

**CAROLYN HAX**



BY NICK GALIFIANOS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

**Hi Carolyn:**

How is one supposed to handle regrets about missed opportunities? I graduated from college two years ago, and I never got to have those fun college experiences because my major depression made me withdraw from everyone and everything. I just feel so sad that I missed out on what were supposed to be the best years of my life because of this damn disease, which just makes me spiral even deeper into a funk.

Chicago

You handle missed-opportunity regrets the way you handle any other regrets. Fix what you can, learn what you can, and keep trying to make the best of the life you've got.

As for college regrets specifically, you say damn disease, but I say damn "best years of your life" expectations. Expectations are often too vague and elusive to fight head-on, yet they insinuate themselves into your entire experience. They make you feel like crap, then make you feel stupid for feeling like crap.

The only thing I feel safe saying about college is that, yes, for some it can be a life pinnacle (and I'd pity them, frankly). But in most cases even rickrolling good times can be complicated by some hard lessons, cringe-worthy behavior and pointed regrets.

For many others the peer angle is a luxury, when costs or age or health (as you know) or other factors rule out the possibility of even partaking in the peer fest.

So, what now? You do what everyone else does when bumped onto a different path than you expected: Decide a course based on where you are and where you want to go, and keep traveling.

Dwelling on what you missed is rarely productive. It's easy to think everyone's at a big party to which you weren't invited (figuratively speaking), but I think you'll find upon close inspection that's never really true.

**RE: Chicago:**

Or: figure out what it is that you WOULD have enjoyed, and do it now. Summer travel? Join the Peace Corps, take a sabbatical and backpack Europe, drive cross country for fun. Political activism? Find the right organization. Hanging out late into the night with friends? Live in a group house.

I can't go back and change things, but I can get what I missed if I am intentional about it.

Anonymous

Good point, thanks.

**RE: Chicago:**

FWIW, I immersed myself in the "b/peer culture" in college, and I often feel like I'm the one who missed opportunities. I didn't spend nearly enough time on my actual education or on non-social extra-curriculars.

I think a lot of people feel that way no matter what their experience was, because college is the first time you are really able to make your own choices about how to live your life, and we're all probably a little unprepared for that.

Anonymous 2

True. It's not just the newness of the freedom — it's also that there are SO many choices. Missing an opportunity feels like a mistake, taking on too much feels like a mistake, doing too little feels like a mistake, focusing on the wrong thing feels like a mistake — but that's only if you look at these opportunities as finite. The ready access might expire upon graduation, but the opportunities don't.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on [www.washingtonpost.com/discussions](http://www.washingtonpost.com/discussions).

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**The Style Invitational »**

**REPORT FROM WEEK 812**

in which we asked for "fictoids" relating to medicine and the human body: We were shocked, shocked (see next week's results) that many of the entries were scatological in nature! One clever entry, from Barry Koch of Catlett, Va., didn't qualify for this contest because it was just too true: Smoking three or more packs of cigarettes a day IS a proven way to prevent aging.

**THE WINNER OF THE INKER**  
 Contrary to claims by some scientists, hair is not dead. It just has a high threshold of pain. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

- 2 the winner of the book of paper dolls of the George H.W. Bush family: It takes twice as many muscles to make an armpit fart as it does an actual one. (Barbara Turner, Takoma Park)
- 3 The reason your fingernails keep growing after you die is just in case you have to scratch your way out of the coffin. (Larry Yungk, Arlington)
- 4 In the Southern Hemisphere, eating beans makes you belch. (Charlie Wood, Falls Church)

**THESE ONLY HURT A LITTLE: HONORABLE MENTIONS**

Extreme halitosis sometimes necessitates the removal of the hal. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Doctors make you sit on wax paper because they are required to keep a tracing of your butt cheeks for their files. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

Holding in flatulence during an airplane flight can cause your intestines to explode. (The risk is even higher on the space shuttle, which is why astronauts are required to fart every 30 minutes.) (Melissa Yorks, sent from Milan, Italy)

The human eye cannot distinguish between cordovan and burnt umber. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Before oral thermometers were invented, all temperatures were taken with written thermometers. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Blindness can be caused by shaking your hand vigorously. (Art Grinath)

The two participants in any happy, long-term relationship — married or not, straight or gay — will have virtually the same number of [well, let's say "nostril"] hairs. (Couples who discover that their numbers don't match: Think about it: How happy are you, really?) (Michael Kilby, Wildau, Germany)

A buffed coat of earwax on sterling silver will keep it tarnish-free. (Peter Boice, Rockville)

Only 2 percent of people can touch their noses with their tongues, but almost twice as many can touch other people's noses. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

The length of a person's pinkie toe is equal to the length of his or her uvula, and in an emergency they can be

interchanged. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

Breast implants correlate to lower IQ: The bigger the implants, the dumber the man attracted to them. (Mike Ostapiej, Tracy, Calif.)

