

Conference of Namibian Womens League in October 2001
Speech held by Elizabeth de Beer, Owner and manageress of African Desk in Swakopmund

Dear Ladies,

had somebody told me 1 year ago that I will be running an own travel office I would have laughed aloud and not believed it. But here I am: 41 years old, single with 3 children and standing on my own feet. My parents were poor but they always believed in my qualities. They made it possible for me to undergo a professional training. And still I had to fight a lot in my life - personally and professionally. I was married twice. 10 years ago a divorce in this country would have meant a social disaster for many women. They were economically totally depending on their husbands. Bringing up children for unmarried women meant to be happy with a man, who occasionally drops off a plastic bag with milli pap and sugar, shares the bed for a night and then disappears again. It was the sons who went abroad, learned a proper English, German or French and opened up their own businesses whereas girls were waiting in the rural areas or the shacks of Katutura to get married one day.

We are from different cultures in this country, with different characters and a different outlook, yet we have so many things in common. We are mothers and we are wives. There is so much that we have achieved already: We are driving cars, we have entered universities, we are going abroad for studies, we are breadwinners, we can take a man to court if he does not help us maintaining his children, we can open up an own business, we've got the guts to lead an autonomous life. There is no reason for any women in this country to feel inferior or stand back behind a man as long as she is becoming aware of her talents and her strengths. We are women with the responsibility to raise our sons and daughters with love, patience and self respect. And let's not forget that our life sets an example for them! This alone will break the vicious circle of humiliation and lack of self-confidence. Nobody will benefit if we victimize ourselves - let's stand together, support each other and see the powers and the sparkle in each other! And once we are 70 year-old grandmothers we will look back into our lives and say: "It was a life full of colours and experiences. And it was worth it!"

Thank you

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