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**African Smiles**

**By Suzanne Whitby**

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Home of the hundred-mile smile. That was the name of a portrait I found painted by Stephen Bennett. It was a glorious painting, quite captivating. A young woman from Botswana, her skin luxuriously dark, smiles disarmingly at the photographer who captures her. Mr Bennett has super-imposed streaks of colour over her, not disguising her but enhancing her. Every shadow ripples with colour. Her smile hardly seems static, her eyes are alive.

The moment I saw the painting, I knew that it symbolised home for me. Although the smiling woman in the painting was from Botswana and I am from South Africa, her face struck me. When I think of people smiling in South Africa, I think of them smiling like that woman. Where their eyes light up, creasing, and the smile seems to come from their very soul.

I recall stopping at an intersection in Johannesburg recently. Unemployment is rife in South Africa and this has given birth to an extraordinary entrepreneurial spirit. You can buy anything at the robots (traffic lights) - from a cooldrink, to rubbish bags, to a mobile phone hands-free kit. Within seconds, 6 "businessmen", their wares draped around their necks and overflowing from their pockets and carrier bags, bombarded me.

"Hello pretty girl! Look at all these - why not buy one from me today? Special price for a special lady!" My first assailant, wearing a red baseball cap, American-style. Young, probably only a year or two younger than me. A twinkle in his eye, and dozens of hands-free kits in his hands.

"But I have an Ericsson, not a Nokia. I'm sorry." It's a standard reply I give, being from a British background, used to being evasive in order to avoid offending people. I make eye contact to be polite, but not so much as to encourage him.

It doesn't work. "Red cap" grins - this is what he was expecting!

"Ah, it's your lucky day! A lucky day for a lucky, special lady - what model do you have?" Silently, I hold up my phone. "Look, I have just the thing! These are originals too, will last for ages. But this model

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is pretty rare - I'll give you two for a very special price and then you won't have to worry. You'll always have a back-up!"

"Um, well they're very nice. How much are they?" I don't actually want one of his hands-free kits, but I don't want to be rude. I sneak a look at the traffic light, willing it to turn green. It stays resolutely red.

"Cheap-cheap! Just sixty rands each - normally they are eighty!"

"Oh..." When will the light change? Nothing is happening. "Um, I'm really sorry but I don't think I'll get one today."

"Cheaper? You want cheaper? Fifty rands - very good price!"

I shake my head. "Honestly, I'm not going to buy one. I..." This is the moment of truth, when he will turn, or swear at me. "I don't want one, thank you."

He grins again. A huge smile spreads across his face.

"No worries, special girl. Maybe tomorrow?"

He winks at me and moves on to the next car as the lights turn green and the traffic starts to move. I smile back, thinking how that grin has made my day.

Looking at that painting of the smiling woman, on a grim day in Europe, all I could think of was the way her eyes reminded me of the smiling eyes of so many South Africans.

Every smile that has been imprinted in my memory is a hundred-mile smile. It's those hundred-mile smiles that keep me going when I travel in Europe, where smiling at people sometimes seems to single you out at a freak.

African smiles - what I wouldn't do for more of them.

Suzanne Whitby is the founder of Naturally Africa (<http://naturallyafrica.org/>) which contains a wealth of information for both South Africans and travellers to South Africa. She loves South Africa and hopes to convey this in her writing and her web endeavours.

## **FREE AFRICAN GAMES**

**By Joan Bramsch**

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FREE GAMES

## African Smiles

### African Games

Please click on the title to play the game of your choice

### Addy's Escape to Freedom

Learn about Addy's escape from slavery to freedom with her mother in this multiple choice story/game based on the books from The American Girls Collection.

### Black History Quiz

How much do you know about Black history?

### Decode the Message

Use the ancient nubian alphabet to decode this message

### National Geographic Okavango Sketchbook

Color some African animalsThe top color is your current color – click to color that part of the animal, click a color to change colors.

### Match the Tracks

Can you match the tracks of these African animals?

### Read Some Myths and Fables from Around the World

Most of these online stories are from parts of Africa, but some are from India, Japan, and even Native America.

### Kid's Crossword

Test your knowledge about Africa

### African Animals

Take a test that will ask ten questions about different African animals.

### African Countries

Pick one of the four regions of Africa to study, and learn about the many countries

### GO PLAY NOW:

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JOAN BRAMSCH is a family person, educator, writer and E–publisher. Her articles appear

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