

## **The absence hits me at mother's day. For whom am I? Childless? Not-mother?**

*We lack words for whom we are. Us, who wanted children and did not get them. We the childless. The language defines us on what we do not have and makes the absence grow.*

'Be happy that you do not have all those concerns.' 'You can sleep in!'. "You can just have my child," they say. But that's not what I want.

In the workplace, my absence - the absence of the childless - is clear to me. But perhaps it is actually overlooked by most. It sometimes seems like the nuclear family has taken over our workplaces. That our working life is organized around life with children. This is good for families with children.

But imagine if we could organize working life in different ways. That the starting point is not that we without children are last. That it is not just expected that we can stay longer when colleagues pick up their children. That it is not just expected that we take holidays outside of the school holidays or take shifts during public holidays.

That an understanding can be created in workplaces that for some it is filled with joy and for others with pain when babies are shown off at work. Or when the children become part of the video meetings. Painful as someone can be in the middle of a process of grueling failed fertility treatment or have just had a spontaneous abortion.

I wish we could have more honest conversations about how many ways life can end up playing out. Both privately and at our work. About what it is like to be childless and open up opportunities for new ways of organizing.

In my ideas about my life we would create a family. A family with children. Children, we would provide with the best we had learned and could offer them. Children we would give values forward to. Children we wanted to see grow, learn new and form relationships. Children we wanted to see walk into life and create their own life.

I never experienced the smell of my toddler, the overwhelming tiredness when the child did not sleep. I did not experience the joy of the first step and word. I didn't experience playing, fooling around or being an 'embarrassing mother' or any of the other joys and worries that come with a life where you bring children into the world.

They're not there, those children. They are missing - we never got them!

The absence slowly moved in, and it is a part of me now. The absence is there both in my body, in my ideas about my life and in stories and my experiences in the encounter with surroundings, media and society. We lack the development that you as parents go through in the interaction with your children. We would have developed in the interaction with our children, in interaction with their development and their emancipation process, and again when they became parents themselves.

The absence will always be there. The absence is obvious and is constantly gaining new 'support'. When I am asked; "How old are your children?". "So what do your children do?" The premise is that, of course, we have children. Everyone expects it.

At times we have had other people's children live with us. During the lockdown in spring 2020, the most fantastic young student lived with us. I thoroughly enjoyed getting a little closer to a young person, even

with the worries it brought during such a difficult time. I experienced a little of what it might have felt like. And then there is the absence and the loss again.

The absence also hits me when I read Jacob Ellemann's (Danish politician) Facebook post, photographed with his little baby on his stomach, about the role of father overshadowing all other roles with the proposal for faster fertility treatment. A post on LinkedIn from a fertility clinic in Southern Denmark also hits me. They write that you scare young women when you create campaigns about the importance of a woman's age for fertility. As if you can just get treatment. Then it will all work out. In these stories, I am missing - who I am. Her, she failed to have a child, despite all the treatments.

I am happy when I see the student vans when they come noisily along our road. But I miss the van stopping at our place one day. I miss worrying about making the best celebration for our young child. The absence gives me a little stab in the heart.

The absence hits me on Mother's Day. Because what am I really? Am I childless? Am I not a mother? Or am I just a woman well on her way in life?

Sometimes I get angry. Why should this particular absence affect us? Anger fills. The anger is kept alive by the language, and by the fact that the story of motherhood is such a large part of the story of being a woman. I lack words with which I can identify. The word childless or NoMo (Not Mother) in itself focuses on the absence. Language itself makes me wrong, makes me deficient. The language describes what I am not and not. I become angry at missing in society and in the language. Let's get new terms for not having children - for the good life, even if you never have become a parent.

I want to be part of creating other terms. I want to create other narratives about being a woman. I know that here it would be obvious to describe all the joys that have become possible in my life because I have not had children. But I don't want to join the story that since we haven't got children we must shine in a different way with great careers, wild travel activities or special large circle of friends. Because as mentioned, I want us to become better at showing and seeing that life can have many different paths. Regardless of whether children were part of it or not.

Now I put myself out there and tell what it is like to be childless. At times it is difficult. But it is also fruitful. At a writing course I read one of my texts. An older man asked for the text to give it to his daughter, who is also involuntarily childless. A woman, aged around 30 told me that she saw me as an inspiring female role without children. I touch, I move. I make a difference. I am not just a human being who is missing out. I am also a person who has.