

# Bless

YOUR

# Heart

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**M**y husband burned our house down. Seriously. He didn't do it on purpose, but he did it. And as thankful as I am that everybody got out OK—my husband burned our house down. It's a little cottage on the bay actually, down close to Grayton Beach, Florida, and while we planned to remodel in about a year, this was not the path I would have chosen to reach that goal. It's sort of like when you have a terrible stomach virus and realize you lost 10 pounds in three days.

This is a second home for us, and I wasn't there when the fire started. I do know that in my absence, he and our son built a fire in the fireplace and sat down to watch football. Five minutes later they were dialing 911 because the chimney was on fire. It quickly spread to the attic, and, sadly that was that. On my drive down the next day, I called to ask my husband which fire station showed up to fight the fire so I could drop off cookies or some sort of special treat. When he told me they all showed up, I didn't really know what he meant and thought he might have been confused. Then I saw the house. As I walked through the charred remains and stepped over huge piles of soaked insulation, drywall, and

muck, I was overwhelmed. I am still amazed that nobody got hurt. If you could have walked through the house, you would have been amazed too. I soon found out that all five fire stations in South Walton County did indeed show up that night—and one from North Walton, too. Those men battled that fire for over two hours in high winds and were not only able to put it out, but also kept it from spreading to the neighboring homes, which is a miracle.

The stairway in our home was lined with about a ba-jillion black and white photos dating all the way back to my parents' honeymoon on Myrtle Beach, and I want you to know that one of the firemen took the time to get every single one of them down and ferry them outside. He also ran through all of the bedrooms and grabbed any pictures he saw on bedside tables. While he was fighting a fire. In my house. At one point, when my husband saw the firemen putting on gas masks, he ran over to the fire chief and said, "This isn't worth anyone's life. Let it go." The chief said he was 45 seconds from letting it burn if they couldn't get it under control—but they did.

As the days and weeks since have passed, there's something that keeps popping into my

head. Those six fire trucks showed up, and all of those men went running into a burning house with no questions asked and no regard for their own personal safety. They didn't stop to ask if the owners were black or white. They didn't want to know where we went to church or what football team we pulled for. They didn't care who we voted for or about our views on immigration or gun control. They simply suited up and ran.

Now that we are in the process of tearing my sweet little cottage down to the studs, I have leaned heavily on my sense of humor these last few months, and my favorite part of the entire escapade is knowing that after calling 911, my son (who is 23) grabbed everyone's wallet, keys, cell phones, a charger, and the laptop. My husband (who's 53) grabbed the redfish he had caught that morning and a half gallon of Maker's Mark. Two days later we ate the fish that had been on ice since the fire, and we drank a toast to those firemen. There aren't enough cookies in the world to properly thank them for what they did for us—much less what they do every single day—and I firmly believe if we could all learn to act a little bit more like them, we really could put out a lot of senseless fires.