A mixture of Screaming Bubbles and green tea makes an excellent laxative as well as an effective oven cleaner. (Howard Walderman, Columbia)

If you burp, sneeze and fart simultaneously, there is an 80 percent chance that your son will say, "Hey, Dad, can you do that again?" (Jean Stewart, Washington, a First Offender)

The speculum was originally used as a "harsh interrogation" device. (Jeffrey Contompassis, Ashburn)

Medical researchers still cannot determine why pigs, which are 100 percent pork, never suffer from high cholesterol. (J.L. Strickland, Valley, Ala.)

Even though separated by a great distance, an identical twin has been known to develop gas when the other twin eats beans. (J.L. Strickland)

Liver spots are so named because they exude a faint aroma of chicken liver. (Stephen Dudzik)

If you laid all of the arteries, arterioles, capillaries, venules and veins in your body end to end, you'd die. (Martin Heath, Wenatchee, Wash., a First Offender; Ben Schwalb, Severna Park)

Shaving for 30 or more years leads to the graying of one's beard. (Dean Evangelista, Rockville)

Three crushed cloves of raw garlic, taken orally, make an effective contraceptive. (Deborah Guy, Columbus, Ohio)

Children have an adhesive substance below their epidermis, so that when a child ingests any liquid, a layer of sticky slime immediately spreads over his hands and arms. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

Before tonsils evolved, early man could not yodel. (Chuck Smith)

It is now considered unnecessary to wait 45 minutes after eating to go swimming. Scientific studies now show that 38 minutes is plenty. (Ben Schwalb)

Forty percent of frostbite victims who have lost their toes suffer from phantom lint. (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

Despite the various images in public service ads, your brain on drugs most closely resembles a lava lamp. (Russell Beland)

Within a month of being buried, all human eyeballs look true north. (Jeff Brechlin)

In many animal species, the only difference between males and females is that the females have long eyelashes. — W. Disney, Magic Kingdom (Mike Fransella, Arlington)

Next Week: Aw, Shocks or Fakin' by Surprise

**ONLINE DISCUSSION** Have a question about this week's contest? Or just want to talk about the Invitational in general? Join the new discussion group The Style Conversational, at [washingtonpost.com/styleconversational](http://washingtonpost.com/styleconversational). The Empress will weigh in with comments and replies during the week, and non-Empresses may talk among themselves.

**THIS WEEK'S CONTEST**



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Week 816: Googillions**

Susan Boyle, the latest Pussycat Doll: 4,910,000 hits  
 I want to pay Mayor Barry's taxes: 1,510,000 hits  
 Marriage is between a Republican and a Republican: 15,900,000 hits

We've done a contest for Googlewhacks — phrases that generate one Google hit. We've done Googlenopes — phrases that generate no Google hits. Now, per the suggestion of Inexorably Climbing Toward the Hall of Fame Loser Kevin Dopart, we're heading cautiously in the other direction. This week: Come up with an original phrase that generates at least 1 million listings on a Google search, as in the examples above. We don't want you to send in someone else's witty remark that's spread to a million Web sites. We're looking instead for something originally funny, ironic or at least remarkable in that it generates so many hits.

To accomplish this feat, it's best not to use quotation marks around the phrase you're searching for — it's fine (better!) if your phrase doesn't show up on the Google hits. The Empress just has to be able to feed your words into Google and see that two-comma number atop the page of search results.

Note: While it's not easy to come up with great entries for this contest, it is distressingly easy to come up with meh entries for this contest. So: **Do not submit more than 25 entries.**

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a fine volume that, if you hold your finger over one letter in the title, looks as if it's called "The Big As Book of Jokes." It's, well, a big book of jokes that actually are pretty mild; some of them wouldn't be out of place in Boys' Life. Donated jointly by Big Losers Beverley Sharp and Mae Scanlan.

**Other runners-up** win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or — it's back! — a Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (Fir Stink for their First Link). One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, May 18. Put "Week 816" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published June 6. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Beverley Sharp; the revised title for next week's results is by Chris Doyle.

