

PERHAPS ONLY a few times in a generation do men of courage rise who spend their lives for others. In this issue of the *Plain Truth*, we open up to our readers the concerns and the dedication of a man of that stature, who at this moment is at his work of saving a people. He is Jean-Pierre Hallet, explorer and author. And the people about to perish, for whom he is spending his life and physical energies, are the Pygmies of the Ituri Forest in the heart of Africa.

Jean-Pierre Hallet has been a reader of the *Plain Truth* for three years. We can do no less than present to our multiple millions of other readers around the world his story with these beautiful and revealing photos. Here are his own words from conversations with us:

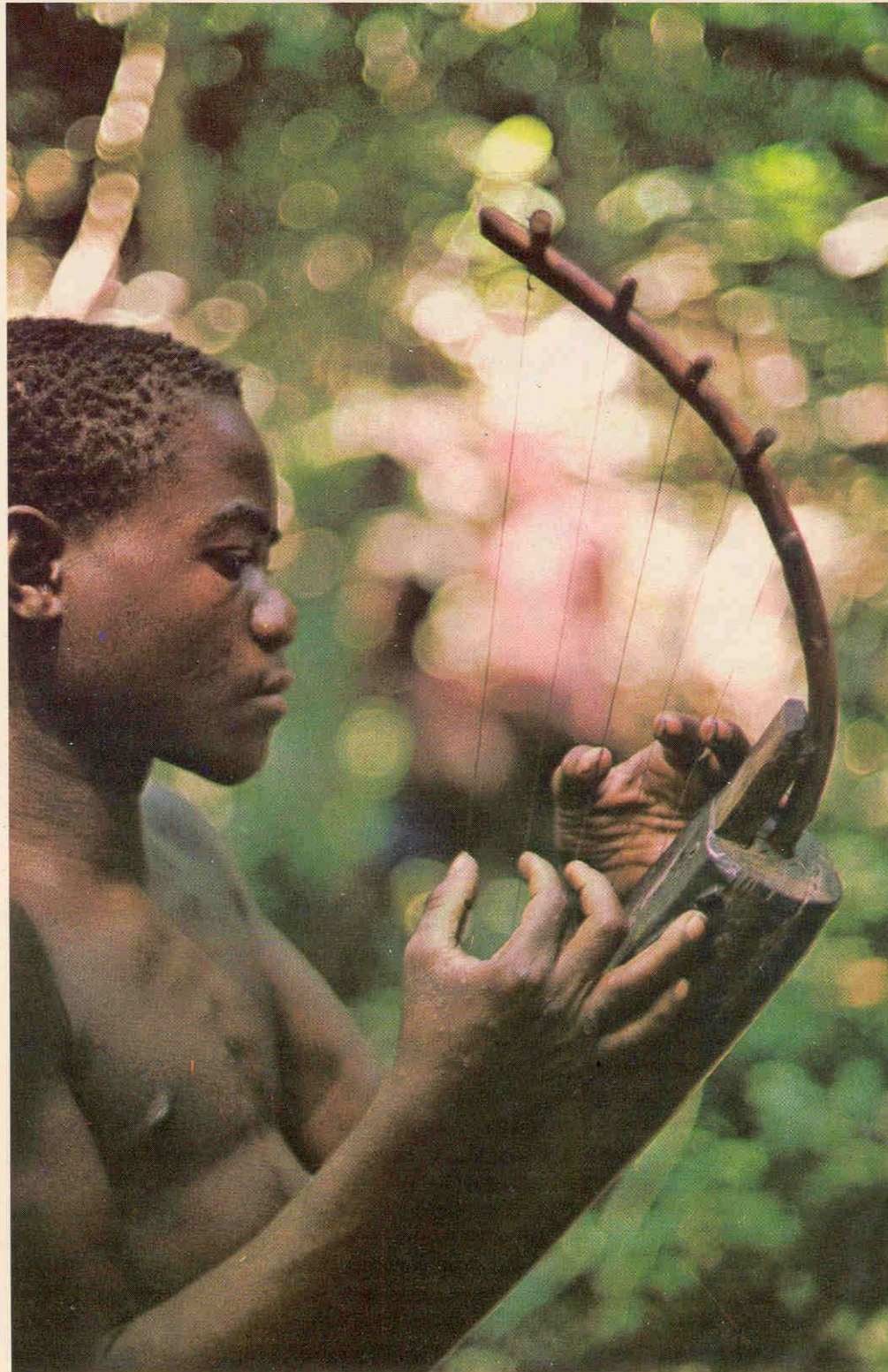
As a child, I was fortunate to grow up in Africa with the physically small people called Pygmies. Back then, in the 1930's, there were about 35,000 of these healthy, delightfully happy and highly expressive people, as exemplified by the young man playing here the five-string Pygmy bow harp. Twenty years later, as an adult, I was again reunited with my former playmates whom I respected and loved. Professionally, I was a bush sociologist and agronomist for the Belgian Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. I did everything from diagnosing plant diseases to delivering babies.

