

# A Countess's Fortune Saves AIDS Orphans

## Countess Albina du Boisrouvray, 66

Verbier, Switzerland and New York City

**A HEART-WRENCHING LOSS:** She had it all—a noble bloodline tying her to Monaco's royal family, a gorgeous apartment in Paris, a career as a film producer. But her world was her son François-Xavier Bagnoud, who, at 24, was a rescue pilot with movie-star looks. Then, on Jan. 14, 1986, he died when his helicopter went down over Mali—and du Boisrouvray decided to change her life. "I wanted," she says, "to follow through on François's commitment."

**RENOIR FOR SALE:** In 1989 she sold off the bulk of her inheritance. It included an emerald-and-diamond Cartier necklace, a Renoir and a set of Louis XIV dining room chairs. (She kept her father's gold cuff links, which she wears as earrings.) The sale netted \$100 million. Half went to causes François had cared about— aerospace education, human rights—and the other half to one he never could have imagined: relieving the misery of some 15 million children around the world who have lost their parents to AIDS.

**ONE FAMILY AT A TIME:** Through her Association François-Xavier Bagnoud ([www.fxb.org](http://www.fxb.org)), du Boisrouvray has reached some 1.5 million orphans and people with HIV or AIDS in 16 countries. One initiative: covering medical and school costs, while providing a nurse, social worker and planner to help families become self-sufficient. "She's helped millions of orphans and inspired others to do the same," says Jennifer Delaney, director of Global Action for Children. One 13-year-old Rwandan boy used to go hungry for days; now, with money his aunt earns selling fruits and vegetables, he has regular meals and is back in school. "Our lives," he says, "have improved." Which makes du Boisrouvray, who travels to Africa and India to visit kids she's helping, feel she's really struck it rich. "I don't know how François would have lived his life," she says. "But I know these were his values."

By Courtney Rubin

"They're the discarded generation," du Boisrouvray says of AIDS orphans. "And they need tender loving care."



Know a hero? Send suggestions to [HEROESAMONGUS@PEOPLEMAG.COM](mailto:HEROESAMONGUS@PEOPLEMAG.COM)

Photograph by ANDRE RAU