

# THE SAVIOUR OF

A simple act of kindness in a remote mountain region of Pakistan was devoted her life to the medical care and wellbeing of a vanishing tribe

IT WAS A MAGICAL SPOT ON A MAGICAL TRIP: the northern tip of Pakistan, where the world's four most majestic mountain ranges: the Himalayas, Hindu Kush, Karakorams and Pamirs brush shoulders. Here, even the tallest local peak, Tirich Mir, is inhabited by fairies, according to native folklore.

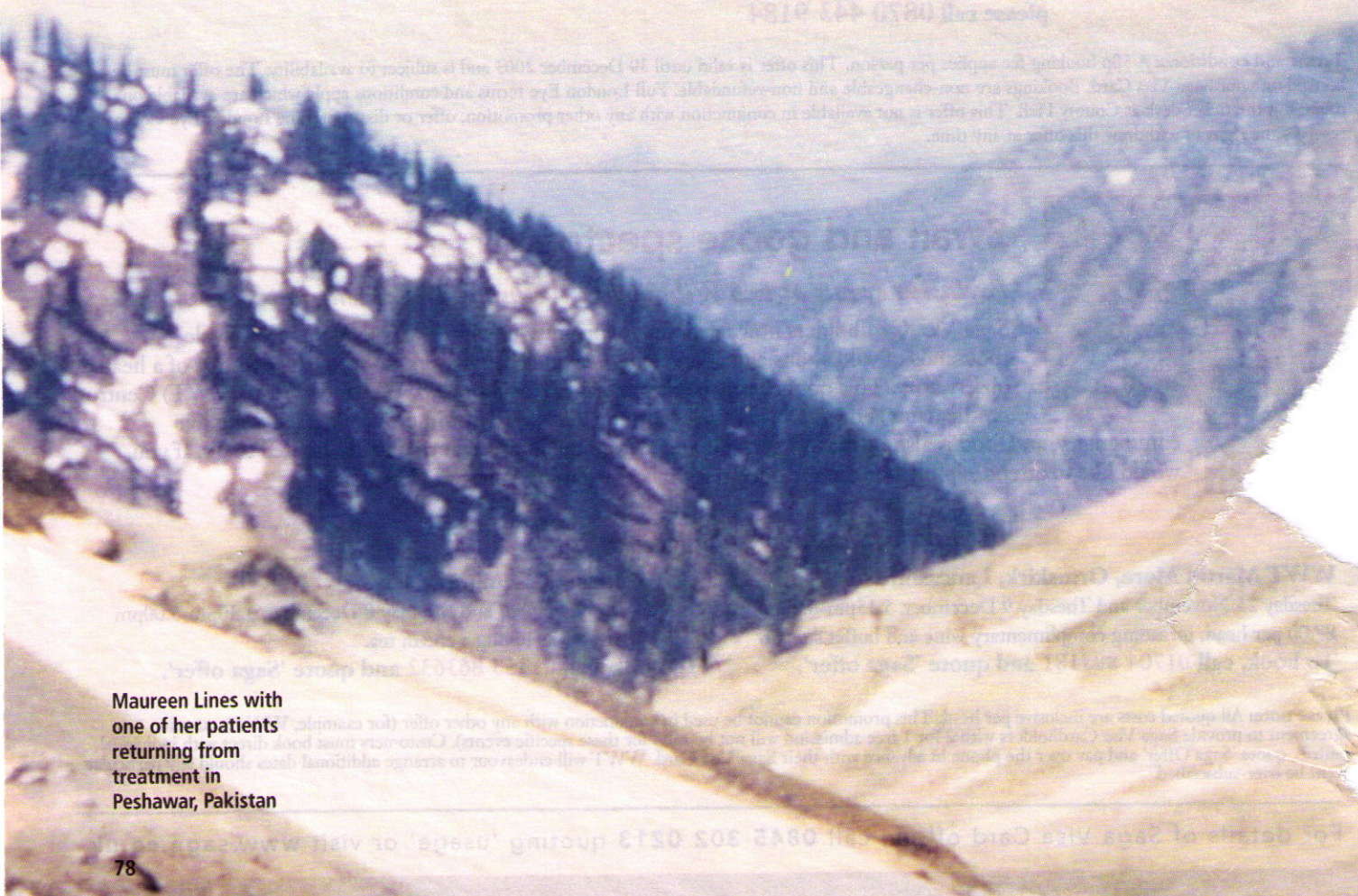
Permanently covered by ice, the 25,000ft mountain is just 3,000ft short of Everest and glistens like glass over the valley where 43-year-old Maureen Lines was hiking alone. As she was jumping a stream she lost her footing. A woman working in the fields grabbed her hand, preventing a dunking. As she did, her face veil, unusual in this region, fell away, and Maureen could see what she had chosen to obscure. The young woman's face was a mass of terrible scars and sores.

"It was clear she was expecting me to recoil," says Maureen, "and that many others had." Instead, Maureen returned to the nearest town of any substance, several hours away by road, and in sign language described to a druggist what she had seen. She came back to treat the woman with

medications and ointments; it was only much later that she learnt she had healed the condition. Several years later, Maureen discovered that the woman had had a severe case of impetigo, a highly contagious skin disease which, if untreated, can damage the kidneys, and cause septicaemia.

This single act of kindness changed Maureen's life dramatically. It also changed the life of the Kalasha, a vanishing tribe of some 4,000 people who inhabit three isolated, rugged valleys near the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. For the past 19 years, Maureen, now 64, who stands 5ft 3in, her brilliant Paul Newman-blue eyes sparkling under cropped silver hair, has lived among them, tending to their medical needs.

"That young woman was so distressed, and had no help. I had a compulsion to do something about it," she says. "I knew that somehow, I had to get as much medical training as I could. The urge to come back to these valleys was overwhelming. Since medical school training would take ▶



Maureen Lines with one of her patients returning from treatment in Peshawar, Pakistan