

Ask Aleksandra!

Dear Aleksandra,

I know I should count myself one of the lucky ones. I've got a tenure-track job I love. My problem is, it's in a rural part of the country that after three years doesn't feel at all like home. And the local perspective on national and international politics, not to mention cultural diversity and gender equality, is not the most advanced. I have found a few friends, but I'm young (and unattached) and worry that this place will suck the life out of me. I've tried applying for jobs, but nothing has worked out. What's your advice for making peace with the provinces?

Olga P.

Dear Olga P,

First off, yes, you are one of the lucky ones. But you can be grateful, relieved and appreciative, and still want more than a job that you love in your chosen profession. That's more than most people get, but it isn't everything. In fact, I'm rather reassured that you recognize that, as many of our colleagues seem to confuse having a job with having a life.

I am also relieved by your firm grip on reality regarding your options. If tenure track jobs are rare, then you have just about as much chance of getting one where you'd actually choose to live as the USSR did to achieve true communism. And your prospects only dwindle further after tenure.

I once knew a single woman in her late 30s whom we'll call Valya. She taught at Big Midwestern State University at Nowheresville. Valya was offered a job at West Coast U. in a major city. It was a lateral move professionally, but pickings were slim in Nowheresville for a potential partner. Rumor has it that when the dean tried to make a bid to keep her, Valya responded by asking: "Can you guarantee me one date per month?" A modest request, to be sure, but beyond the reach of even a dean. She made the move but, alas, she hasn't received tenure in the love department. Even when you move to where you think you want to live, it does not necessary meet expectations, something that Valya has the opportunity to contemplate on her long commute to work through bumper-to-bumper traffic.

I suggest three easy steps to making peace with the provinces. First, find something to do that you enjoy. If your rural locale is also enveloped in snow much of the winter, spend less time binge watching Netflix and take up ~~knitting~~ skiing or snowshoeing. The great outdoors not for you? Join the local amateur theater. Volunteer at the local food coop. Take a painting class. Find things to do beyond academia that will help you to feel part of the community and give you an opportunity to expand your social circle further.

Step two: go online and start dating! The best thing about living in the digital age, other than the advent of PDFs for interlibrary loan articles, is the demise of bars as the locus of dating rituals. Rest assured that you are not the only lonelyheart in that godforsaken town. They are out there and at least some of them must share your progressive values. Get out there and start looking.

Finally, squirrel away your money so you can skip town for mental health breaks as often as feasible and necessary.

You may never actually prefer to be where you are rather than someplace more cosmopolitan, but in time you will build a life there and, hopefully, come to appreciate its quiet charms.

In comradeship,

Aleksandra