

-Country Philosopher-

Ordeal by fire

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Our systems are filled with various values, and these values have a decided intensity based on whether they stem from the conscious or the subconscious. We know that those things we esteem would never be delegated to some remote crevice of the subconscious, but would be brightly visible with each pulsating awareness.

But this truth, to me, became somewhat tainted yesterday when an occurrence transpired that left me bewildered and confused.

I love my wife. She is an intriguing wisp of magic... a bountiful treasure of warm fulfillment... a precious oasis in the daily turmoil of life. She brings to me the music of happiness... the thunder of passion... and the enchantment of love. She is the essence of my thoughts and the power of my dreams. And without reservation... without hesitation... I claim her to be my number one reason for existing.

I would become violently angry if anyone suggested I trade my wife for a tennis racquet. I would die in astounded mirth if someone suggested swapping my wife for an old Caruso record. After all, she is my value here on earth.

But yesterday morning my house caught fire.

I had gotten up rather early. My wife was still sleeping and I thought it would be nice if I fixed us both a breakfast. I went into the kitchen and put the coffee on. I threw strips of bacon in the frying pan and stuck some rolls in the oven. The aroma in that kitchen was heavenly and I thought of my wife's delight when I gently kissed her, and said, "Honey, breakfast is ready."

I don't know exactly how it happened. I was reaching for a spatula when I accidentally upset the frying pan. The grease immediately ignited and in a fraction of a second the

kitchen wall was engulfed in flames.

Our lives teem with difficulties... with trials... and tragic circumstances. But it is seldom that we are faced with a critical emergency. And in an emergency we all react with a certain degree of proficiency. These are the times when we prove our resourcefulness and give testimony to the value of our character.

As soon as I saw the flames I ran into the dining room. I knew that I must act swiftly if I were to save the valuable things in my house. I brilliantly deduced that it would be physically impossible to pick up my new refrigerator. I couldn't even save the beautiful sofa that had been given to me by the women in my neighborhood. There was no way I could remove the ten foot statue of Robert E. Lee that graced my living room.

GOOD LORD! MY CARUSO RECORD!

I dashed frantically through the house, through the smoke filled hall, up the stairs past tiny fingers of flame, and into the den. Half-blinded by the dense smoke, burned upon the feet and hands, I grabbed my precious Caruso record and leaped out the window.

I placed the Caruso record on the ground and stood watching the fire. What other thing was in that house that I would risk my life for? What wonderful thing could I not live without?

GREAT SCOTT! MY TENNIS RACQUET!

I leaped back into the house... past the roaring flames... and grabbed the tennis racquet that was placed beneath the attic steps. Coughing and

hacking I stumbled outside and placed the tennis racquet beside the Caruso record.

Tears filled my eyes. Not tears of remorse or anguish, but tears of happiness because I had overcome the fire and saved those things most precious to me. All the other things... the drapes and furniture... the silver... were meaningless and expendable. But I had, with courage and fortitude, saved those things most

dear to me. I picked up my Caruso record and my tennis racquet and caressed them with love. With those two things I would start life anew and very quickly replace those material things that I had lost.

I felt elated with the fact that although catastrophe had come crashing down upon my head... still... I had acted with great dispatch and clarity of reasoning. Hell! I had even shown a courage I hadn't thought I possessed. Because out of that entire house... with all those mini-

treasures... I had saved the most precious of them all.

My eyes went slowly over my burning house and my surveillance stopped as I came to the roof. Something caught my eye that made me somewhat ashamed of myself and made a farce of my Caruso record and my tennis racquet.

For dangling, in absolute terror, from the T.V. antenna was something that I had entirely overlooked.

My wife.