

# Seattle Post-Intelligencer



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## Inspiration grounded in a cup of divine intervention

By Mary Swift, P-I Columnist

At the risk of public censure, let me share a not-so-well-kept secret: I don't drink coffee.

Can't stand it -- not with milk, not with sugar, not with any of the myriad flavorings that get tossed into coffee around the Northwest.

My late father was appalled. Coffee was sacred to him. He drank his hot, black and naked (the coffee, that is, not my father). The thought of adding sugar or cream seemed a sacrilege to him. Ditto the idea of adding flavorings.

That I drank no coffee in any form undoubtedly made me his gravest disappointment.

But he would have liked Leslie Armstrong, an art teacher at Kentwood High School who loves coffee the way some of us love chocolate.

She likes it so much that she's even taken to using it as a "wash" for her paintings.

Credit creativity combined with a cup of coffee gone cold.

It happened at an art educators conference, she says.

"We were playing around with different 'washes,' using tea," she says.

"I decided to try using my coffee."

And having tried it, she found she liked it.

So when members of St. John the Baptist Church in Covington recently decided to sell Pura Vida coffee (produced by a fair trade roasting company) to raise money for their Guatemala mission, Armstrong offered to donate "coffee paintings" to decorate the display table.

"There were photos of some of the people who worked growing the coffee," she said. "I thought I'd do some paintings of them -- kind of put a 'face' on coffee."

Enter Dan Lee, organizer of the church's "Night Of Inspiration," an annual event designed to help the congregation find ways to make the world better.

The scheduled speaker was former TV newscaster and foreign correspondent Margaret Larson, who serves on the board of Global Partnerships, a not-for-profit that provides micro loans to poor women in Central America.

Lee asked Armstrong to do a coffee painting of Larson to give her as a thank you gift. Armstrong received photos of Larson, including one of her with her arm around a young Guatemalan woman. That was the photo Armstrong chose.

Meanwhile, Lee obtained a video of a local TV station report featuring Larson. It tracked a small donation from Seattle schoolchildren to a Guatemalan woman who used it to start her own beauty salon. Lee wanted to use it as an introduction for Larson's "Night of Inspiration" speech.

But he and Armstrong only got a chance to watch the video just a week before the event, once the painting was done and framed.

When she saw the video, "my jaw dropped," she says.

"The woman in the video was the same woman I'd chosen to paint."

As the "Night of Inspiration" came to an end, Armstrong removed the covering from the painting. Larson gasped, then clutched her chest, her eyes damp.

"How did you know?" she whispered to Armstrong as she accepted the painting.

"Until last week, I didn't," Armstrong told her.

Choosing to paint the same woman in the TV report -- without knowing the connection -- was more than coincidence, Lee thinks.

"(It's) God's fingerprint on this event," he says.

The event raised more than \$4,800 in donations, which were split between St. John the Baptist's Guatemala mission and Global Partnerships.