

Questions from Deep in the Heart of Texas

Texas
Life

Dear Boots,

I'm a newcomer to Texas, and I've heard before that taking pictures in bluebonnets that grow along the highway is a Texas tradition. Are there any spots in Waco you recommend for this?

-Beginning Bluebonnetter

Dear Beginning Bluebonnetter

My church is one of those congregations that likes to talk. Not just by the coffee machines; we're loudest while the service is happening. And that's how our pastor wants it—she says things to get us riled up, throwing out our hallelujahs and amens. But there's always a point where she'll say something like, "I know all of you are out there praying every day," and we reply, "Oh yes we are, amen,

amen." And even while I'm saying it, I know there have been recent days when the only reason I remembered to pray was because I needed a parking spot at Target.

I suspect if you were in a room full of Texans and asked how many of us actually park our vehicles on the side of the road every year so we can careen with the bluebonnets, it would be a little bit like my church. You'd hear the "amens," but inside we'd all be wrestling with the truth. Our patooties don't smell like flowers for a good reason: It's been decades since we sat in them.

As long as you live in Texas, you will have many people informing you of our pastimes. We like to eat brisket, sometimes until the top button on our pants has to be relieved of its position. Most of us only know it's fall because of the glow of high school stadium lights on Friday nights. You'll note we often refer to shipping ports as "the beach" and are in the habit of buying hats and t-shirts that advertise our state

loud and proud. When we do this, we've "gone shoppin'."

But feeling the wind of an eighteen-wheeler blow by while positioning yourself in the bluebonnets won't make you any more of a Texan than swimming in an oil slick. What really makes you a Texan is when you decide you're going to do what you want to do, come hell or high water, possibly while wearing a Stetson, hopefully with the expanse of a rural Texas highway stretching out before you in a way that makes you talk to God. To yourself or out loud, I'm sure He's appreciative of all conversation that goes deeper than parking spot requests.

On all your adventures here, I wish you good times, lots of long-cooked cow, and—should you choose—a patootie that smells like spring.

Love,
Boots

Dear Boots,



Dear Boots,

My neighbor has holiday lights up... and it's March. Should I say something to him?

-A Time and a Place

Dear A Time and a Place,

My best friend is 10 minutes late everywhere where we go. I suspect my husband couldn't find the laundry hamper with a map. And I'm on a parent text chain that's meant only for important high school news, yet at least once a week someone blows it up with a meme of a cat.

None of these situations have a thing to do with holiday lights, yet I suspect you and I struggle with the same core issue: When will everyone else get with our program?

I have many theories I could share—every time I open a bottle of wine, I seem to come up with a new one—yet I suspect the answer to our conundrum is simple and final. No matter how hard we try, no one else is ever truly going to do what we want them to.

Oh sure, our "casual" questions about whether the lights are up to celebrate St. Patrick's Day might hold sway for a while. Maybe the holidays even end before February for a couple of years. But sooner or later, their program—the one that's hard-wired in them—will resurface. The golf shirt will be found, inexplicably, in the bathtub. You will check your text messages and find a feline doing the cha-cha and wishing you a Happy Friday.

As deeply perturbing as that might be, isn't it actually closer to how life was intended: That all of us might have the chance to march around this great orb to the rhythm that thumps only in our veins? What if those lights aren't only for your neighbor's viewing pleasure but are hanging as a reminder that you have a beat to follow too, a beat that's all your own, a beat that can become hard to hear when we're nagging people to pay attention already.

It ain't natural to loosen up *as* you age, but I'm with you on the journey and always in doing the cha-cha.

Love,

Boots