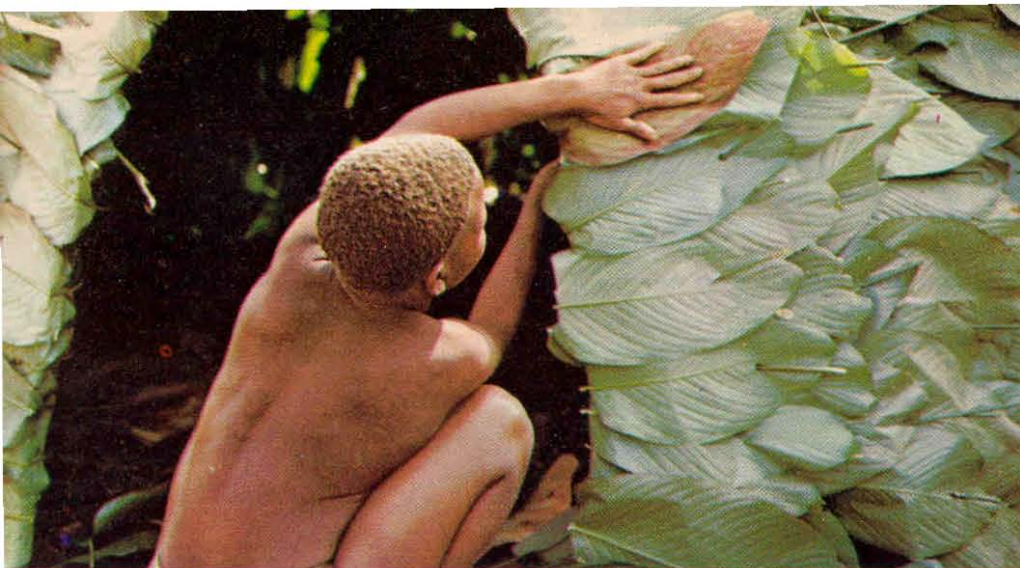
To know and understand my Pygmy friends better, I left behind "civilization," and in January 1957 I walked into the tangled shadows of the Ituri Forest in the eastern Congo (now Zaire). For eighteen months I lived with them as an adopted member of the Efé Pygmy society, learning the hard way to appreciate their unique life-style, their high moral values, their spiritual understanding, and their wisdom.

But I also became aware of the many physical problems threatening their survival. The Pygmies' ancestral forest was being increasingly chopped down by greedy lumber operators, thus robbing them of the

