

Élisabeth Carrier, *Entre le rire et les larmes*,¹ Les Éditions de l'Homme, 1996, 358 pages

No energy? Try reading the book by Canadian nurse Élisabeth Carrier. For 358 pages packed with feeling and compassion, readers are drawn into this admirable woman's whirlwind life and its two dominant themes — passion and commitment. Her love for traditional Africa, nurtured by childhood stories told by an uncle who worked there as a *Père blanc* missionary, together with her thirst for knowledge of other cultures and her desire to help the suffering, led Elisabeth Carrier to embrace a career as a nurse in countries of the Third World.

For over twenty years her humanitarian work — often for the ICRC — has taken her to Africa and Asia, for better or for worse. She remembers the “better” as being new friendships she forged, marvellous nights when she was lulled to sleep by the sound of tom-toms and songs expressing unquestioning faith, her joy at the discovery of cultural traditions as ancient as they were wise, and the satisfaction of being useful, at least some of the time. The “worse” encompasses nightmare visions of war — corpses lying in the street, children horribly mutilated by landmines, refugees languishing in camps as they face an increasingly hopeless future, starving people waiting in line for a handful of food to keep them alive. Another “worse” is the awareness that she cannot help everyone, that she is powerless to relieve all the suffering. Yet time and time again Elisabeth Carrier packs her bags and sets off to some other luckless corner of the world. What will it take to make this woman, with her obvious zest for life and her talent for happiness, to stop for just a moment and catch her breath?

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¹ *Between laughter and tears*