

We see a lot of white liberals wanting to be in the forefront, fighting for individual causes rather than seeing themselves as human rights activists, not linking our struggles as women, black women, lesbian women. There is a mind-set that blacks must stop complaining about apartheid because it's over. But in our daily lives racism is still there. White people can't change their attitudes overnight, and only if they can admit that and accept that we have different political points of

departure while trying to achieve the same thing will we be able to engage in constructive interaction.

If I can take as an example discussions around the Gay Pride March, white men said "we sent buses to the townships but the people never came." So whose march is it? They need to understand that problems around access are more than about transport. The challenge is to go deeper into what our problems are.

We talk about diversity in the

community, but we need to deconstruct what that really means if we want to find out what is stopping people from getting involved. And we cannot do that without getting involved in community issues. Our main challenge is to combat homophobia in the communities, and how are we going to do that without getting involved as visibly gay and lesbian supporters of other causes? In that sense I see myself as a human rights activist rather than simply as a lesbian and gay rights activist.

short story

Saturday morning in the hardware shop



By Wiebke Volkmann

In the dress of the night before I walk into a big Do-It-Yourself hardware shop in Windhoek.

The day is a bright Saturday morning. I am looking for a hacksaw with different blades to cut used air filters from which I want to make lamp shades and stands.

Standing in the queue at the till with the tool in hand, I observe a middle-aged man approaching the same till from the opposite end of the store. "You are getting this for your husband, not so," he asks.

My mouth widens into a big smile as the warmth and aliveness of my body reminds me of this morning's cuddle in my lover's bed. "Well, it's not for my husband, since I don't have a husband."

I move up the queue towards the till. The man comes to stand next to me and when his eyes travel my

body from legs to bare shoulders, I decide not to just let him gaze like that.

"You know, women are using hacksaws as well - for repairs around the house, for building a dog house, for making sculptures, for all kinds of jobs."

"OK, yes, of course."

After a while he continues: "But surely a pretty woman like you has at least a boyfriend."

I say: "Oh, I have the most wonderful partner I could wish for."

He probes further: "So, he's your fiance? When are you getting married?"

My chirpy mood is tickled to the utmost - I ask him: "Do you really want to know the truth?"

"Yes, why not?"

"This partner happens to be a woman," I say as I pull out my cheque book to pay.

"What a pity!" he responds. "I know there are many people who don't think so, but this I really find a pity. Such a pretty woman and here she is without a man!"

"Well, I am not sorry about this at all. I think she is the greatest gift to my life and we are very happy."

He is silent while the till operator prints out the invoice and I write out the cheque.

When I turn to take the parcel with my purchases the man says: "Oh, I suppose when she gives you trouble you can always use the hacksaw to put her in place."

Now I really break with laughter. I had come here because the hacksaw I had borrowed from her earlier had not been the right one for the job. So I tell this confused man: "I think she is better at wielding hers and by the way, we know more creative ways of using a hacksaw."