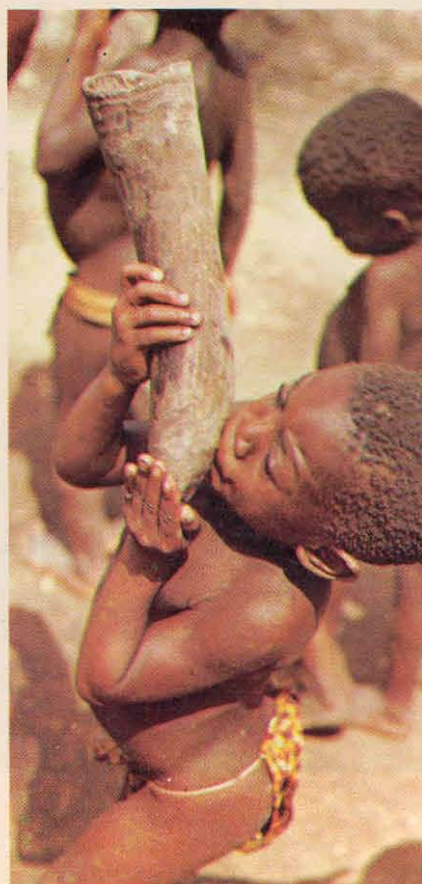
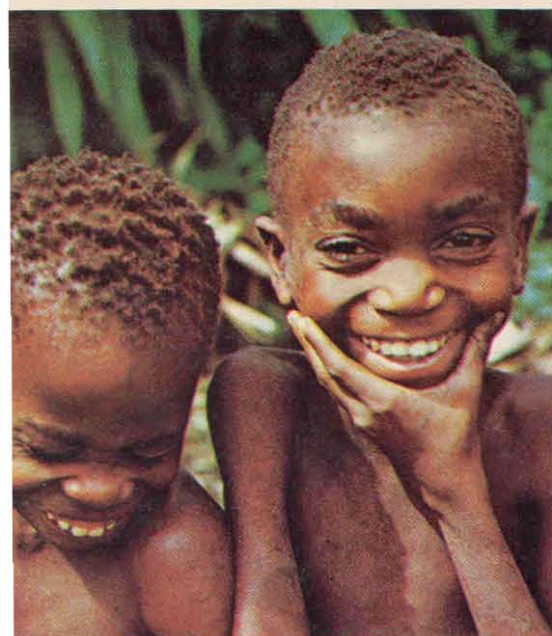
"TO SAVE A PEOPLE"

Conversations by Jean-Pierre Hallet as told to Senior Editor Herman L. Hoeh
Photography by Jean-Pierre Hallet





AN EFÉ WOMAN (top) puts last touch on the doorway of a traditional Pygmy hut, a primitive version of a geodesic dome, looking like a shaggy green igloo. Left, a grandmother shows her granddaughter how to thatch the hut with ilipi leaves. Bottom left, Pygmy children are extremely alert, with a great sense of humor. Below, in the frame of a traditional dance, a five year old is blowing an atsi made from the horn of a forest buffalo.



