



BLESS YOUR HEART

By Lisa Printz Roday

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“Bless your heart” was not a phrase I had ever heard during the 38 years I’d grown up and lived in New York. But when I moved to the South several decades ago, it was one I encountered the very first day I arrived.

At the time, I assumed that if someone blessed my heart, they intended to wish me well. I now appreciate that there are at least five meanings, three of which are unkind. After hearing it used in many different situations, I feel like the generally accepted and context dependent meanings are:

1. I feel truly sorry for you, so I brought you a covered dish.
2. I’m too polite to say what I’m really thinking.
3. I’m praying for you.
4. I don’t give a hoot about you or what you just said.
5. I think you are the most pathetic thing on two legs and the worst part is, you have no idea.

We lived in the South for all of two days when I dropped my sons for their first day of kindergarten and first grade at their new school, a private K-12 college preparatory school. Dressed in a tank top and elastic waistband sweat shorts, I had deliberately parked rather than driven through the carpool line, excited to meet other parents.

The gaggle of Lilly Pulitzer lookalikes gathered under a magnolia tree stopped their conversation as I approached. No stranger to being a stranger, I mustered an enthusiastic, “hi” and identified myself. In her lovely Southern accent, one pretty brunette said, “You haven’t even had time to unpack your things! Bless your heart.”

What she really meant was, “the only reason you would show up at this fancy private school looking like you just finished your morning run is that you literally had nothing else to put on.”

But at the time, the sarcasm was lost on me, and I forged ahead asking for recommendations for pediatricians, dentists, and hairdressers. One of the

women in the group offered, "Jon Allan and Associates is the best in town. Just leave it to Jon. He'll know how to get those curls under control. It's this humidity," she said, obviously mistaking my naturally curly hair as a problem rather than as one of my favorite personal features. "Bless your heart," she added.

Hmm, there it was again, I thought to myself. No sooner had the thought entered my mind when I was interrupted by another perfectly coiffed, impeccably dressed woman who introduced herself as the "Chair of the New Parent Luncheon" and handed me a tastefully designed invitation.

I scanned the card:

Please join us
for the New Parent Luncheon
Tuesday, August __ at 12:30 pm
At
CCD

That was it...three initials, no address. Set me loose in the concrete jungle of Midtown Manhattan and I could find my way anywhere. Here in my new "home" town, how was I supposed to know who or what CCD was, let alone where he/she/it was located?

I stammered a thank you. "The afternoon dress code at the Club is golf attire or country club casual," said Curl Killer helpfully. I smiled with gratitude. I was married to a scratch golfer; I understood the dress code.

I asked nonchalantly, "Where is The Club?"

"You *are* new to town, aren't you?" said Luncheon Chair. "Bless your heart. Why don't I pick you up at your place at 12:15?" she offered. We were living in temporary housing nearly 30 minutes from school and it seemed

to me to be an incredible inconvenience to someone who had so kindly just blessed my heart.

“Thanks, but if you could just email me the address, that would be great,” I replied, thinking I could easily have found it without sounding like such a.....newcomer.... if only I knew what the initials stood for!

A few days later, both of my kids got a stomach bug, my husband had to leave town for a conference, and I still hadn’t contacted a pediatrician. I called the school nurse.

“We aren’t supposed to favor one doctor over another. But you are in such a fix, bless your heart. Call this number and ask for Sheila. Tell her I sent you,” she said, sounding as sincere as could be, like she really was praying for me.

Later that afternoon, after successfully scoring an appointment thanks to my “in” with Sheila, I was doing the third laundry of the day when the doorbell rang. There stood Curl Killer, smiling sweetly. “I heard you are having such a time,” she drawled.

“Wait for it,” I thought.

“And with your husband away and those poor sweet angel babies being sick. Well, bless your heart. I fixed you something for dinner. You don’t want to get all run down and sick yourself, now do you, bless your heart?”

My first twofer!

Two days later, both kids were fever free and green-lighted for school. It was the day of the New Parent’s Luncheon, and I carefully selected a flattering skort and matching golf shirt.

I drove confidently up to the valet stand, put the car in park, smiled at the valet who opened my door with an enthusiastic, “Welcome to CCD” and strode through the front doors. I was greeted by dozens of clusters of

balloons with the school logo on them, tethered by ribbons in the school's colors.

A uniformed butler appeared and said, "The pro shop is down the hall and to your right."

"Oh, no. Thank you, but I'm here for the New Parent's Lunch," I replied.

He eyed me carefully and seemed to be mulling over what to say. He settled on, "right this way," and escorted me into a dining room filled with slim, attractive women with perfect hair and flawless makeup dressed in smart sleeveless shifts and white slacks with flowing silk blouses.

"Well bless my heart," I thought.

Author's Note: This piece is not meant to diminish the overwhelming majority of people who have "blessed my heart" with the most sincere and well-meaning intentions and for all of you, I am grateful.