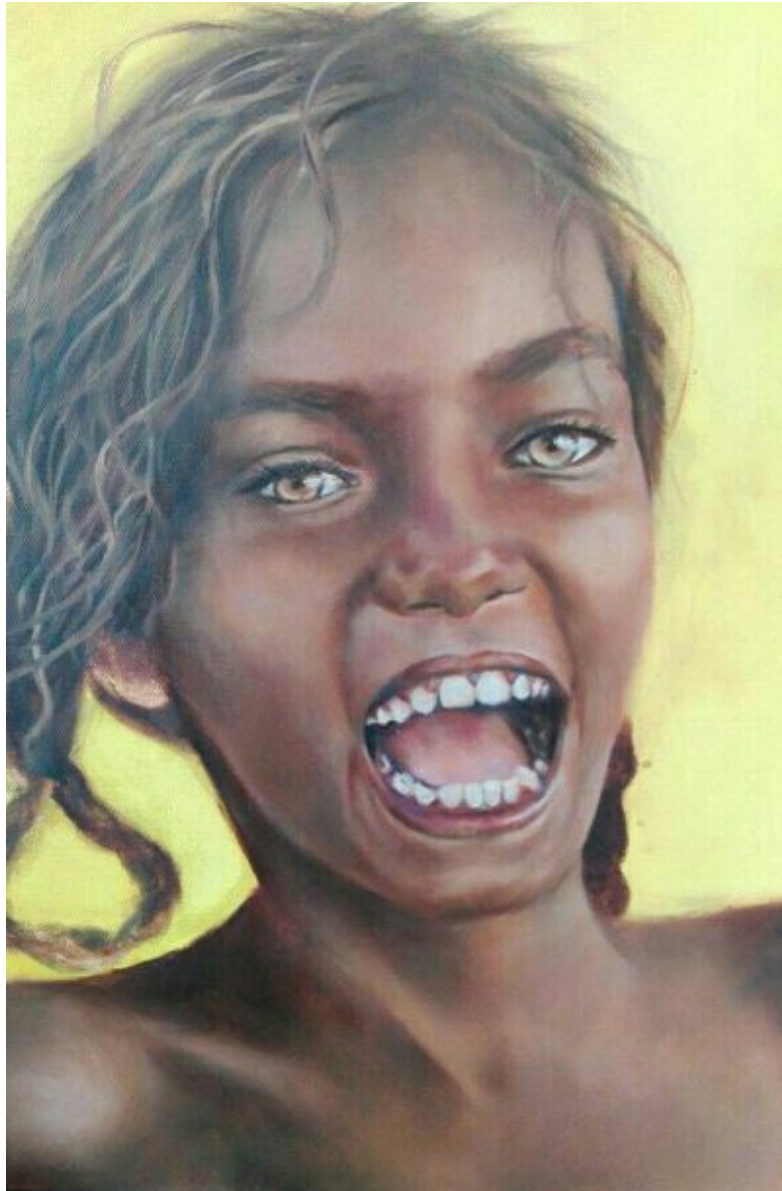


# The nameless girl – a testimony of God's hand in all that happens



Susan Smith's unfinished painting of a happy and free child which was meant to be the first in a series highlighting the hidden reality of human trafficking.

## **A letter from Port Elizabeth artist Susan Smith about painting with a purpose, finding meaning in a setback, and making a difference**

Dear reader

Allow me to start by sharing some of the events that led up to me writing this letter.

I have been painting for quite some time as an art-student. In 2017, I was invited by a group of artists to take part in the Grahamstown National Arts Festival (NAF). This happened in a time where my heart's greatest desire was to create paintings that would carry a deeper meaning, and in the last few years I started trusting God for help and guidance with every painting.



Susan Smith.  
(PHOTO: Facebook).

I completed a sequence of seven portraits named *Beloved Series*, for the Grahamstown NAF in June 2017. My inspiration for this series came from a book I read the year before on the Bride of Christ. Throughout the whole process of creating *Beloved Series* God constantly gave me confirmation through His word, and specific scriptures for each of the seven paintings. I was thrilled at the opportunity to share their meaning with their new owners, by putting a printed copy on the back of each painting, and in that way get the message for each across.

After the exhibition, God started opening a door. I was invited to share the *Beloved Series* with women at my local church, and from there I have received a few other invitations to speak with women in and around Port Elizabeth and share the *Beloved Series* and God's heart for His beloved daughters. Up to date over 700 women have heard the *Beloved Series* message. My desire was to share the message with the person that buys the painting, but God used it for something bigger.

### **Rescued just in time**

A people upliftment programme, called "Pop-Up" started in the Sidwell Area of Port Elizabeth. This programme started, in April 2017, through Louise Van Heerden (a friend in my church, Doxa Deo). I accompanied Louise to a safe haven for children, also located in Sidwell, in a block of flats (well known to the local people of PE as the "brown flats"). Some of the biggest drug lords in Port Elizabeth operate from these flats. After our visit I was overwhelmed at seeing the children and hearing their stories. The same week we visited the safe haven, there was an incident at the "brown flats". A woman sold her 5-year-old daughter to someone for drug money. This little girl was lucky enough to be found by the police in time, just before she was trafficked.