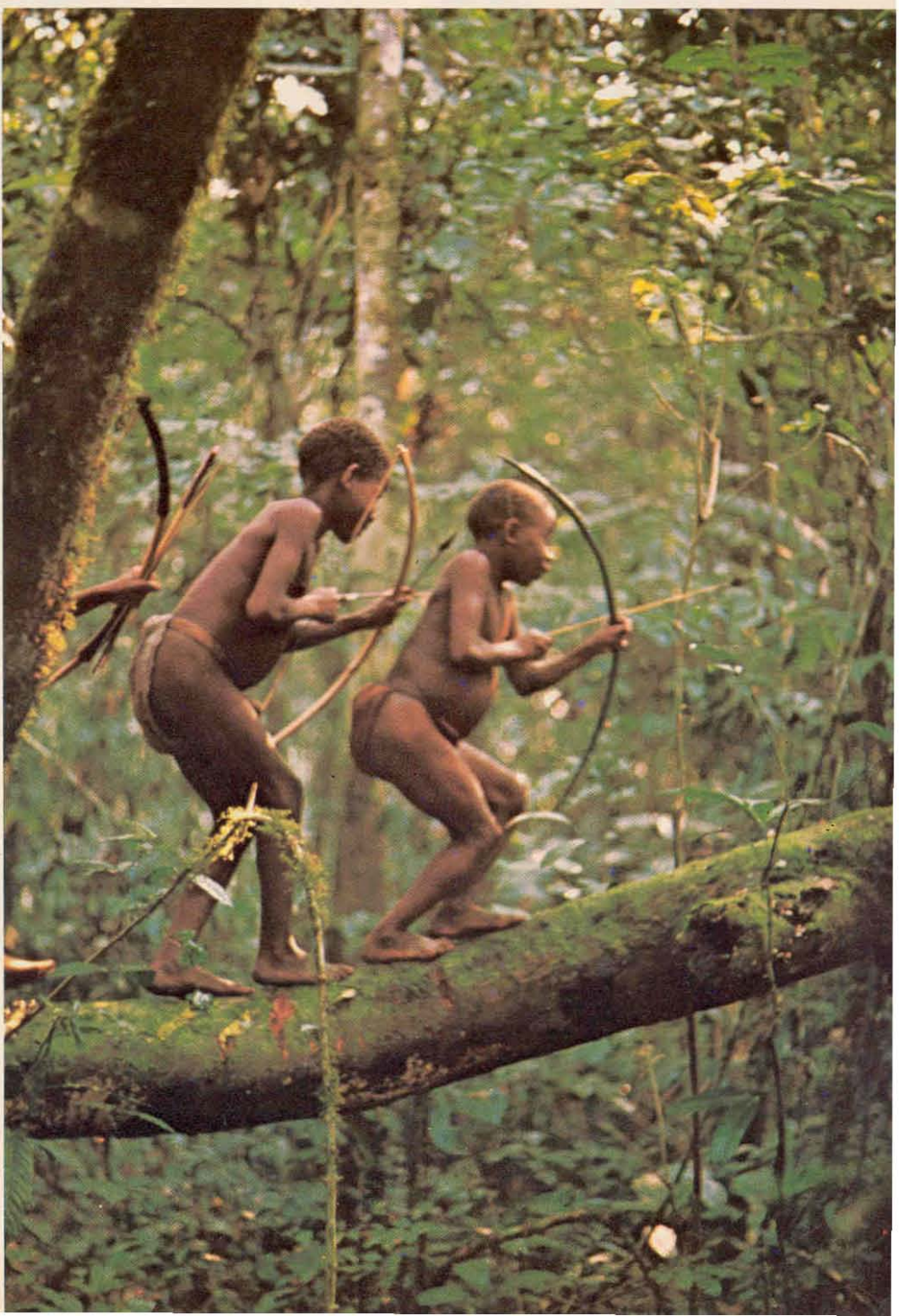
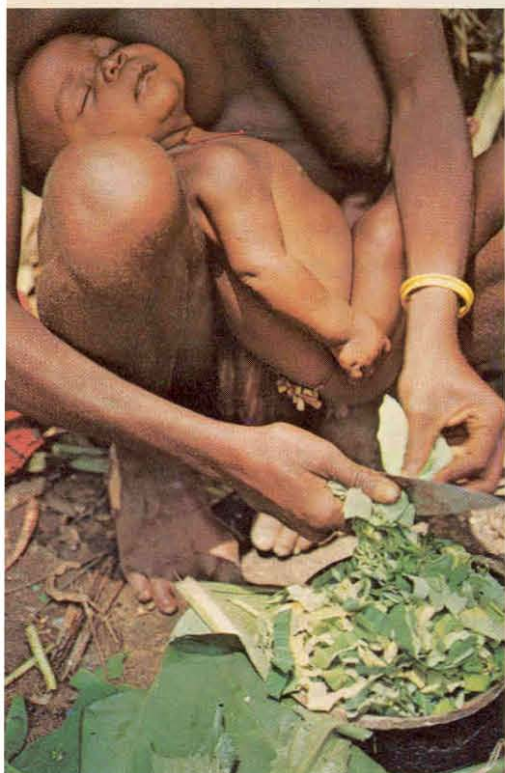
animals they hunted. The Efé were forced to live in the blistering tropical sun for which their bodies were unprepared. Bantu and Sudanese Negro plantations were creeping in from all sides. Tourists came in droves bringing peanuts, cigarettes and sugar. The Pygmies started to succumb to new diseases, suffering from a high mortality rate and being reduced to about 25,000. Above all they suffered from loss of basic human dignity, sliding into feudal serfdom to the benefit of their tall African neighbors.

On June 26, 1957, after great difficulties, I managed to liberate every Efé (the only true, pure-blooded African Pygmies in the Eastern Ituri Forest) from these bonds of serfdom by obtaining from the Nande Negro chieftains of Beni an official "emancipation proclamation." At the same time I established for the Efé Pygmies a realistic self-help program based on the progressive introduction of agriculture and better sanitation to compensate for the loss of their forest home.

