

Dear Boots,



Texas
Life

By Anna Mitchael

Questions from Deep in the Heart of Texas

**Dear Boots,
Every year when football
season ends, I go into a
depression. And every year
my friends try to cheer me
up with talk of basketball.
Why don't they get it?**

- March Madness

Have you heard the one about the little boy who loses his dog and to try and help him feel better, his parents get him a goldfish? So for a couple days, the boy stands there in front of the bowl saying things to the goldfish like “sit” and “stay” and “lick my face as though I’m the only person on the planet who matters,” but of course the goldfish can’t do what a furry four-legged friend can. The fish just swims circles. Circle after circle after circle, all the live-long day. Finally, when the boy gets fed up to his mullet

with watching aquatic revolutions, he leaves his room, informs his parents that the goldfish is good for nothing, then goes outside to shoot baskets.

If you’re thinking to yourself, “Well, duh, of course a fish can’t compare to a dog. What were those parents thinking?” here’s another angle to contemplate: Were the parents trying to replace the dog, or did they just want their kid to remember that life was still going on, even if — sadly, very sadly — his dog wasn’t a part of it? If the aim was to get the kid back into the world, then the fish was the gift he needed.

All this time you’ve been thinking your friends don’t get you. That they are undervaluing how important gridiron is to your psyche. But maybe the world is a nicer place than you think, and while there aren’t enough million-dollar contracts to keep players passing the pigskin year-round, there are some people who

want you out there living, even in the off season.

When they tell you about basketball, I suspect they aren’t expecting a sudden passion for zone defense. They are handing you a goldfish. They are saying, “Hey, we miss you, come out of your room and hang with us.” You don’t have to pretend you aren’t grieving the end of the season. What’s important is to acknowledge that seasons are still seasoning, the clock arm is still ticking, there are circles still to swim.

I’ve already taken us pretty far down this goldfish road, and every part of me wants to finish with a fishy pun. But the lyrics to a certain song are bouncing around in my head, and I would feel bereft if I did not bring up the wisdom first howled by Mick Jagger into our sometimes nicer-than-we-think world: *You can’t always get what you want, but if you try, you just might find, you get what you need.*

Football is over for now, but you've got some pretty good amigos who want you to see that other wins are still possible. What else *could* you really need for a successful March?

Love,
Boots

**Dear Boots,
I've got nothing planned for spring break. What's a girl to do while everyone else is out there taking trips and having a blast while I'm stuck at home?**

- Home Alone

I can tell you what a girl's not to do: spend her week watching Tik Tok videos of "everyone" who's out there on their trips. Because you know what's weird? When you look at Tik Tok, you see "everyone" vacationing in awe-inspiring locales. But when I look at Tik Tok, I see that "everyone" just happens to be getting their books published. My neighbor, who is currently so obsessed with her kitchen renovation that her husband reports she speaks of countertops in her sleep, looks at Tik Tok and finds "everyone" is showing off pictures of their newly redone cookery nirvanas.

How does this metaphysical mystery work — that "everyone" can be laying on a beach in Belize *while* having their novels published *and* getting brand-new backsplashes installed behind the stove?

Or is it even a teensy-weensy bit possible that the idea of "everyone" is a myth created by our own minds? To haunt us, or worse, to beckon us toward that very dark corner where self-loathing is known to lurk.

Hear me on this, Home Alone, because I realize self-loathing sounds heavy, and I am not trying to hand you a fedora that doesn't fit. But in my day, I have been the beneficiary of friendships with some amazing women, and I'd wager a guess that you would

fit in that category of amazingness too. Not one of those women has managed to maneuver her days without occasionally needing to pick up a really large stick and fight off some self-loathing.

Now of course there are other ways to do it — there are about a billion and one podcasts that will recommend some combination of positive self-talk, journaling and tea — but I really can't say enough about the large stick method. Getting that self-loathing in sight, then wildly swinging around a heavy tree limb while you scream like a banshee ... it just takes you to a primal space. In that space it's easier to remember who we are deep down and what we are made to do — which is, first and foremost, *to love*. Ourselves. Others. Our towns, where we might get to spend a few responsibility-free days of spring. Our manuscripts, that may not become books but are keepers of our precious hearts and souls. Our kitchens, no matter the state, color scheme or era of their tile.

My recommendation is not for you to take a stick to your Tik Tok, mostly because your social media is likely connected to your phone and that could be a very expensive therapy session. But every one of us benefits from noticing which activities turn us toward that dark corner where self-loathing lives. Some facts of our lives can't change, but we can leave behind scenarios that make us feel less than awesome about them.

And on the topic of awesomeness. If you do some stick-swinging over spring break and don't have a blast, look me up. It might be that your yell is not quite to banshee levels, and I'm happy to show you how it's done.

Love,
Boots

**Got questions for
boots? Send them to
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