

Dear Boots,



Texas
Life

Questions from Deep in the Heart of Texas

**Dear Boots,
My sister-in-law lives
in Waco, and all she
talks about now is the
new movie theater. Is
it really worth all that
fuss?**

- Out-of-Towner

Almost every Saturday night of my high school life was spent at the lake. Winter. Summer. Fall. Spring. On those nights us teenagers never swam or even wore bathing suits. Instead we did our hair and put on our best shirts. We experimented with eyeliner and carefully orchestrated who we would arrive with. For me, a small-town girl who never knew anything different, the process made complete sense. But it confounded my father. One Saturday

evening during family dinner, before I made my weekly exit with my friends, he decided it was time for answers. “Why on earth,” he asked, with tomato-red frustration barely tucked inside his shirt collar, “do you want to spend all this time just standing around a lake talking to people?”

Technically, his question was accurate. It was a significant chunk of time to spend with feet firmly planted in the dirt, mouth moving in conversation. But here’s what my dad didn’t see, Out-of-Towner, and what I suspect might offer the insight you seek: Standing around and talking to people was just a cover. It was only what outsiders saw when they were looking in.

For those of us who were bundled up during winter with heaters running in the pickup trucks or sweating it out mid-July while we tried to play it cool, we felt the deeper current: that once-in-

a-lifetime stuff was underway. We were falling in love. We were having our hearts broken. We were learning how to tell stories that might pull in the crowd and jokes — oh, the jokes — some good, others flatter than a pair of ironed Wranglers.

While leaning up against cars and feeling the breeze that sometimes would blow off the water, we garnered there was a social pecking order that we would never be able to see but would always be able to feel, and that the top of that order only had room for one rooster (or queen chicken.) As one weekend rolled into the next, we slowly discovered what we were made of — whether we were going to let a rooster with colorful tailfeathers dictate how we felt about our eyeliner or bad jean jokes. Or if we would fight to protect the small globe of self-worth within each of us.

I think your question about your sister-in-law reminded me of those high

school nights because over the last few months, as I have found myself sitting in the seats of that new movie theater, it has felt like so much more than just sitting in a seat while a screen plays images for a couple of hours. While we're there our imaginations are prodded, our emotions are pushed. But even more importantly, all of that happens while we are sitting next to complete strangers. Who are also having their imaginations prodded and their emotions pushed. It's almost like ... well, shoot, Out-of-Towner, I feel bashful saying it, but it seems you might think we're a bunch of simpletons here in Waco anyway, so I'll just go for it: It's a reminder that there are ties that bind us. All of us.

At that dinner so many years ago, when my dad asked if I really was going to spend all my time at the lake, I countered with a question that I will pose to you now as well: Is there something better to do? Given the line that runs straight down the middle of our country right now, with half on one side and half on the other, I can think of nothing worth more of a fuss than a room full of people laughing at the same joke. Or rolling our eyes at the same bad one.

Love,
Boots

**Dear Boots,
These days my swimming pool feels as refreshing as a bowl of split pea soup. Got a recommendation for an end-of-summer activity that's actually fun?
- Swimming in Soup**

Do you remember when the phrase "Waco tourists" seemed as likely as watching a solar eclipse in the dead of night? And now these tourists come to us by the thousands! Every day, just willfully exiting the highway, like it's absolutely what they want to be doing with their lives and they wouldn't have it any other way!

Sometimes, for fun, I like to drive around downtown just to look at the license plates. By "drive around," of course, I mean "move my vehicle from

one construction delay to the next.”
When paused at one of those delays,
I often wonder if the construction
workers can actually hear me humming
the theme song from “The Twilight
Zone” while I stare at the license plate
in front of me from Arkansas, Virginia
or Oregon. I don’t know how old you
are, Swimming in Soup, but if you are
enough of an adult to have your own
swimming pool then I think I can ask:
Do people these days even know what
“The Twilight Zone” is?

Don’t answer that. The point isn’t
to pit one generation against the next.
I want to suggest that, for all of us,
the great and wild freedom of being a
grownup is that we get to decide how we
define “fun activities.”

Just ten years ago a Waco tourist
was inconceivable. Yet right now at this
very moment visitors to our lovely town
are smelling candles. Tasting an array
of cupcakes. Hoping against hope for a
glimpse of you-know-who.

Have you considered, Swimming in
Soup, that even though diving into a
pool of split peas isn’t refreshing, it still
could be a pretty good end-of-summer
activity? It feels different than it did
back in balmy June, but that doesn’t
have to make it bad.

Perhaps instead of framing it as
“swimming,” think of it as, “a far
superior choice to what Boots is
doing.” When you dive into the soup,
maybe give a mental shoutout to those
downtown workers who, maybe at this
very moment, are steeling themselves
to ignore the crazy lady who is slowly
cruising around, just singing that same
darn song.

Could that shift in perspective be just
what you need to finish strong? Or even
better — and so rare, because it’s hard
to pull off at the end of the summer in
Texas — finish grateful?

Love,
Boots

**Got questions for
Boots? Send them to
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