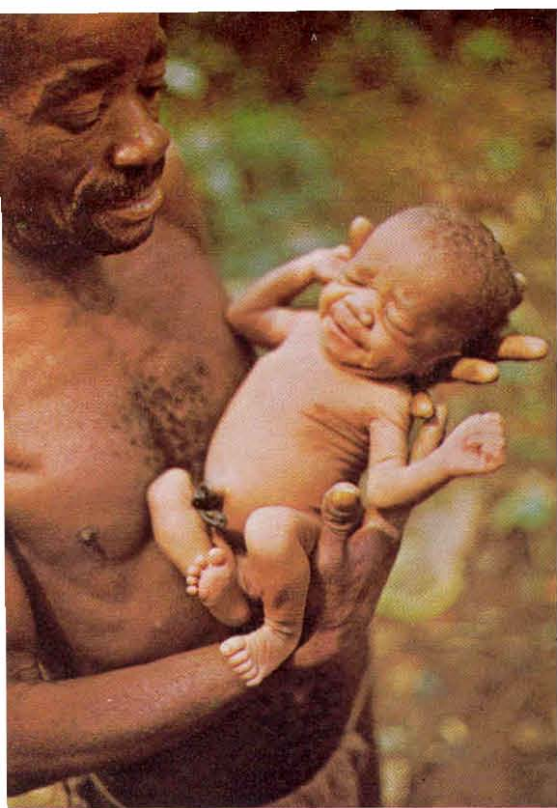
During these eighteen months in the Ituri Forest, I taught the allegedly unteachable Pygmies how to read, write, and do simple arithmetic, mainly for the purpose of proving that they were as able to learn as their former masters — if not more so. I taught them crop rotation and use of improved selected breeds to enable them to compete on a more equal footing with neighboring Negro tribes.

But in 1960 came political independence to the Belgian Congo, and with it chaos, rebellion and civil war. Being by nature nonaggressive, my Pygmy friends were the first to suffer. They were rapidly reduced to some 15,000. Victims of new harassments — having to pay income tax, being drafted into the Zaire army, suffering from enforced loss of cultural identity — they kept on dying at an increasing rate despite my lonely efforts. Today there are only some 3,800 "pure-blooded" Pygmies left.

In Africa, more than one hundred



MOST OF THE Pygmy food comes from the vegetable world (top left). Vegetables, roots, fruits, mushrooms, vines and leaves are the main part of the daily meal. Immediately above, a child, although uncomfortable, is sound asleep, feeling secure as the mother prepares the family stew. Quite often young girls, emulating their mothers, go on a firewood safari (top right). They are not supervised by adults in spite of the fact that they range in age from 2½ to 5 years old. They carry as much wood as their strength allows. In the mysterious world of giant trees, vines and ferns, two boys (right) on a monkey hunt are as comfortable on a slippery high branch as they would be on the ground.



fifty thousand square miles of national parks and game reserves are dedicated to the preservation of the flora and fauna. To date, not a single square mile has been set aside to aid the survival of the Pygmies, Central Africa's oldest known surviving people.

Their Ituri Forest home has been reduced, at present, to less than ten thousand square miles. This area comprises only 6 2/3 percent of the land reserved for the African animals. I believe that the Pygmies have the right to live in this small remnant of their original land. I am now heading an organization dedicated to the goal of securing for the Pygmies their original forest land.

In an effort to make more people aware of the uniqueness of the African Pygmies and the tragedy of their imminent extinction, I wrote my major publication *Pygmy Kitabu*. But I felt that something visual was also imperative. So, in the fall of 1972, I made a full-length documentary on the Efé Pygmies, wanting to raise funds to help them in their struggle for survival. The Zaïre government was about to rule that the Pygmies could not be photographed, since they felt that because of their "primitive" appearance,

they are bad public relations for the new nation. With great difficulties I managed to produce this graphic document, incorporating in 90 minutes the essence of a lifetime of observation and understanding — the first and last ever to be made. It was a labor of love and an almost impossible task because of daily rain, government pressures, lack of competent help, and my own physical limitation due to the loss of my right hand in 1955.¹

Upon my return to the United States I immediately started working full-time on the film with Hanna Roman, a very competent editor. Members of the *Plain Truth* staff became interested in my work. In September 1973 the film "Pygmies" was shown at a press preview at the Academy Award Theater in Los Angeles. It was a great success: standing ovation and excellent trade reviews.

