

BILL GATES, DOCTOR OF THE WORLD

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From our US correspondent **Olivier O'Mahony**

HE DOES NOT WANT TO FOUND A DYNASTY. HIS PRIDE IS TO HAVE ALREADY SAVED 13 MILLION HUMAN LIVES

In twenty years, it was his first vacation. An African safari. This fall 1993, when Bill Gates landed in Tanzania, he dreamed of only one thing: to discover the savannah, its lions and its giraffes. Here he is in a Jeep, with his girlfriend Melinda, whom he will marry a few months later. They think of "unplugging", taking a break at the end of the world. But what strikes them most is the extreme poverty that surrounds them. Emaciated women without shoes. Children who suffer from malnutrition. The distress in the eyes of the people they meet. Bill Gates has known nothing but Seattle, his hometown, where he still lives, and the luxury hotels he sleeps in on business. Such misery, he had never seen. Like Melinda, he is upset, changed forever. He wants to become the one who will eradicate misery from the world.

Back in Seattle, he tries to understand. The billionaire is like a sponge: everything that passes nearby, he absorbs. "He thrives in complexity" smiles Melinda who swears that her husband's brain is "total chaos". According to his friend Bernie Noe, he can read and memorize up to 150 pages per hour. Each year for a week called "Think Week", Bill Gates lives in self-sufficiency in a lake hut, swallowing a ton of books in an attempt to shape the future. In 1993, he came across the World Bank development report. **The document underscores the truth: the surest way to reduce the growth of the world's population is to improve the health of the poor.** Four years later, on a Sunday morning, Bill Gates eats breakfast with Melinda and discovers an article in the front page of the New York Times, titled: "In the Third World, water is still a deadly poison. "He learns that 3 million children a year die from diarrhea, simply because they drink water from the stream which serves as a public toilet ..."This is a report that everyone has forgotten, notes today its author, Nicolas Kristof, except that it was read by two very influential people in Seattle. Bill and Melinda Gates have just had a baby girl. The fate of these kids who die from a perfectly curable disease upsets them. They decide to dedicate their entire fortune to a foundation, one of the priorities of which will be to improve the health of people in underdeveloped countries.

Bill Gates is not a billionaire like any other. Rather, it leans to the left. **Lauren Jiloty, his closest associate at Gates Ventures, his personal investment fund, is a former staff member of Hillary Clinton.** Bill Gates has nothing against "making the wealthy pay" and increasing the wealth tax. In 2016, he told us that he was politically "independent" on the American electoral

lists, but we can clearly see who beats his heart: certainly not on the side of Donald Trump, whom he had never met until his election. In the late 1990s, Bill Gates, like all of his peers, participated in charities. In the United States, it is an obligation when you have a certain level of fortune. Except that the few computers he gave to Africans did not give him the impression that he was going to change the world. However, this ambition, he pegged to the body since he created Microsoft in 1975. If he has to become a philanthropist, it will not be for figuration. Bill Gates never wanted to found a dynasty. In the high-tech business, it makes no sense, he explains: "It is as if the greatest sportsmen are asked to choose their heirs to represent them at the Olympic games of the future. Bill Gates has warned his children that they will have "almost nothing" of his immense fortune (\$ 100 billion at the last score). What he wants is "make a difference", as they say in America. What we could translate as "doing the good of humanity". Extensive program.

His mother, Mary, a strong personality, always pushed him there. "My parents were very involved in volunteering", Bill Gates told me in 2016. They donated money to local schools, as well as to Planned Parenthood, an association that supports women and family planning. We often talked about it in the evening, at dinner. When I created Microsoft, I encouraged company employees to do the same. As soon as they donated to an organization of their choice, the company doubled the amount of this donation. I always thought generosity was the best thing that could happen to you when you were lucky enough to have money. Melinda Gates confirms, "I would never have fallen in love with him if he hadn't had a huge heart. I realized this from the first day. He told me about his cousin who died of AIDS, which was particularly taboo at the time", she explained to me last year. In 2000, in his father's garage, Bill Gates opened his foundation. It will become the first charity organization in the world. Only here: at that time, the billionaire suffered from a terrible image. "The problem with him, jokes his rival Steve Jobs, is that as soon as a dollar goes under his nose, he wants to take a few cents ..." Bill Gates is still entangled in a mega-trial for abuse of position dominant, where he is accused of having stifled competition in order to impose his operating system on all computers on the planet. The affair which will result in 2001 by an amicable settlement, makes him the caricature of the greedy capitalist, greedy for gain. Does Bill Gates want to catch up by creating with his wife the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation? Perhaps. But no one today questions his good faith or his altruism.

When he built his house of the future for \$ 100 million on the shores of Lake Washington, you would have thought it was going to close in on itself. From the creation of his foundation, however, he was passionate about the fight against polio and malaria. He is also interested in the invention of "future toilets", without water, which will prevent deadly diarrhea in underdeveloped countries ... We are far from the computer prowess of Windows. In 2005, he was named "Person of the Year" by the magazine "Time", alongside Melinda and Bono, the singer of U2, also very involved in the fight against poverty in Africa.

The purpose of its foundation is simple. It's about going where no pharmaceutical company wants to invest: in third-world countries, where profit prospects are non-existent. Bill Gates thus created the Gavi (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization), a global alliance for vaccines and vaccinations, a common platform which, in order to bring prices down, makes it possible to group together the demand for medicines from poor countries. Total success: thanks to this system, 760 million children have been vaccinated in twenty years. Bill Gates

can claim to have saved 13 million lives and cut the price of some vaccines in half. "This is what I am most proud of," he said today.

But in 2014, the Ebola epidemic hit West Africa, which he knows well. The virus threatens to spread around the planet and leaves 11,000 dead. "Fortunately, urban areas have not been affected", he said today, after running the forecasting models he set up to fight polio. A great lover of figures and statistics, Bill Gates has indeed looked at the mortality curve in the 20th century.

IN 2015, BILL GATES DESCRIBES THE DISASTER SCENARIO CURRENTLY LIVING ON THE PLANET

It displays three peaks, including two for the world wars 1914-1918 and 1939-1945. The other is **the 1918 Spanish flu, which killed between 50 and 100 million people**. Faced with this jagged diagram, he wonders: **what if the same scenario happened again in the 21st century?** Nothing stands in the way of this, because, he believes, no one is ready. **In 2015, Bill Gates sounded the alarm at a press conference that will go viral:** nearly 30 million people have watched it to date. **It describes the catastrophic scenario that the entire planet has experienced since the start of the Covid-19 epidemic.** In 2017, he returned to the charge at the Munich security conference, where he urged the world leaders present in the room to "do something" and **"mobilize the armies"** against what will sweep the planet.

Bill Gates was one of the richest men in the world, but no one listened to him. Obviously, it annoyed him. Today everyone praises his insight and his efficiency: at the end of February, he signed a check for 100 million dollars to support the fight against the virus; **today, his foundation is funding the production of eight different vaccines** ... "His goal, says one of his relatives, is to be ready for the next epidemic. Melinda is launching The Solidarity Pledge this week, a promotional campaign to convince her contemporaries that only a global response can prevent global pandemics. And Bill Gates smiles. He no longer preaches in the desert. It was time.