

Claire Bertschinger

Claire Bertschinger's main theme is that 'We can and must transcend our differences, and make humanity, not economics, our highest priority in life.'

One needs to read Claire's book "Moving Mountains" to be able to keep up with the many areas and places of the world where she has worked as a Red Cross nurse. Without realising it at the time, Claire was the person whose pictures inspired Bob Geldof and Band Aid and Live Aid, the biggest relief programme the world had ever seen, and which raised more than £150m and saved an estimated two million lives in Africa. One of the most enduring images of the Ethiopian famine that shocked the world in 1984 was that of the young International Red Cross nurse who, surrounded by thousands of starving people and with limited supplies, had the terrible task of choosing which children to feed, knowing that those she turned away might not last the night. A BBC crew had filmed a few scenes and the world heard about Ethiopia's plight.

Claire went on to ever more dangerous postings, and even more impossible situations, always as part of Red Cross teams in areas of conflict. She was in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Uganda, Togo, Sierra Leone, and back to Ethiopia. She ran feeding stations, visited prisoners, organised rescue missions, and set up emergency hospitals. What is remarkable is that for over 20 years Claire thought she had been a failure in Ethiopia, and only when she returned to Ethiopia in 2004 and heard Bob Geldof talk about her role and how it motivated him into setting up Live Aid, that she recognised the work she had done as valuable.

Eventually she herself fell victim to malaria and her Red Cross field work came to an end. She now works at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine where she is lecturer and Course Organiser of the Diploma in Tropical Nursing, training nurses to work in tropical and resource-poor areas of the world. In one of the many interviews available on websites, she said: 'I decided that ... by writing my life experiences so far, I could show the world that an ordinary person can overcome educational, emotional and physical difficulties and still make a difference to our planet.' Claire continues her extraordinary work now through her book and in presentations and lectures far and wide in Europe.