The film follows the Efé Pygmies' life from birth to death, showing the strange customs surrounding the

¹In 1955 Jean-Pierre Hallet set out with a few black helpers to relieve a desperate famine among the Pygmoid or part-Pygmy Mosso tribe of Burundi. He emerged from this mission of mercy single-handed after an accidental dynamite explosion blew off his right hand above the wrist. He wrote of this and myriad other experiences in his exciting book *Congo Kitabu*.

Pygmy birth which takes place in the river, the colorful marriage ceremony, and the moving cremation ritual. Their amazing precocity and artistic creativity are illustrated for the first time on the screen. Also shown is the sacred Toré ceremonial which precedes the hunt, and possibly the last filmed elephant spear-hunt. The Pygmies' tremendous warmth and the depth of their full range of emotions are felt throughout. The powerful narration by Lorne Greene enriches its visual impact. The film implies that these wise and once happy so-called primitive people hold a key to our emotional, mental and physical survival, suggesting that "civilized" society should establish a profound and realistic understanding of life — not as an automated existence, but rather as a basic privilege.

I was sure that the film would be well accepted. I never expected it to be repeatedly rejected during the next year by all the major distributors, for being "too honest, too artistic... too good" — just not a commercial movie which would go for the average audience. "How do you expect people to pay... to see a picture that has no sex, no violence, no suspense and no staged drama —



AT BIRTH, a Pygmy baby, far left, is rather large. Proportionally, the Pygmies have the largest babies in the world, sometimes reaching eight pounds. Traditionally Pygmies disposed of their dead with a cremation ritual. Today it is against the law and they are forced to practice conventional burial (center photo). Above, Yobu, a six-year-old boy, is crying over his mother's death. His father died two months earlier. They both succumbed to new diseases resulting from the impact of "civilization."

a film that nobody can 'relate' to?" I was told. I was disgusted, since I believe that many people are eager for quality and meaning in a motion picture. However, I was determined to convey the plight of the Pygmies, and I selected San Francisco, California as the ideal city for the introduction of my film. The San Francisco Zoological Society and the California Academy of Sciences sponsored for me three large benefit programs. Another success. On the strength of that, I finally persuaded a local theater circuit to run "Pygmies" in a regular theater. The reviews were excellent and viewers seemed to be impressed, touched and, above all, aware of how unique the Pygmies are and why it is so important to give them possibly their last chance to stay alive.

Few, it seems, know that the Pygmies, long before the coming of the European to Africa, possessed an enlightened philosophy and laws regulating their relationship to one another, to their forest environment, and to a creator-deity. They even prayed aloud to that heavenly deity, usually addressed by the familiar-sounding title "our Father." They claim to have personally received from this deity a lofty moral code

which forbids killing, adultery, lying, theft, blasphemy, devil worship and sorcery, disrespect toward elders and other forms of misbehavior. Pygmies do not indulge in cannibalism, human sacrifice, mutilation, sorcery, ritual murder, intertribal war, initiation ordeals or any of the other cruel customs associated with equatorial Africa.

