

Every Fifteen Seconds...

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Philippe Labro... A Certain Regard

To date, no one knows the number of victims that will arise from what we now commonly call a pandemic. “Pandemic”! Currently the most written and most spoken word on the planet, replacing and totally (though probably only ephemerally) erasing the term “crisis”, even if, ironically speaking, both these words correlate. Nevertheless, one pandemic should never be allowed to mask another.

An altogether more silent pandemic exists, one which is particularly persistent, highly invisible, and, one which, although admittedly not outrightly ignored by media and public opinion, has been relegated to the rank of those accepted and fatal realities that symbolize the terrible routinal spiral of misfortune – a misfortune whose victims are children. Between now and 2010, forecasts predict an estimated 100 million AIDS orphans. Keep this figure in mind: every 15 seconds, somewhere in the world, AIDS kills a father or a mother. Yes, you’ve read it correctly: every 15 seconds... In a few days time, on 7 May, the World AIDS Orphans Day (WAOD) will organize a grassroots campaign to increase the awareness of public powers, and an association bearing the intriguing acronym, FXB, will lobby the powers-that-be, as it does every year, to direct at least 10% of all HIV and AIDS funding to the creation of programmes supporting orphans. FXB is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Do you know the origin of these three letters, of the story hidden behind them?

It all began with a smile – a smile now long-lost, gone forever.

The smile of a 24-year old archangel, whose radiant face continues to haunt those who had the chance to cross his path. He was tall, handsome, curious and interested in people, his generosity was boundless and his intelligence immeasurable, his spirit and soul were possessed by a sole vocation: rescue.

- As his mother says, he had the knowledge of alpine guides; that so-essential virtue focused on helping those who are lost, those in distress.

Helicopter

For three years during the 1980s, from Vaud to Zermatt, on both sides of the Pennine Alps, this helicopter virtuoso rescued skiers exhausted and lost in the fog, climbers injured in falls or imprisoned in crevasses or chasms, avalanche victims, women about to give birth in villages cut-off by the snow, men and women taken by surprise by the mountain, the cold, the bad weather – over 300 rescue operations were carried out by Air Glacier, the company founded by his father, Bruno Bagnoud. His name was François-Xavier. On the night of the 14 January 1986, during the Paris-Dakar race, the helicopter he was flying (with, on-board, Thierry Sabine, founder of the famous race, the singer Daniel Balavoine, the journalist Nathalie Odent and the sound engineer Jean-Paul Le Fur) crashed in the desert, for reasons unknown to this day. Several hypotheses spread, including the most out-of-the-ordinary, though perfectly plausible, story of the viper.

- It is cold at night in the desert, recalls his mother. A helicopter, cockpit open, sitting on the sand, is a direct source of heat. You can just imagine that a reptile, attracted by the heat - vipers are rife in these regions – bit one of the passengers, and that when the helicopter took off, this passenger, with his leg outstretched, foot high in the air, inadvertently kicked the “pitch”, the

control used for directing the helicopter up or down. At 200 metres altitude, François was flying at 80 km/hour, when suddenly he accelerated brusquely, dropped instantaneously, having jumped from 80 to 200 km/hour in a split second. It was impossible to reset the trajectory in time.

The mystery remains unsolved. Technically-speaking, this is known as a “loss of external attitude references”. When the brilliant François-Xavier died in the peak of his youth, his mother, in her own way, almost lost her references too. Her name is Albina du Boisrouvray. Her destiny is an incredible storybook. A fabulously wealthy maternal grandfather, a Bolivian tycoon, known as the “King of Tin”; a father, a French aristocrat. Everything was perfectly united to offer her a life that would embrace the carefree universe of the “café society”, New York, Paris, Monte-Carlo, etc. But the injustice of the world revolted her and so she turned towards militant journalism, the ecological cause, and total rejection of the bourgeoisie. She went on to devoting her life to producing films, with great success. She married Bruno Bagnoud and together they had this son; son, who she says she is so “proud to have had”. When he disappeared, “it was like a pillar that had collapsed”. Desolation. She wanted to “leave”: Médecins du monde, humanitarian causes, various missions – but not enough to alleviate her grief, her heartache. She decided to sell most of her possessions (works of art, jewellery), her film-making company, her inheritance - 100 million dollars with which she founded FXB International, FXB – her son’s initials. To carry on “as long as possible his passion for helping, for rescuing others”.

Pain

Very early on, and long before the institutions, she became aware of the universal catastrophe caused by AIDS. Indestructible crusader, inexhaustible lobbyist, pioneer and inventor, she ventured towards pain - Africa, Brazil, India, etc. – setting up over 100 programmes in 20 countries – with the simple, efficient and unique idea of creating “villages”, grouping together a network of 80 to 100 people, whose economic and social autonomy would offer the opportunity to rehabilitate AIDS orphans. Her action, honoured, recognized by all international bodies, implies “going on-site”. She can have her feet in the mud, labour, do the dirty work, but she can also interest presidents, collect funds, even when it means, as was the case at the beginning, standing up to authorities engulfed with scepticism and apathy. She still remembers a governor in Goa telling her: “My dear lady, AIDS does not exist in my state”.

Rescue

In over 20 years, she has never boasted, never bragged, but the specialists and the experts do it for her: the activities implemented by FXB have helped change the lives of 18 million people throughout the world. FXB is not just villages – the association is involved in water management, palliative care, renovating schools, education and vocational training, etc. It is a fully-fledged NGO - 420 employees – and to get an idea of the results obtained, from 13 May onwards, just pay a visit to the Prévôts Hall in the Hôtel de Ville of Paris. An exhibition of photos taken in the FXB villages will help you understand more profoundly the immensity of the remarkable success of the remarkable Countess du Boisrouvray.

- AIDS children, in Africa and elsewhere, were considered as waste, she says. They were easy prey for prostitution, forced labour, or condemned to become child soldiers. They had no life to live, no matter how short that life could have been. Obviously we are not alone – lots of other organizations, be they officially recognized or not, are concerned about childhood and childhood rights. But, in “targeting” the situation of orphans, I wanted to honour the spirit, the conscience of my son, this commitment to rescue.

When she describes the personality of the young man who was nicknamed “the Valais Prince”, Albina du Boisrouvray makes sure her voice does not tremble too much. Much time has passed. But a certain sadness forever remains in the passionate eyes of this exemplary woman. So we contemplate one of the 22 films that she produced in her bygone life. One of these was entitled: *L'important c'est d'aimer* (The Important Thing is to Love). It's not very difficult to imagine who came up with the idea for this heavenly title.