, and Canadian teenagers together in British Columbia.

Lazar grew up the youngest of six in a family that she describes as having a strong Jewish identity. As a young adult, she often travelled to Israel, where her sympathies lay with the Jewish-Israeli experience. At university, she was exposed to a new perspective; she met people who challenged her beliefs and presented

the idea that Palestinians have rights. In the late 1990s, Lazar embarked on a tour through Israel and the occupied territories led by

BY DIANE SELKIRK

the Compassionate Listening Project: “I listened to real people from all perspectives speak about how the conflict affected them. I had a big cry every night for that first week.”

Lazar says she was transformed by the experience and wanted to do more, but she knew her role wasn’t just to represent just one side of the conflict. “I wanted to find a way for people to gain an understanding of each other.” Lazar began exploring peace education programs and she says she was amazed by what she saw when Israeli and Palestinian teens simply had a chance to meet and tell each other their stories; “they made meaningful connections that quickly became very loving.”

Along with over 50 volunteers in British Columbia, Lazar began Peace it Together in 2004. It was a program modelled on different youth programs she visited in the US. But Lazar says she felt the teens needed an opportunity

Go online to find out more about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

to do more than just talk: “Figuring out who is right and who is wrong wasn’t getting us to a solution. To get to peace we need to move forward and create our future.” Together with Adri Hamael, a Canadian Palestinian, Lazar discovered that film was a medium that forced the kids to work together while they told their stories. “It’s difficult to make a film by yourself — and I loved the idea of adversaries creating together.”

In 2006, Lazar and Hamael ran the program again — bringing a group of 29 Israeli and Palestinian and Canadian teens to Galiano Island to make films. The teens worked together in the peaceful setting, while back in the Middle East, Israel and Hezbollah were engaged in a bloody conflict. In the summer of 2008, the third, three-week-long Peace it Together program was held on Bowen Island.

Lazar says the quality of the films that came out of the two projects was so impressive they were able to expand the program’s educational component. And thanks to a significant grant from Steven Spielberg’s Righteous Persons Foundation and the North Growth Foundation, they created an educational package

for schools outside the Middle East. They are now fundraising to take the films that were produced in Canada and using them as part of an educational package for students in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Lazar is already hard at work planning for the next Peace it Together camp, which will be in 2011. While Lazar says that nothing about her work is easy, it’s everything she’s ever wanted. She explains that the need for “people to people” programs is vital to our future: “The peace created by politicians is as fragile as the piece of paper it’s written on.”

What does this last sentence mean? Do you agree?

Participants review their film at the Peace it Together camp in 2006.



Why is this an important point?

ZOOM IN

- Why did hearing the stories of people on opposite sides of the Compassionate Listening Project affect Lazar?
 - With a partner, discuss why sharing stories would bring people on opposite sides of an issue together.
 - What problems do you see in this plan?
- The purpose of Peace it Together is “To get to peace ... to move forward and create our future.”
 - With a partner, reread the article and list what the program has accomplished.
 - Think about what can be done next.

ZOOM OUT

- If you were part of the Peace it Together project, what film about conflict or the price of war would you make?
 - Brainstorm some ideas with a partner, and then create a storyboard for your film.
 - Give your film a title and decide which actors you would choose to be in your film.
 - Share your storyboard and casting decisions in a small group.