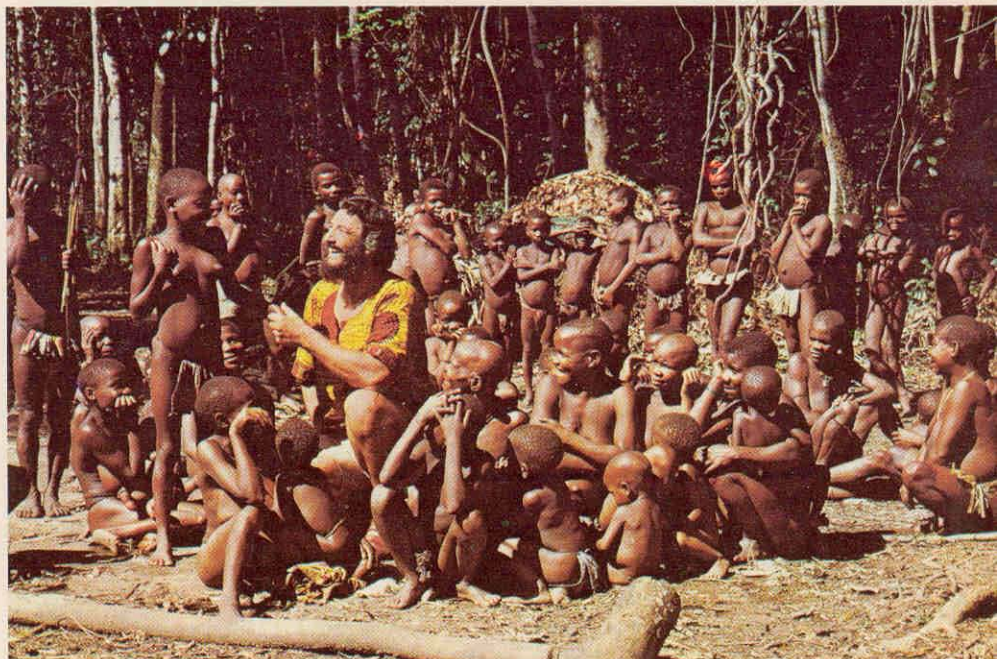
In Pygmy life, hunters — no matter how hungry — bring game back to camp where it is divided up among members of the band. (This is one of the laws their deity gave to his Ituri Forest congregation.) Traditionally, cooked game is not eaten until a brief prayer is intoned while a little tidbit of meat is either tossed into the air (the direction of the traditional home of "our Father") or wrapped in a large leaf and placed in the fork of a nearby tree (an act which raises it from the earth as an offering). These acts, now nearly totally neglected in their struggle to survive, let the deity know that his Pygmies do not take food for granted.

The Pygmy concept of God, in contrast to their tall black neighbors before the coming of the Europeans, is enlightening. "In the beginning," said a Pygmy elder, "God lived with men and gave them his command-

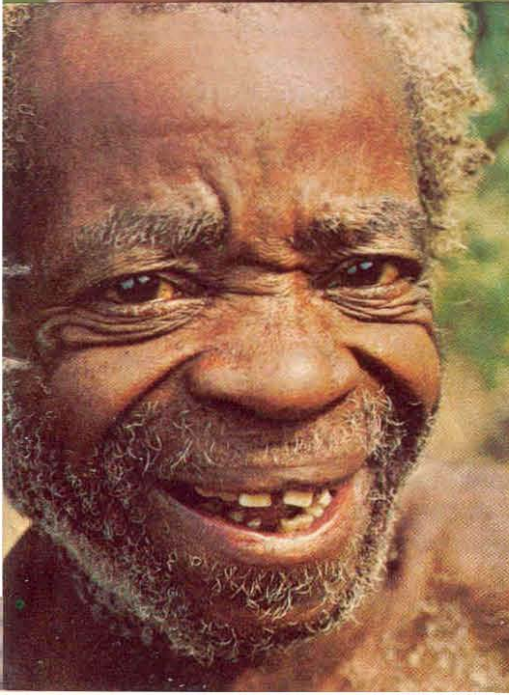
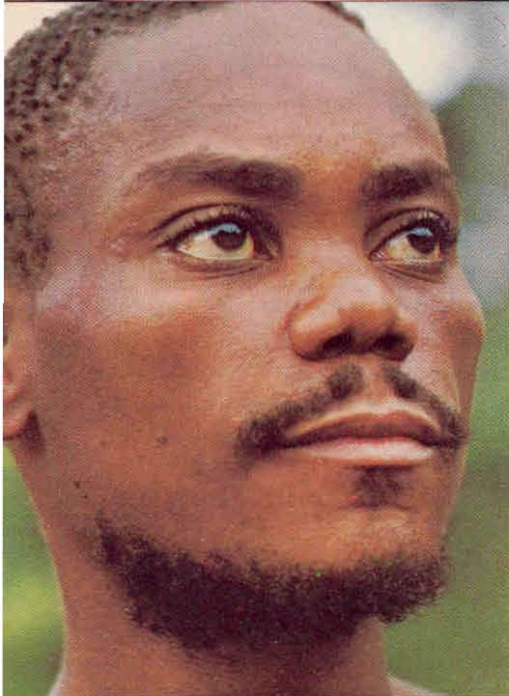
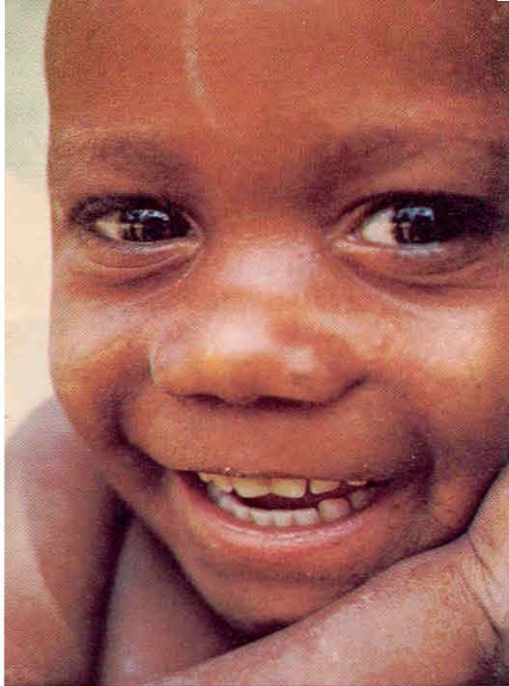
JEAN-PIERRE HALLET