This reality was overwhelming to me, and I asked myself how I could really make a difference. It took me a while to realise that the one thing I can do, is to paint the "faces" of homeless and nameless children and people, and through my art help bring this "hidden" reality of human trafficking to people. My desire to do a series on this topic grew stronger, although my knowledge on this is very limited. This is not only about "physical" trafficking, but also about how the enemy traps our "minds" daily with negative thoughts and things that happens with and around us.

This is where my story starts and the reason for this letter...

### **Innocence and happiness**

I paint every Wednesday with a group of local artists and friends. I've been working on a portrait of a young girl that radiates innocence and happiness ... not really anything to do with trafficking! At that point in time, I was still working on ideas for the series, and I never thought that she could be part of this important topic. I finished her on Wednesday February 21. I packed up to go home and carefully placed her, paint still wet, at the passenger side of my car. As I was driving home, every now and then I glanced at her to make sure that I was completely satisfied with her. According to me she was perfect. It suddenly dawned on me that this painting symbolises "the happy child" before they get trafficked. She represents innocence, joy, happiness and a care-free childhood, precisely how God intended every child's life to be ... free and happy. That was when I knew in my heart that she will be the first painting of my human trafficking series!

I made a quick stop at the Spar on my way home, but only when I got home I realised my painting was no longer where I left her. I searched all through my car even though I knew I never moved her! That's when I realised that she was gone. I clearly remembered locking my car, but somehow someone managed to block my remote!

My first thought was, who would steal a painting? I know her monetary value is not much and her only true value is what she means to me ... she probably got stolen because there was nothing else to take in my car.

### **Shocking reality**

At first the loss after all my hard work made me cry, and the absolute pointlessness of the act made me feel angry and frustrated. Immediately a shocking reality hit me ... it felt as if God wanted me to grasp, if only a fraction, of the absolute horror and devastation parents would experience at losing their child!

My focus shifted completely, to the senseless stealing of

millions of innocent and happy children. My painting was still wet, if by any chance I would get her back "she" would never be the same again, unrecognisable! Another true reality of what happens in real life to children ... their childhood and their innocence, are stolen forever.

The painting was "nameless", a fact on human trafficking is that, most children age five and under that are stolen will not remember their real names, from that moment, they lose their identity.

I have no reference of the finished portrait. The last photo of her was taken with my cell phone, with only my bed lamp as a light. I had sent this to my daughter for her to see the progress of the painting, just because she asked me to. If not for that, I would not have taken a picture of her, and I wouldn't have had any reference of her!!! How many children get stolen without a proper reference or photo of them?

One friend suggested to file a police report and put up a poster of her with a "promise of a reward" on return of my painting. I remember thinking, if "she" was my real child ... is this what I had to do? It was as if the reality of what happens in such a situation was playing out in front of me.

Someone else asked if I would want to re-paint her. Again, another reality, I could re-paint a portrait, but no child could ever be replaced by another! How could I have imagined that I could ever comprehend the profound impact and trauma of an act so evil!

### **God opens doors**

Only 24 hours later I received an invitation by a friend to an event that was focused on the topic of human trafficking, held in PE on February 24. I believe that God open doors, because He is faithful, and He is interested in the desires of our hearts. I had been hoping to find a company in Port Elizabeth who are involved in awareness programmes on human trafficking

for about two months prior to this invitation.

At the event, the lady that spoke said the following: "You may think that you can't do anything to make a difference or you may look at the statistics and get overwhelmed by it. But you can make a difference if you educate yourself on this topic and realise that this is a reality and that it does happen around us every day!!"

I met a wonderful lady there, who together with my friend that invited me to this meeting, encouraged me to write this story. If just one other person is touched by reading this and becomes aware of this reality, I have made a difference!

Christine Caine founder of A21 said the following in an interview: "People think we can't change the world, but what if we can change the world for one person, aren't we then changing the world?"

I truly do not know how the rest of this series will turn out! All I do know is that in my previous experience, God used a desire that was in my heart to share His message of the *Beloved Series* to His Bride (the church) through art. I also know God can use the "natural" things we do in obedience, for His Glory!!!

### **Co-labouring with God**

Bill Johnson wrote in his book, *The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind*: "... until Christians decide to co-labour with God in unheard-of creativity and off-the-map dreams, we won't change society and the world. We can't rely on God to do everything. We can't demand that He come up with all the solutions; we must co-labour with Him. In my personal experience, the more I come into an intimate place with the Lord, the more He blesses the labour of my hands with creativity and new ideas. That is God's desire for every person."

May we not miss God's hand in all that happens around us.

May we not miss God's voice when He speaks to us.

A dear friend encouraged me in saying: "Susan, your paintbrush is your weapon of warfare!" I believe God is asking you today, what is your weapon of warfare?

This Scripture encouraged me: *What could I do, King Agrippa? I couldn't just walk away from a vision like that! I became an obedient believer on the spot. – Acts 26:19-20 (MSG)*

With all my love

Susan Smith