**[Jean-Pierre Hallet: A Giant of the 20th Century](http://insearchofsimplicity.com/2009/10/06/jean-pierre-hallet-a-giant-of-the-20th-century/%22%20%5Co%20%22Permanent%20Link%3A%20Jean-Pierre%20Hallet%3A%20A%20Giant%20of%20the%2020th%C2%A0Century)**

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*“The pygmies of the Ituri Forest must be saved. They still represent the true human potential for love, peace and harmony, without crime or greed.”***Jean-Pierre Hallet**

Imagine an explorer who survived backwater fever, a knife slash in his leg, and a dynamite explosion that not only blew off his right hand at the wrist, but caused a 75 per cent loss of hearing. Though he was bleeding profusely, he swam across a lake, narrowly escaping crocodiles, and began a painful two-hundred-mile journey to reach medical aid. Jean-Pierre Hallet was that explorer and **I reckon if he could live his dreams any of us can pursue ours. He was truly a giant of the 20th century.** The following words summarize his life and were found at: <http://www.midhudsongalleries.com/id8.html>

Jean-Pierre Hallet was a man more intimately connected to Africa than perhaps any other westerner. **His feats were legendary-what one expects of fiction and adventure movies**. About his mission to save the vanishing Bambuti pygmy tribe in the Ituri Forest in Northeast Zaire, the newspapers and magazines of three decades reported it in various ways. He Saves Little People; A Giant Comes To The Rescue; He’s The Biggest Of The Little People of Zaire; Humanitarian Sows Seeds of Hope and Pygmies Have A Friend in Hallet.

A friend, indeed. **In 1955 he lost his right hand**, in an explosion, while dynamiting Lake Tanganyika for fish to feed a Pygmy tribe. In 1957 he was successful in obtaining, from the colonial government, official acceptance of his “Declaration of Emancipation” for the endangered pygmies. **He lived with the Bambuti pygmies for eighteen months and learned six aboriginal languages and seventeen dialects**. His extensive knowledge of the pygmy language resulted in a dictionary of more than 18,000 terms, which remains unpublished. He founded The Pygmy Fund in 1974, the only organization devoted to the preservation of the lives and culture of surviving forest dwelling Efe pygmies.

**Born in 1927 in Louvain, Belgium**, Jean-Pierre Hallet was the son of Andre Hallet, the famed Belgian post-impressionist painter, who lived in the Congo. Jean-Pierre played with pygmy children, north of Lake Kivu, in the northeastern part of the former Belgian Congo. At six, he left his playmates to go to school in Europe. He was already the height of an average adult pygmy in the forest. He returned in 1948 with a Sorbonne education. He was now an agronomist and a sociologist. Jean-Pierre was twenty-one. He was six feet five inches tall and 225 pounds. His incredible life was about to unfold and his reputation as “father to the pygmies” and the “Abe Lincoln of the Congo” was just beginning.

Jean-Pierre Hallet would become a heroic figure. He would become an authority on African culture and a blood brother to many tribes. **He was an internationally renowned africanist, ethnologist, naturalist, author, lecturer, explorer, cinematographer, artist, African art authority and collector as well as a death-defying adventurer. He delivered more than 500 African babies, pygmy and non-pygmy**. It would be difficult to find another man with such a resume.

He would author three books, the Kitabu trilogy. (Kitabu is roughly translated in Swahili as book.) Congo Kitabu, the first of the trilogy was autobiographical. It would be translated into twenty-one languages including Chinese and Russian. His own words say it best. “I grew up among the pygmies, learning everything that is their world,….making my first bow and arrow…..identifying birds and animals.”

In Animal Kitabu, he explained the odd double life of the hippopotamus, aquatic by day and terrestrial by night. “At the Rwindi Camp in the Congo’s Albert National Park, the hippos used to come on moonlit nights, walking a full mile from the Rwindi River, just to stand outside the restaurant and watch the tourists eating, drinking, chattering and playing cards. During the day, tourists went to the river to watch the hippos.”

In Pygmy Kitabu, his descriptions of the pygmies had palpable charm -”They are very amiable, warmhearted, fun-loving, sometimes mischievous but wholly non-aggressive characters, who behave more like the elves of European legend than the awful killer apes of modern myth.” He also wrote **“They love to dance, sing, play the harp and flute, tell jokes, compose tongue twisters,**and engage in thrilling sports like the grand old game of archery-ball.”



**Human Potential**, a magazine published by The Ambassador International Cultural Foundation, featured a cover story in the September 1975 issue entitled” To Save A People”. The cover photograph was a charming portrayal of a moment of tenderness between a pygmy father and child. The man behind the lens was Jean-Pierre Hallet who captured the warmth and the sensitivity of that moment. “To Save a People” was comprised of a series of conversations by M. Hallet as told to Senior Editor Herman L. Hoeh. Following is some of what he said.

About the pygmies: “The pygmies of the Ituri Forest must be saved. **They still represent the true human potential for love, peace and harmony, without crime or greed.**If people are judged by the quality of their hearts and minds, the ancestral pygmies are giants of mankind. Yet, our often blind, “civilization” is now responsible for the imminent extinction of those people by systematically destroying their forest. Sophisticated technology is self-destructive. Our ultimate survival can only be inspired by saving a simple people such as the pygmies…”

On the pygmy belief about death: “God willed it. If God willed it thus, it is because He had his reasons. One does not judge God.”

On his documentary, Pygmies: “In the fall of 1972, I made a full length documentary on the Efe pygmies wanting to raise funds to help them in their struggle for survival. The Zaire 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.”…..I managed to produce this graphic documentary incorporating into 90 minutes the essence of a lifetime of observation and understanding-the first and last ever made. In September 1973 the film was shown, at a press preview, at The Academy Award Theatre in Los Angeles. It was a great success: standing ovation and excellent trade reviews.”

Jean-Pierre Hallet was appealing and charismatic. He charmed Tonight Show viewers appearing as a guest of Johnny Carson. He was photographed with Dwight Eisenhower. Writing his eulogy, following his death on New Years Day of 2004, family friend, Donald Heyneman, Ph.D., wrote “…he could not enter a room without arresting all attention. He could commandeer any conversation usually redirecting it towards his worthy objectives. Strong opinions, strongly-and fully delivered were a trademark. He was indeed larger than life, a powerful presence. One who led a full, unrestrained unconventional independent and important life, Jean Pierre Hallet was, and remains, a significant force in the lives of all who were privileged to have known him.”