shown here among a typical Pygmy extended family, was born in Louvain, Belgium, in 1927. His father, Andre Hallet, was a painter of African landscapes and portraits.

After spending his childhood in the Congo, Jean-Pierre Hallet returned in 1948 to live and work among seventeen different African tribes. He has managed to revisit his adopted people every year, bringing back a wealth of new facts on the Pygmies' culture, philosophy and religion. He has also compiled the first dictionary and grammatical study of the Efé Pygmy language and has photographed and filmed each aspect of their daily life.







ments. He created the world. He can never die. If he did, the whole world would perish with him. God dwells on high, in the Firmament. God is the Lord above all things. He reigns also over men, whose actions he watches day and night.”

Now, why should we in the Western world — beset by inflation, unemployment, etc. — care about a dying race thousands of miles away? The world is not so large that we can ignore what is going on even a few thousand miles distant, and any human tragedy that occurs there may happen here sooner or later. Have we forgotten what happened in Europe and in Asia during World War II? The main point as far as we civilized people are concerned is that we have one last opportunity to preserve a people who would otherwise disappear — a people whose simple wisdom, reflected in human relationships and family ties, should make us think about and seek a realistic compromise between our self-destruction, often blind technology and a simple, honest way of life.

Should these people, despite their human limitations in which we all share, be deprived of the right to life in tomorrow's world? What if we were in their situation — and they in ours? With the help of good-hearted people, I have developed a feasible plan for preserving part of the Ituri Forest which, with enough money, could assure the relative stability of the Pygmies' society before it is too late.

I devote the proceeds of my film and books to the PYGMY FUND,² as well as my life's energies. But alone I cannot save an entire race from extinction. Substantial help is urgently needed if we are to save the survivors. I would like to say in conclusion a warm and very sincere “thank you” to the people who have already helped and to the ones who will care enough to become involved. □

²The address of the PYGMY FUND is 5630 West 79th Street, Los Angeles, California 90045. Information about the availability of the film or lectures can be obtained by institutions and organizations at the same address.

THE PYGMIES developed a life-style respecting the wondrous marvels of the Ituri Forest (opposite page). In the middle are a child, a young adult, and an old man who still belong to the uncorrupted Efé way of life of Central Africa's oldest known people. In contrast, the three men below are rather pathetic examples of the impact of cast-off Western clothing on Pygmies in servitude to Bantu neighbors. They convey the tragedy of the loss of cultural identity and their basic human dignity. To reverse the tragedy besetting the Pygmies, funding is used to provide medication when needed, to secure land, to buy tools and seeds — none of which the Pygmies can afford to buy on their own. This aid is to compensate for the destructive effect of the accelerated reduction of the forest on their lives and culture — since they receive no support locally. Their only hope for survival is from outside help.

