

Dearest Martha,

For all of my married life, 21 years, you have been an inspiration to me. You have given me the courage to strive for a more rich and fruitful home. My home has been a sanctuary to me for all of these years. Living in California, I have been quite the anomaly: canning, knitting, gardening, cooking only from scratch. Frequently I get the, "Okay Martha," response from my sister.

My family has had quite a setback in the past several weeks. A raging wildfire has taken our house and most of our neighborhood, 63 houses in all. The fire is now known as the 49er Fire. It has been a huge reset button on my family's life. We are, as a community, coming together to rebuild.

The reason that I am writing you, is to let you know how one of your products has like a phoenix, risen from the ashes. Your Enameled Cast Iron Dutch Oven has become a great source of entertainment, and hope for myself and all of my friends.

The morning of the fire, as always, I awoke and started dreaming of what to make for Sunday dinner. Baked beans and Cornbread. Of course I was excited to use my brand new Dutch Oven, used only three times before. After a very hectic morning, I finally put the beans in the oven. Having made plans to meet a friend at the movies, I asked my husband Dave to carefully stir the in two hours, and not to worry, I will be home in time before they are done.

While we were in the movie the fire started. It started about two miles away from our house, and with the high winds it marched through commercial and residential areas causing great destruction. Our subdivision was decimated. Our cul-de-sac had ten houses, only two houses survived. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has declared it a disaster. It was a horrific scene, people ran for their lives. Luckily my husband was home. He was able to get himself, the dog, turtle and laptop out in one piece. There were no lives lost or injuries.

Back to the beans. When my son Adam and I left the movies our lives were surely about to be changed. During a flurry of receiving phone messages and seeing the great plume of black smoke I got in contact with Dave. He then informed me that the house was most likely gone and ..... the beans were probably done. Both of course were true.

That night as we started to come to grips with the situation, the beans started to be a great source of hilarity in our family and on facebook even more. My friends and family were shocked by our situation and so worried. The enormity of the situation was somehow softened by the strange conversations about the beans. We all found it comforting and hilarious thinking about the beans sitting, waiting for us in the oven. Done.

The next night when we were allowed to go back to the house it was a war zone. Devastation. Shock. News Cameras. Clergy. The news cameras were hovering over people going back to their homes, trying to document the gravity of the situation. Our family was not on the news that night, laughter was not what the media was looking for. Hilarity! My dutch oven was the pretty blue, amazingly still blue. As we looked at what was left, bent metal, and ash, and the beans sitting so prettily in the oven, which had the glass completely broken out. The beautiful Martha Stewart blue was the only bit of color in the austere environment of our neighborhood. Stunning!

The pictures that we took of the beans we posted on my facebook account. The jokes still keep on coming. I am very surprised how far and wide the pictures and the story of the beans have spread. When we found out that the governor had actually visited my neighborhood, all I could think of was if only I had gotten a picture of him with the beans. The pot is now at our rental and will assume a place of honor at the house when we rebuild. It is legendary for making our darkest hour a little brighter. Thank you.

Thank you for all that you do to make us a little more aware that our homes are there for our

enjoyment and fulfillment. I look forward to rebuilding and starting my nesting all over again. My vegetable garden, fruit trees, canning, etc.. will continue. We will thrive. I now have even more of a reason to watch and read everything Martha, new house to build.

On one last note. I would like to be control group A in the effects of your cast iron in an extremely hot fire. Here are the results:

1. Cast iron- Fine, not bent or melted.
2. Plastic knob on lid- Not recommended. Melted to nothing.
3. Interior enamel- Did not survive.
4. Exterior enamel- Spectacular! Almost the same as before fire. Remarkable!!!

Thank you so much, I admire and respect you.

Noelle Mays