

Ernie

... the adventures begins



BY SUSAN BRANDT

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These people and their wiliness to believe in magic still exists in the world have contributed in someway in making these books and other books on our website possible.

Elroy Germishuys
SOUTH AFRICA

Susan Brandt
UNITED STATES

Khonal Sonut
MAURITIUS

Carol Anton
UNITED STATES

Dave Rice
UNITED STATES



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Like most days in Africa, it was hot. Today it was really hot.

Even as an elephant, Ernie was sweating, which was a rarity. She was going to go the watering hole and see your friends, then later she would go climb to a very high spot on the mountain of rocks where the waterfall emptied into the watering hole.

This particular day, it seemed as if no one was there. No one! The wind wasn't even blowing a breeze and thus there was no wisdom of the tall talking grass.

She would miss the voice of wisdom as she traveled about. There has so much of what the grass had said that helped her grow - from a baby elephant into the adventuresome elephant she was.

There was a big rock at the end of the tall grass and she stopped there. Pouting. She was glad she brought her umbrella. Not only did it provide shade but there were those handy donuts on the handle.



"I wonder if people elsewhere will know what donuts are? Will I have to share? Could they give me donuts if I am low." She looked at the assorted donuts on the shaft of her umbrella's handle. She started to really get hungry. Each one was like a small cake of fried dough, all round, with a hole in the middle. She had heard some people fill them with jelly, fruit and cream cheese. She liked her's frosted. Sometimes with sprinkles. Sometimes not.

The temptation got to her.





Ernie ate a donut, She thought, "It'll be my pre-take-off energy."

The grass moved. There is no wind! She stopped doing everything and stared.

Out comes a turquoise very slowly. That's the way tortoise travel about. Swaying from one side to the other. Oh... there something about his walk that was so amazing. Wonderful. Ernie just felt good all over.

The tortoise looked to be almost a 100,000 years old. It had big eyes. They didn't look anywhere but to the ground in front of him. He kept moving until he was out of the grass, planted himself down near the edge of the watering hole and pulled-in his legs and head. UGH! Ernie was disappointed. She wanted to talk to the tortoise. He might know about the voice of wisdom that came from the moving grass. He looked like a bigger-than-big rock.

After a bit Ernie, slightly tapped the shell with her trunk. Out came this really deep, thick voice, "Yes."

"Can I talk to you?" asked Ernie.

"Talk" said the voice.

"Can you stick your head out so I can see who I'm talking to you. I have never met you before," Ernie said in a shy voice.

"OOOOkkkkkaayyyy." Out came one leg. Then another. Then another ("Maybe a mistake to ask. I've never seen anything move this slow", Ernie thought.) Finally he stuck out his head. Little did she know that the tortoise was having fun with her.

Ernie quickly asked, "What's your name? I think you are a tortoise. How old are you? Why do have so many bumps? Why do you hide in the tall grass? Have you seen the voice of of the tall grass? Do you have family? How many are there



in you family? How long have you lived here? Why have I not seen you before? Do you know who I am?" Yes, Ernie had learned the art of rattling off rapid questions like her mother did. After all this the tortoise's head was twirling about and about.

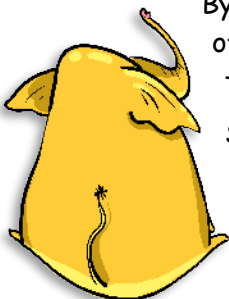
All of a sudden, he bellowed with the deepest voice "STOP!" It echoed through the grass, STOP, STOP, STOP - getting softer each time.

Ernie gasped. Taking her trunk and scratching her head. Was this huge tortoise the source for the voice she had so wondered about? The voice of the tall grass.



The tortoise told Ernie he wanted her to "SIT!" She dropped right she was. He began to talk and every time it looked like she was going to be able to talk again, he nodded his head as if to say, "No!"

