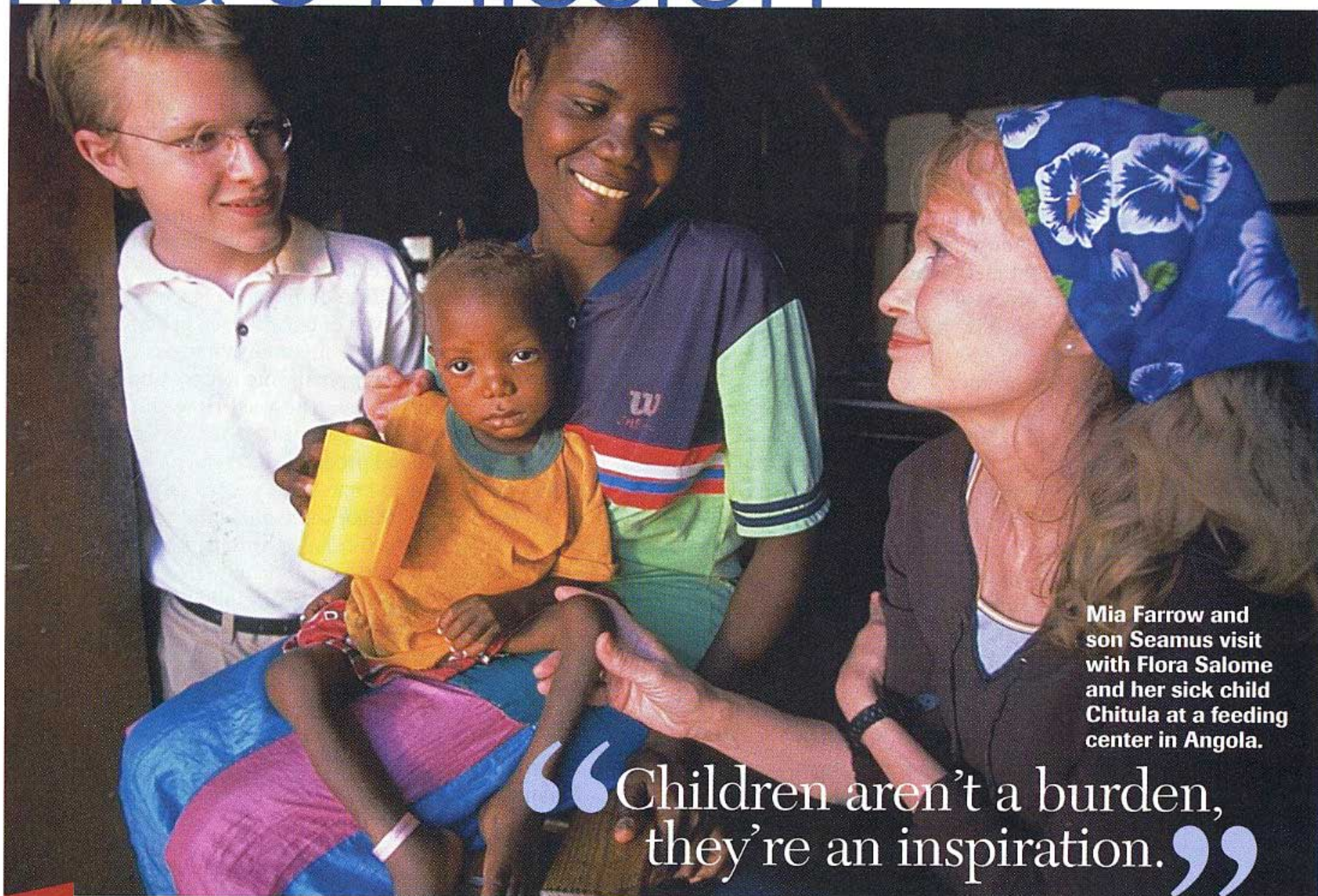


Mia's Mission

By Glenn Plaskin



Mia Farrow and son Seamus visit with Flora Salome and her sick child Chitula at a feeding center in Angola.

“Children aren't a burden, they're an inspiration.”

The insomnia, fatigue and occasional pain that a young Mia Farrow had been experiencing in 1954 was troubling, and it puzzled the doctors she visited. Finally, “At my ninth birthday party, my legs suddenly collapsed and I tumbled to the ground,” she says. “The next day I heard the doctor tell my mother, ‘Burn everything.’ After that I was taken out of the secure existence of my Beverly Hills house and found myself plunged into a world of uncertainty and pain—the public ward of L.A. General Hospital. Iron lungs lined the walls. I could only talk to my parents through a glass window.”

Mia was diagnosed with childhood polio.

