



Questions from Deep in the Heart of Texas

Q Dear Boots,
I just found some leftover
tickets from the HOT fair in the
pocket of my jeans. What should I
do with them?

— From, *Regretful in Riesel*

A Dear Regretful,
The first time my mother ever
gave me a dollar bill to use, I didn't
do it. This was back in the '90s,
when a dollar could buy much more
than half of a Gatorade. In some
parts of the country it still was good
as a down payment on a house.

My plan was to use the dollar for one or five ice creams, depending on how the mood struck me, but when the ice cream truck actually pulled onto our street and I was standing with the other neighborhood kids looking at the menu, I seized up. The sheer number of options paralyzed me. When the kids in front of me had ordered and it was my turn, I couldn't do it. I stayed back, did not spend the dollar, and spent my day in a fudgesicle-less state — what adults know as “brain fog.”

When I got home I took the dollar out of my pocket and handed it to my mother regretfully, feeling as though a great opportunity, or five, had passed me by. She must have seen the self-doubt stamped on my face because she said, “Well, if it wasn't

the right day today, there's always tomorrow.”

I get that rodeo tickets are a little different than cash — they come with a very specific time and space in which they are designed to be used. But the same principle of believing that all is as it should be can apply. And if that feels too loosey-goosey compared to the actual, physical accordion of unused tickets in your hand, here's one more shot at a reframe. I know a woman who became so sick on a spinning pirate ride three years ago at the fair that carnivals — and some pirates — are ruined for her forever. What if those tickets were a narrow miss with the same fate? You don't want to have to say goodbye to the fair forever! You don't want to feel your stomach flip

every time a pirate trick-or-treats at your door! So *thank goodness* those tickets were left in your pocket. Thanks to that oversight, more corn dogs and funnel cakes are in your future! Now you can just tuck the tickets away in a drawer and pretend you'll remember to use them when the fair comes to town again. Mothers know best: There's always next year. And when it comes, you'll be ready to *carpe the diem*.

— *Love, Boots*

Q Dear Boots,
Recently I purchased my very first piece of Texas-themed apparel, a jacket that has the Texas flag across the front. Even though I wear it every day, no one has complimented me on it yet. Why do you think that might be?

— *From, Star Spangler*

A Dear Star Spangler,
I wish you'd heard the joke I made yesterday. The room was ripe for entertainment. My timing was spot on. I managed to say "hippopotamus" with just the right mix of inflection and irony. And yet, no one laughed. The quip fell flatter than the room, and for the rest of the lunch meeting I was left to wonder what I had missed — how could I be so wrong about something I thought was so funny?

But do you see where I was so messed up, Star Spangler? Can you detect the point at which I went astray?

I said something I thought was hilarious, but when that enjoyment wasn't reflected by the

people around me, I pulled back. I won't go so far as to say I let others steal my joy because they weren't malicious in the taking. The correct description is that I willingly handed my joy over to them. I decided people outside of me were better tastemakers, and as a result, I missed out on a laugh and wasted time worrying over why my brain doesn't work like everyone else's. I don't know you, Star Spangler, but I'm going to take what I do know about you — that you recently purchased a jacket with the Texas flag emblazoned across the front — and take a guess that your brain doesn't work like everyone else's either.

Not everyone takes joy in advertising what they love. Some people aren't sure enough about what they love to do that, and others just aren't into spangles. The reasons don't matter though. What matters is that you cruised into a store, got fired up by the idea of walking around every day with your home state pride on full display, then acted on that impulse.

Whether other people appreciate that or not shouldn't matter. Your joy is in your own hands every time you slide them through the arms of that jacket. You can offer to share that joy with others, but please don't hand it away. There are a whole lot of us trying to figure out how to walk to our own beat, when we catch sight of another human being doing it well — and in spangles, no less — it scooches the hippopotamus out of the room and gives us space to belly laugh.

— *Love, Boots*