**These Days, Small Towns Are Huge in Country Music**

SMALL TOWNS. From Page C1

tle Big Town, whose breakthrough single, "Boondocks," is about, well, growing up in the boondocks and being damn proud of it. And headliner Rodney Atkins, whose chart-toppers include "These Are My People," in which the singer from Cumberland Gap, Tenn., flies the flag for the rural South, declaring: "These are my people / This is where I come from."

"The essence of the song is that we're in this together," Atkins says in an interview. "That's what country music is; it's about giving folks something they can relate to, and it's about that sense of community. But it really doesn't matter where you're from."

No? So somebody who was born and raised in a big Northern city or suburb — like, say, Rockville, where country station WMZQ-FM is based — can relate?

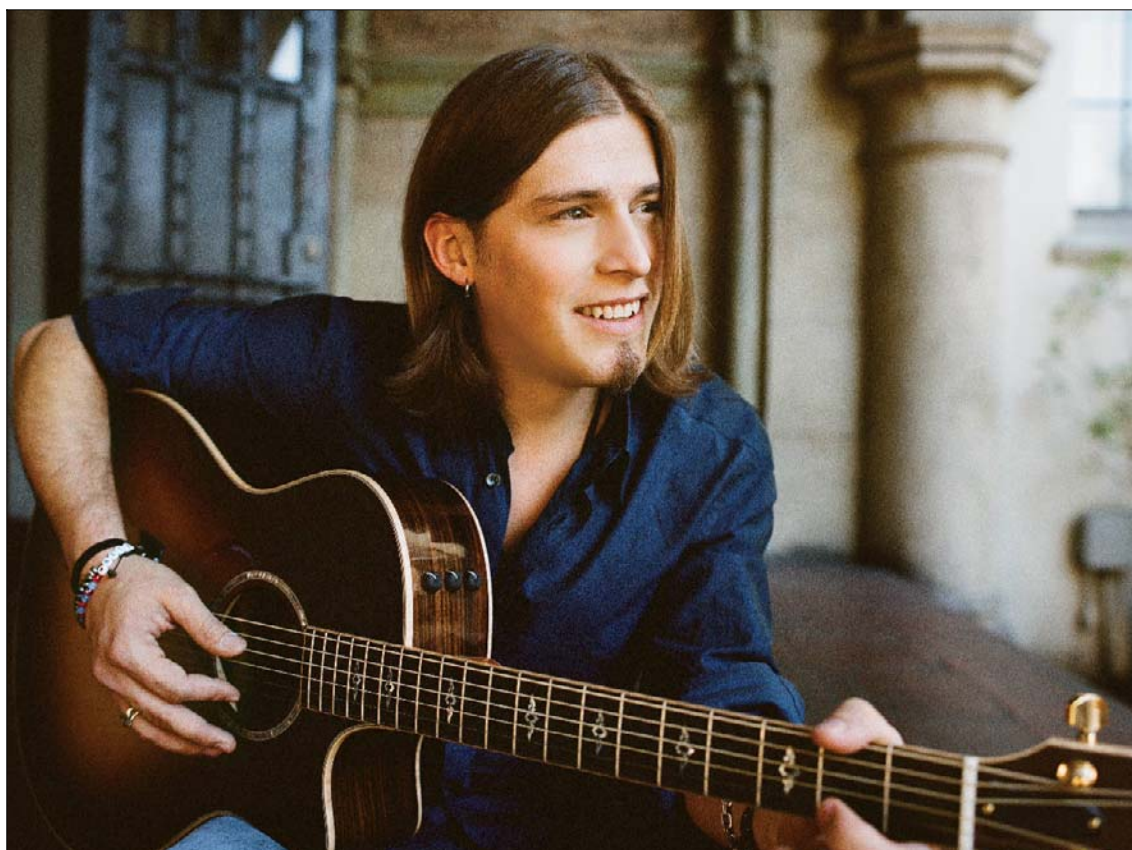
"Without a doubt," says Atkins, who argues that "These Are My People" includes some universally applicable lyrics and, therefore, is for everybody. (At least everybody who grew up down by the railroad tracks, shooting BBs at old beer cans, playing church-league softball and singing "loud and proud" to Lynyrd Skynyrd's Southern rock anthems.)

"The funny thing about it is that Rivers Rutherford was one of the songwriters on that, and he grew up in Memphis, which is a big city. He wrote it with a guy named Dave Berg, who grew up in Portland, Oregon. But they came up with a song that I could really relate to, and I grew up in a town of 1,500 people in East Tennessee."

