

Chapter 6

Childless in Appalachia: The Societal Costs of Teaching Yet Kidless in Rural Virginia (How I Got Ahead Then Left Behind)

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ABSTRACT

In Appalachian VA, practically everyone my age, not just other teachers, are married with kids. I deviate as childless, unmarried, polyamorous, and LGBTQ. Generally more educated and cultured than others where I grew up, I am often misunderstood or misjudged despite my accomplishments and career success. I ultimately discuss the unspoken rite of passage behind having kids and marriage that, by not doing so, has kept me from being treated with the same respect and candor, along with its benefits.

I'll never be rooted like a tree I can't be contained / You think I'm insane?
/ You don't understand a hurricane / I needed time to heal / it was time you
tried to steal / But baby let's be real / you just like my sex appeal / I will not be
tamed / cuz I'm a hurricane. / Gotta let me stay wild & free / if we're gonna
have the same destiny / Cuz since the day I was born / I have been a storm /
You couldn't console me / & you tried to control me / You don't understand
me / so you left me stranded / Look where we landed / now you're empty

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handed / I will not be tamed / I'm a hurricane. / I won't be ashamed / Don't forget my name / Hurricane . . .

The poem above is one of many that I have written that later became lyrics; boldly, it captures my feelings on what it's like being childless as a schoolteacher in Virginia's Appalachian Mountains. In the past twenty years, I have produced over 300 songs, written countless essays, scratched down a myriad of poetry, performed a variety of acts and gigs as a thespian and musician on multiple stages, and even dabbled in the fine arts like painting and charcoal. This is all during my career as an English teacher. Nevertheless, it is often challenging to try to openly express my honest emotions about who I truly am in this place. Raised along traditionally conservative backroads of southwest Virginia (VA), I am a direct witness to the fact that being childless in these rugged edges of eastern Appalachia is tough. Yet it has helped me build resilience and grit to stay focused on my career development despite personal and societal challenges slowing me down along the way, because mama didn't raise no quitter.

For over a decade, I have been teaching English Language Arts (ELA) and environmental education in rural communities. Like a rhythmic heartbeat, the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Valley have practically been my sacred guide. Exquisitely blending both internalized intensity and intersectional intricacy has become a vital part of my existence. I finally feel the best about myself rather than ever because now I can sense the femininity of the land as it exists and struggles to thrive in shadowing synchronicity. Dancing with the wind and singing along with the tidal waves is a glimpse into a definition of what makes me who I am: incessantly human. Now a 34-year-old left-hander exploring career avenues that stem beyond the public school system like marketing, nonprofit leadership, business, or songwriting, I have become strong, resourceful, and resilient by necessity. In addition to self-identifying as LGBTQ (bisexual) and polyamorous in a conservative community, so I have lived and breathed societal dissonance my whole life. I am a symphonic anomaly like a song echoing proudly. Ultimately, my story harmonizes a myriad of chaotic deviance. Yet, I am still childless.

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