



Jackie Dives/The Globe and Mail

## Treana Peake: 'I'm not afraid to try different things'

The founder of clothing label and non-profit organization Obakki is melding fashion and philanthropy

**BRENDA BOW**

### THE LADDER

Treana Peake, a Vancouver-based fashion designer and philanthropist, is the creative director of the fashion label Obakki and founder of the Obakki Foundation, which focuses on bringing clean water, education, sustainable agriculture and medical care across Africa, in particular, South Sudan, Uganda and Cameroon. Since 2009, the foundation has provided 900 water wells and supported more than 12 schools. Ms. Peake is married to Ryan Peake, of the band Nickelback, with whom she has two children.

I was born in Ontario, but the majority of my life was spent living in rural Alberta, in a town called Hanna. That's also where I met my husband.

For most of my childhood, it was just my mom and me. My father passed away when I was quite young. I was an only child. Our family struggled quite a bit. We spent some time living with my grandparents in a one-bedroom house. It was a humble upbringing. We had no running water. My grandfather and I would go to the well to bring water back to the family. As a child, I don't remember noticing or thinking anything of it. I just remember being in a family where I was surrounded by love.

I think my philanthropic side came from something that happened while I was growing up: Every year, around Christmas, a white envelope of money would slide under the door to help our family get through the year. We never knew who it was from.

There was no return address. Part of me wants that person to know and understand the power of their super kind actions. On the other hand, I know that's not why they did it – for recognition or praise. They did it because they cared.

Throughout my life, I've thought less about the money and more about the motivation: this beautiful act of kindness done quietly. It shaped my views on what giving really means.

I started fundraising at a very young age. I ran garage sales and other fundraising events. My husband grew up in the same town and started a band. I would organize concerts and we would give that money to charity. It was a very inclusive rural town where everyone helped each other. It built me up and made me feel I could really do anything.

My first real philanthropic trip was to Romania when I was 18. I met a Canadian military captain who said he was putting together a group of people to go and help with issues around overflowing hospitals and orphanages. I was instantly hooked by the work we were doing.

I launched Obakki, the fashion label in 2009. Obakki is a made-up word. I think people thought fashion came first. I didn't. I have been doing philanthropy my entire life. As the fashion brand began to grow, I realized it could be a great platform for me to showcase the philanthropic side of what I'm doing. I also recognized that fashion can have a very large platform, similar to what musicians and actors have. The fashion sales cover the administration costs of the Obakki Foundation so that 100 per cent of the donations can go exactly where we want them to go.

I have always been a creative person and business-minded. Fashion has allowed that outlet. I love putting together the photo shoots and collections and seeing clothing come to life through

stories. I have a small team of about 20 people that work on the fashion side here in my studio in Vancouver. The challenge is to push the envelope and come up with creative campaigns to keep peoples' attention. My focus now is trying to further weave the fashion into the foundation.

In Bidi Bidi, the world's largest refugee camp in Uganda, I met a group of women who helped me design a scarf – 100 per cent of the net proceeds of which go back to them. They're using their own two hands to create change for themselves. I'm looking for more opportunities like that. There are some beautiful stories I can try to weave into creative products. People want to buy things that do something good in the world.

I look to hire people with a common vision, who are innovative, collaborative and who want to make a change in the world. I think there's a misconception with non-profits that they're not modern or creative thinkers. We are absolutely that. Yes, our programs in the field are grassroots but, on this side, we are a forward-thinking, open-minded and modern company. It's getting harder to fundraise and we need to come up with creative ways to present issues to people and inspire them to be part of it.

I have been told many times that what I'm envisioning won't work. I've never been that person. I'm not afraid to try different things. If this inspires me, moves me and makes me feel really engaged, then I believe it will allow others to feel that way.

The best advice I've been given is simple: To do what's in my own heart; build my own model instead of what other people are doing and trust that I know what I'm doing. My advice? Don't be afraid to take the first step.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

Special to The Globe and Mail



### A team, a town and a country united in grief

Through grief at a vigil on Thursday to honour the 50 members of the Bonaville family killed in a collision that also injured 10 firefighters.

**TYLER REBER** / **LOGAN HUNTER**  
**Mark** / **Logan**  
**Reber** / **Hunter**  
**Fire** / **Fire**

**LOGAN ROULET** / **JASON JOSEPH**  
**Logan** / **Jason**  
**Fire** / **Fire**

**MARK CROSS** / **KAMAR LABELLE**  
**Mark** / **Kamar**  
**Fire** / **Fire**

**GEN JOSEPH** / **JACOB LECHT**  
**Gen** / **Jacob**  
**Fire** / **Fire**

**BRYAN HAY** / **CONOR LEAN**  
**Bryan** / **Conor**  
**Fire** / **Fire**

**ASHLEY HENDL** / **LOGAN SCHWARTZ**  
**Ashley** / **Logan**  
**Fire** / **Fire**

**DARCY HUGHAN** / **EVAN THOMAS**  
**Darcy** / **Evan**  
**Fire** / **Fire**

**STEPHAN MAJCE**  
**Stephan**  
**Fire**

**THE VICTIMS**  
 The names, ages and dates of the 50 fire crew

**REVEREND**  
 A disaster that motivates across Canada

NAME	AGE	LOCATION
Logan Roulet	34	Edmonton
Jason Joseph	34	Edmonton
Mark Cross	34	Edmonton
Gen Joseph	34	Edmonton
Bryan Hay	34	Edmonton
Ashley Hendl	34	Edmonton
Darcy Hughan	34	Edmonton
Stephan Majce	34	Edmonton