

Dear Boots,



Questions from Deep in the Heart of Texas

Texas
Life

Dear Boots,

Every year my wife dreams of going to a Christmas tree farm, but I keep telling her the ones at the grocery store are nicer than any she's going to chop down in Texas. Do you agree?

- Cutting to the Chase

When I was growing up, I had a very fancy friend, and every holiday season her family put up a very fancy tree. In all our growing-up years, the only time I was ever jealous of my friend was when that tree went up. Never mind that my house had regular-height ceilings and doors made for men and not giants — I still fantasized about having that towering evergreen in my living room.

But then something happened that rid me of that jealousy. One day, I asked how they hung ornaments on the tip-top of that fancy tree, and my

friend told me she had no idea. "I'm not allowed to decorate the tree," she said, "My mother likes for it to look perfect."

At that moment, it dawned on me: There are people who want the experience of Christmas. And then there are people who want Christmas to look like a certain experience.

Given the drought we've been clawing our way through in Texas, if you find a tree that can stand on its own at a Christmas tree farm this season, count yourself lucky. But I don't think a full and bushy tree is what your wife is asking for. In her desire to visit the farm, I don't hear her wanting a holiday that looks a certain way, I'm guessing it's a request for a true Christmas experience with you.

If the idea of a less-than bulbous tree is something that tweaks you five ways to Friday, perhaps consider another way to share those kinds of

moments. Cocoa drinking. Holiday caroling. Cheesy sweater shopping and wearing. Feet warming by the fire. And truly, it doesn't have to be a moment that feels plucked from a Hallmark movie to matter — the experience of Christmas is really about the experience of love. Every day of the year offers us millions of small moments to step into that.

Love,
Boots

Dear Boots,

My extended family is so hard to shop for. What do you think about gift cards under the tree?

- Wanting a Win

What do you think about shopping online for groceries and having them delivered to your door? Or texting lifelong friends to say Happy Birthday instead of picking up the

phone to call them?

I ask about these scenarios specifically because each is a shortcut that saves time. No one can argue the shortcuts work. They keep life moving efficiently, and in some cases, are parachutes for our sanity. But when shortcuts become the only choices we make, we miss the delight that can come when we take the long way around.

Think of the first bin of springtime asparagus or apricots you happen to notice when you're pushing your cart through the grocery store at the end of a long, hard winter. Or hearing the voice of the girl who once invested entire summer days into helping you bake the ultimate Easy-Bake Oven mudpie.

Gift cards aren't evil. I don't think they make bad gifts — I remember a time my fragile heart leaped at being gifted all the blooming onions I could eat. Yet in some cases, it's possible those little pieces of plastic can rob us of the full experience of giving. If you're hanging on by a candy cane this season, maybe they are the best option. But if you've got time and energy to show those difficult-to-please relatives you've still got some fuel in the tank to wow them, maybe not.

Love,
Boots

**Dear Boots,
For all 20 years of my life, my aunt has knitted me a sweater. I hardly have room to store them and definitely don't wear them all. How do I politely tell her enough is enough?**

- Sweating It

Oh, sweet Sweating It, you don't. You don't ever tell her that. Not only do you stay silent about your frustration with this gift you feel you've gotten before, when the time comes for you to open this year's sweater, you don't whip through it like turning onto your own street and then racing into your driveway — like you've been down this road before and know

how the experience will end.

Instead, you carry the wrapped box to a cozy seat. You take a sip of hot chocolate and then (after the hot chocolate is swallowed, of course) a deep breath. And before you open the box that contains the inevitable, I want you to imagine something for me. Picture all the nights over the last month you've spent doing things you love. Playing video games. Going to dinner with friends. Underwater basket weaving in the bathtub. Whatever it is that you do because it makes these little fizzy bubbles that lighten the weight in your soul.

Once you can see those fizzy bubbles, I want you to let this realization settle into you: There are people in this world who — when faced with an evening they could spend a million different ways — get fizzy bubbles from the sheer act of doing something to show you they care.

Sure, we live in Texas. Sure, that geographic location offers few opportunities to wear a homemade sweater collection. And sure, your aunt should probably know stripes are more flattering when they run vertically and not horizontally. But those facts are nothing but preferences jimmying for the lead in the Parade for Importance. They can't even nick the truth that matters most here and always: Love wins. Love matters, and it wins, and it doesn't have to be a two-way street, but when it is, the people on that street can go places they didn't even imagine they could before.

Take the gift of love your aunt is offering and love it in return. Love that your aunt gets fizzy bubbles while she clicks those needles together. Love that you can be the kind of person who looks at yarn sewn together and sees much more than a sweater. Then take another sip of hot chocolate, call that woman, and thank her for the nights she spent choosing you.

Love,
Boots

**Got questions for
boots? Send them to
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