Says Meg Stevens, the WMZQ program director: "It's a global theme: Wherever you're from, that's your place. You see what's happening with the economy and what's going on in the world, and people are getting in closer to their roots and their community, whether you're from rural Virginia or downtown D.C."

But the Atkins song and others of its ilk — from Jason Aldean's "Hicktown" and Miranda Lambert's "Famous in a Small Town" to Zac Brown Band's "Chicken Fried" and Josh Turner's "Way Down South" — are narrowcasting to a specific community: the core country audience, whose roots aren't exactly in America's urban centers.

The symbolism and prideful sentiments of the songs are intended to create a sense of belong-



BY DARRIN ANKENMAN

Jason Michael Carroll, who grew up on a tobacco farm in Youngsville, N.C., has a Top 20 hit with "Where I'm From."

ing among people with similar backgrounds and lifestyles, or at least people who romanticize life in the rural South. (It's not a place; it's a state of mind.) To some listeners, though, it might sound as if the artists are closing ranks.

"Some of these songs seem to fall into the 'we're from Real America, and you're not' camp," says Peter Cooper, who covers country music for Nashville's daily newspaper, the Tennessean. "Seems like being divisive while the industry around you crumbles is a poor decision."

Atkins' latest chart-topper, "It's America," is actually a more generalized celebration of nationalism via a checklist of all things Americana: a high school prom, a Springsteen song, a man on the moon, fireflies in June. But more typical of his fare is "About the South," which is exactly that, and "In the Middle," in which he sings of "a way of life worth fighting for."

Similarly, Eric Church isn't really aiming to be inclusive when he sings "to tell the truth, I think we're the chosen few" in "Hit 'Bout You," a boisterous 2006 hit about redneck living.

"It's putting the flag down, saying: 'Here's who we are,'" Church



BY SUSAN BIDDLE — THE WASHINGTON POST

"The essence of the song is that we're in this together," Rodney Atkins, who played at Merriweather Post Pavilion last year, says of "These Are My People."

says. Not unlike hip-hop, in other words, a genre in which artists repeatedly reference where they're from and with whom they're aligned as a means to establish their bona fides and, especially, connect with their tribes. (It's also not unlike the work of Bruce Springsteen or John Mellencamp, though their small-town rock songs tend to be darker and less idealistic than the recent offerings from Music Row.)

"It's like a political party: You have to understand and reach your base," says Church, who grew up in Granite Falls, N.C., population 4,612. "The majority of our base is Middle America, so we try to do songs about what Middle America thinks and feels. Which I understand, because I'm from a small town and I grew up that way, too. God was important, hard work was important, family, honesty, patriotism were impor-

tant. So you see those things in my music."

Church, of course, was hardly the first country artist to celebrate his rural roots and way of life. Alabama recorded more than a few songs about ... Alabama. The 1981 Hank Williams Jr. hit "A Country Boy Can Survive" is something like a field guide to Southern living.

More recently, the theme has been explored by the likes of Kenny Chesney, Tim McGraw and Alan Jackson, who has recorded multiple tributes to Georgia, including "Home" and "Where I Come From." Last year, Jackson reached No. 1 with "Small Town Southern Man," which celebrates the titular figure and all that he stands for.

The form isn't quite dominating country playlists, which continue to be filled with giddy love songs and bereft breakup ballads and songs about partying and parenthood and patriotism and such; but it's increasingly prevalent on the charts.

"It's become a staple of the format," Church says. "There always seems to be at least one on the radio. The one thing we really have to be careful of — and we're really bad at this in country music — is that it can become very cliché."

But that might have happened already. Says the Tennessean's Cooper: "While these songs' lyrics tend to celebrate the special and idiosyncratic nature of the rural South, the music itself is often as distinctive as the Applebee's restaurant out by the interstate that runs next to so many 'small towns.'"

Moore's "Small Town USA" doesn't exactly break new ground. But then, that wasn't the goal.

"It's just a heartfelt song about who Justin really is, and it has a great singalong melody on top of it," says Scott Borchetta, the label chief who signed Moore to Valory Music. "He's a great writer and singer who really flies the flag of being a small-town Southerner in a very natural way."

Earlier this year, the pride of Poyen returned home to film the video for "Small Town USA." It was quite the scene, Moore says.

"Talk about shuttin' a town down for a day. Rolled in there with a tour bus, a film crew and everythin'. Needless to say, that's about the biggest thing that's ever happened in Poyen, Arkansas."

He adds: "Everybody likes home and going home. Wherever it is."