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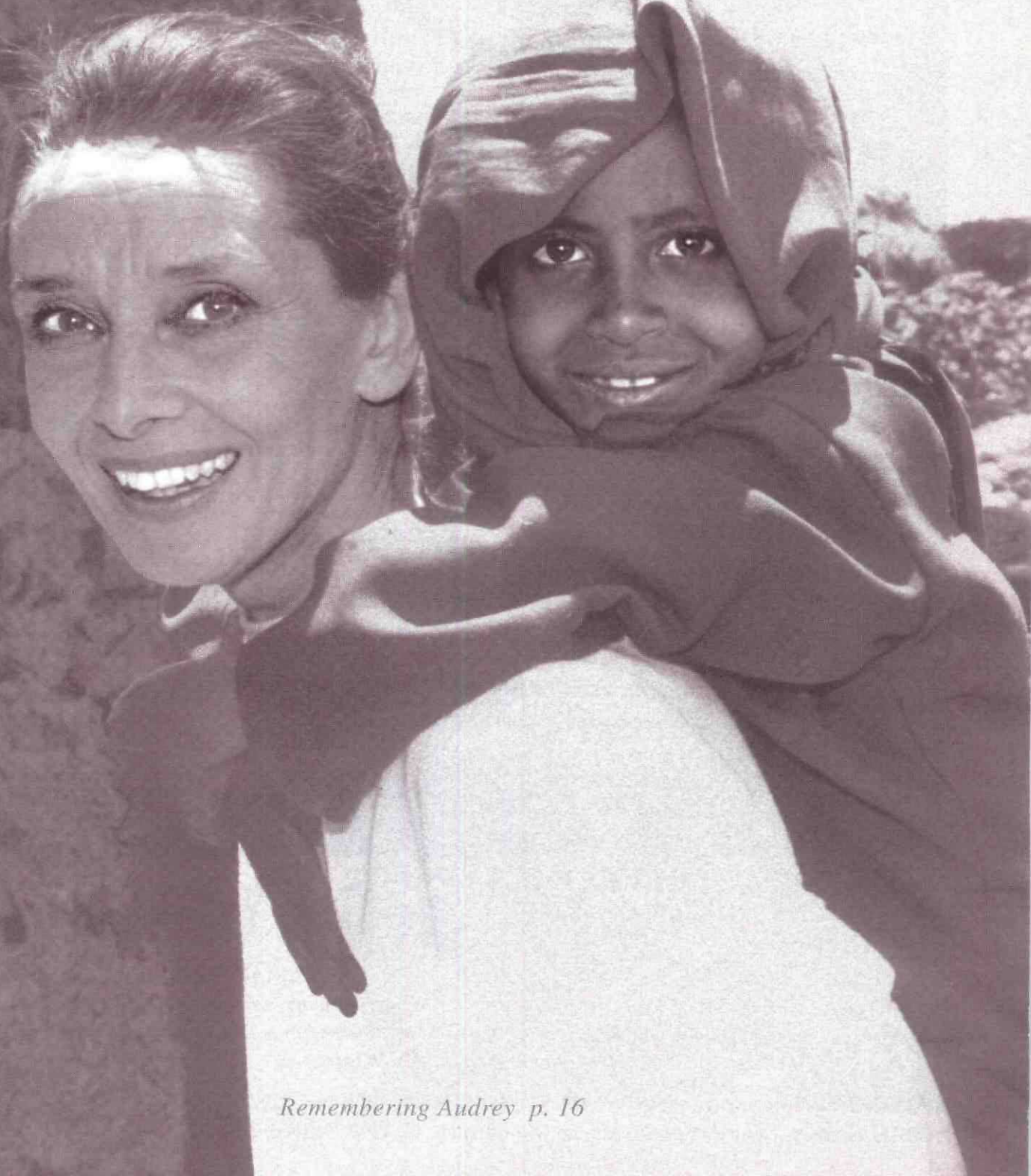
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# U.N. spécial

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*UNICEF: Farewell to a Goodwill Ambassador*

# Remembering Audrey

John Williams

Audrey Hepburn was a wonderful woman. Like most young men in the '50s and early '60s, I was enchanted by her elfin mischief in "Roman Holiday," "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and other films. Unlike most of her admirers, I got to spend time with Audrey Hepburn—almost three decades later.

In March 1988, she undertook her first major mission for UNICEF, to Ethiopia, then exhausted by civil war and drought. I was one of several UNICEF staff members who accompanied her and her devoted protector Robert Wolders. We flew across the country in comfortless, clattering transport aircraft. Audrey usually sat next to the pilot, gazing down at dried river networks, naked mountains shimmering under burning blue skies, and occasional patches of green, teeming with people. She was awed.

By the second day Audrey knew the name and background of each of the 20 people accompanying her—European pilots, Ethiopian minders, American journalists, and UNICEF officials. The elf was always in her. Her gentle sense of irony and her gift for mimicry kept everyone at ease. Once, in a hotel lobby, she inadvertently sat on my sun hat. She stood, jammed the crushed re-



sults onto her head, and pretended to be me, producing hilarity among all. Then she carefully pushed out the crumples and, with a grin, a little bow, and a kiss, returned the hat to my head.

With children she was magnetic. As we approached our first village and I saw her wiping her face and hands on a paper towelette, the kind airlines give you, I thought that this frail-looking, elegant lady was too far from her own environment. A minute later she had gathered a flock of dusty, scabby children to her, hugging and holding hands. In Mehal Meda, she cradled screaming infants in the immunization tent and chatted, despite the lack of a common language, to young women suckling babies. Her compassion and tenderness came from deep inside. She never complained—not in beautiful Italianate Asmara, then under siege, where the hotel had no water, nor of the grueling schedule, the unpaved tracks and the late aircraft. Her concerns were always for others, like the orphans in Mekele lining up for a lunch of grain, or for the hundreds of girls and women in rags, slopping buckets of swamp water to build an earthen dam.

She was critical only of herself. Back in Addis Ababa, preparing for a

news conference, she was determined to master every nuance of the labyrinthine politics of war and drought. We spent hours over questions and answers. In the news conference she was magnificent, combining passion and logic in an alliance of eloquence for children. Only she thought she could have done better.

For me, her most endearing quality was her lack of pomp. More than once, in New York and elsewhere, I saw her step—somehow, always politely—around a line of dignitaries gathered to greet her. With open arms and a big smile, she would greet a friend, old or new, high or low or not at all on the protocol ranking. It didn't matter a whit to her.

In New York, on the day she died in Switzerland, we talked about her with our 22-year-old son, for whom the '50s is a biblical period. "She wasn't just a great star of your time," he said, "but of my time, too. She doesn't really have a time." Audrey would have seen that off with light self-mockery.

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*(The author is secretary of the UNICEF Executive board. Extracts from Int'l Herald Tribune, 26 Jan. '93)*

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