Without stopping what he was saying. " I am Zaphlier. You are right I am a tortoise. How old I am? Only the sun and he moon known for sure. My wife.. Dearie .. and I live here on the edge of the watering hole and often protect ourselves from the sun and other animals by hiding in the grass. That is why you have not seen us. Yes, I do know you are Ernestine ... also known as Ernie ... everyone at the watering hole says you will soon be head out to discover the world. As far as being the voice of the tall grass I know nothing about that." He drew in a deep breathe. Let his back legs relax now. He leaned back on them and nodded his head at Ernie so she could talk.



By the time he finished, she knew he was the source of all the wisdom she so valued. "Zaphlier was the talking grass," she laughed to herself, softly.

She was so happy to finally meeting the voice before she took off. She didn't know what to say.

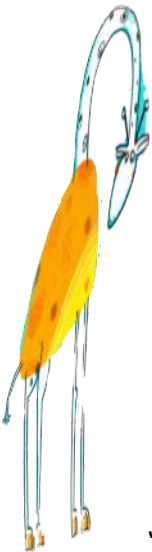
All the questions gone from her mind. Well almost. "How come are you so wise on so many things " Ernie finally asked.

"It comes from living as long as I have and learning by watching the actions of others as well as the experiences you have. Mix them together, shake it all up and you have wisdom."

Another tortoise approaches. Smaller, dainty. "Are you a turtle too," asked Ernie. "No," said the sweet voice. "Like Zaphier, I'm a tortoise. All tortoises are in fact turtles," Dearie said. "Both are reptiles having bodies that live in a bony shell, but not all turtles are tortoises. The most important thing to remember about tortoises is we are exclusively on land."



Ernie wasn't going to ask. She wanted to head out on her adventures today and the sun was starting to slide down in the horizon. As if he had seen her thoughts written on her forehead, Zaphier said, "Ernie, life is an adventure if you live it as such. Or you can keep your eyes focused on the the ground in front of you and miss all the wonders around you."



Ernie's eye got really big! Huge! This was almost the same thing Stretch, the giraffe, had told her.

Before she could ponder her thoughts much longer Dearie pointed her head to the mountain top where the trees were starting to bend. "Erie, see how the trees bend. A sign of wind. You and your things need to be headed up there if you are going to head out today.

She saw what the tortoises were talking about. Were they reading her mind, head scratch, one last question:



"Do you serious believe your words: anything is possible if you only belief in yourself?"

Both tortoises smiled to the other. She had her answer. YES!

Ernie quickly grabbed up her umbrella and headed to the top of the huge mountain. The wind was strong here. Somewhere in her research, she saw "stuff" about the trade winds of Africa. Did could not remember what she read, she just knew it was time to start her adventures.

She went to the edge of the cliff. She looked down. "OH, no!"

Zaphier said to look up. (Ernie was afraid of heights.) She backed up five steps... then pushed herself forward and just as she lunged... she drop ...she thought oh, my what have I done.

Look up! Look up!

Believe in yourself.

"I believe in my self! I belief in myself!" Screamed Ernie as she set off. Just then - a big wind from no where, grasped her and sent her and her umbrella off and flying. Up and down, she bounced. She was above the tree tops and she was really going places.

At first she could just felt it. Then she peaked down and she would see the ground move as she flew through with such a sense of floating through the sky.