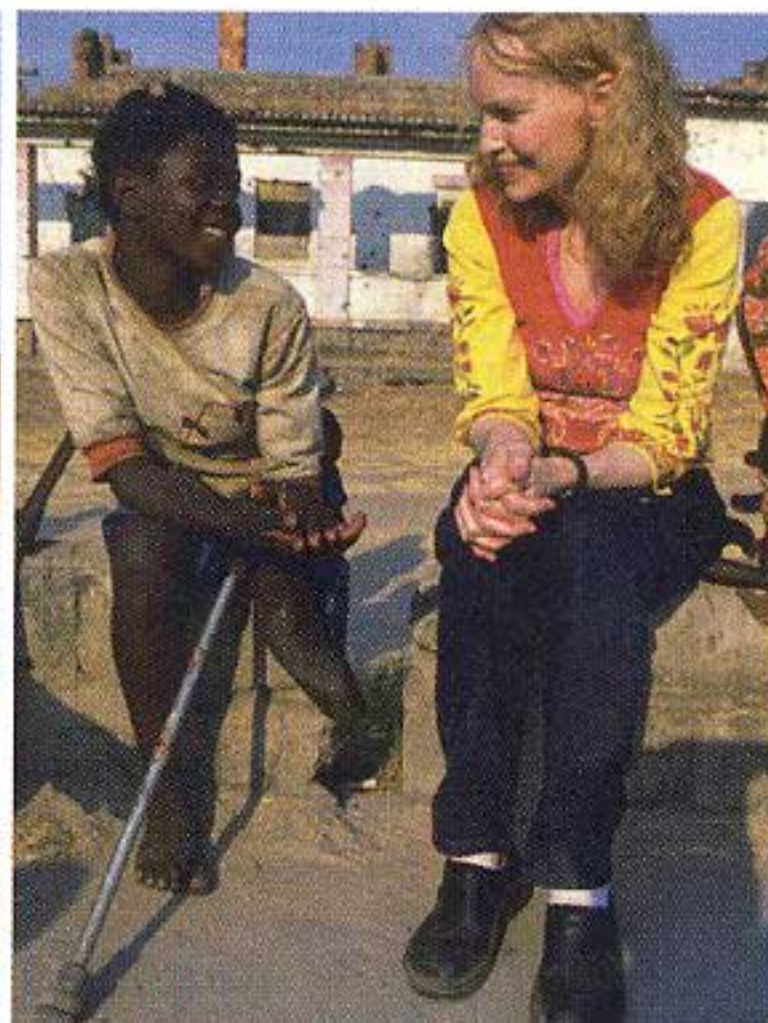
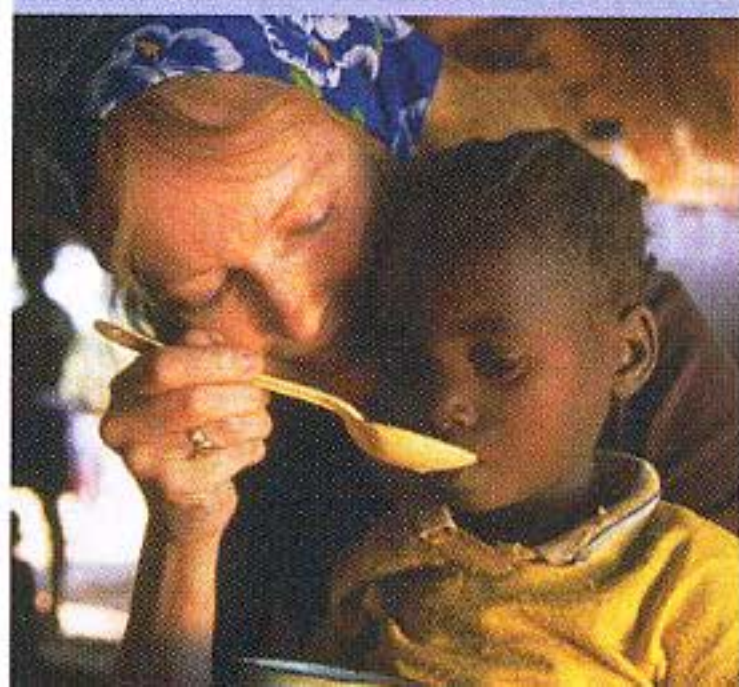
Although the now 57-year-old actress recovered completely with no physical disability, her childhood was irrevocably scarred.

“When I returned home, I found that my six brothers and sisters had been moved to another house, and I didn't see them for months. The house

had been repainted, the carpets torn up, the furniture replaced, the swimming pool drained—even my dog had been given away. Everyone was frightened of me—the kids at school, even my mother. In my book [*What Falls Away*] I wrote that my childhood ended that year. After that I was only pretending to be a child.” Almost immediately, she says, “My social conscience was born. I realized there was a whole world of people in pain.”

Since then, Mia has committed her life to children,

Right: Mia meets Madalena, a 13-year-old who lost part of her leg. **Below:** She feeds Esperanca, a malnourished six-year-old.



Glenn Plaskin is a FAMILY CIRCLE contributing editor.