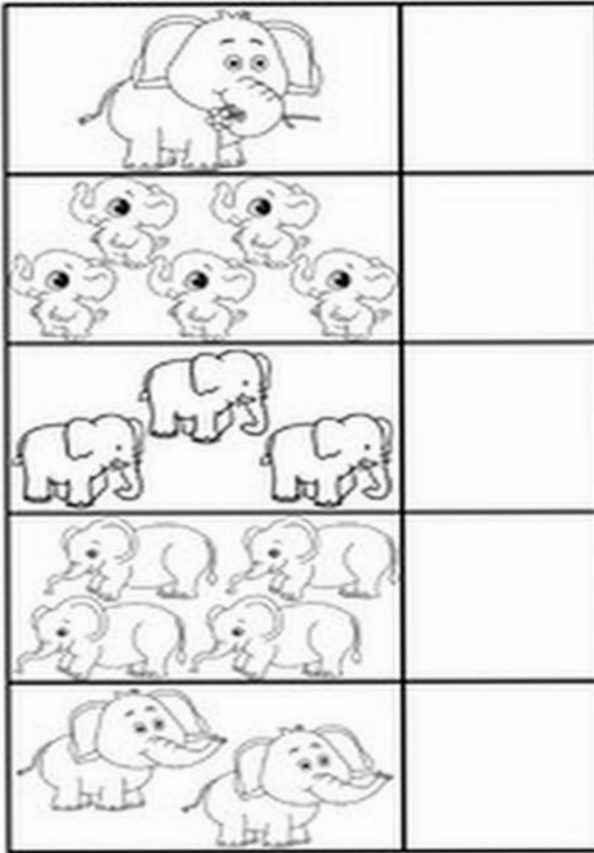
How long she had flown or where she was, she didn't know, but her trunk was getting tired. She was ready to land. You can only fly so high, for so long, before you needed to land she thought. Laughing inside. It must have been the wisdom of her umbrella, she thought. She had been watching the clouds and the way they traveled. All of the sudden the breeze she was riding on settled and softly it placed her in a grassy landing surrounded.



It had been a busy day. "I'm going to rest and tomorrow I'll discover everything."

She stretch in ways she never thought of and then she lowered herself into a an



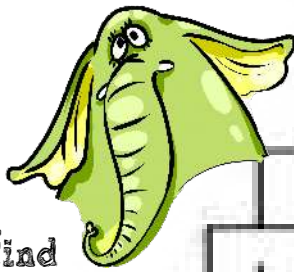


FACTS ABOUT ELEPHANTS' PHYSICAL FEATURES

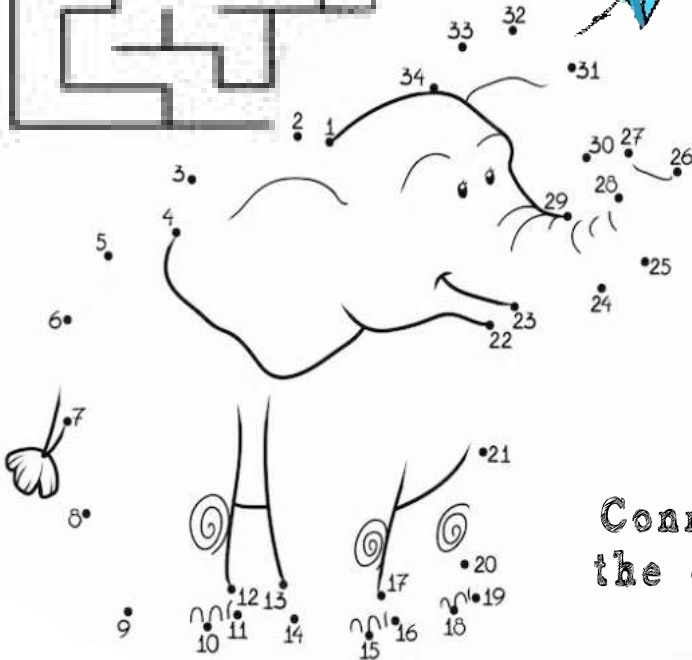
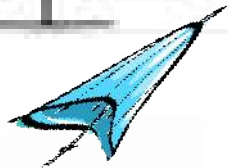
Bull elephants (males) can grow up to 13 feet tall at the shoulders, measure up to 30 feet from trunk to tail, and weigh up to 14,000 pounds. Perhaps that explains why Elephants are the ONLY mammals that cannot jump!

An elephant's trunk weighs around 400 pounds and contains around 100,000 different muscles. Thanks to the elephants special physical features like finger-like appendages at the tip, they're also nimble enough to pluck a single blade of grass.





Help Ernie find her umbrella so she can go on new adventures



Connect the dots

Help Ernie find her way to the rocks?

