

In the Midst of the Storm

"The Art Center is having a contest," Sue Rhine bit her lip and offered Larry the crumpled flyer. "They're looking for a painting of the 'Essence of Peace'. First prize is 10,000 dollars. Tightening his jaw, Larry Rhine hissed through clenched teeth, "That's stupid; how can you paint peace?" Larry had been in a funk since his parent's fatal car crash three months before. Consumed by anger and doubt, he blamed God.

"You're a good painter, Larry. You have to get out of this mood. We can't live this way. I just thought maybe this would help," Larry ignored Sue's monotone whisper. "How can I paint peace when I don't even know what it is?" He slammed the door so hard a cup fell off the counter. With sagging shoulders, Sue rested her chin on her fist using the sofa as her altar.

"Father, Larry is in such pain. I know he still loves you. Help him. This darkness is killing us. Please give him peace. Thank You.:

In the garage, Larry paced, clenching his fists. I don't care what anyone says. They didn't deserve it. They were faithful to God and he didn't protect them. How can I have peace if I can't trust God with my own parents? He stopped pacing and spoke to God for the first time in months. "God, I don't want to go to hell so I'll serve you, even if I can't trust you."

He went into the bedroom where Sue was reading her Bible. "I'll do it." Raising one eyebrow, he almost smiled. "Who knows, with luck I might win." Shrugging, he turned to leave, "Besides, we can use the money." Larry painted for six days. Sue was delighted. She noticed a gradual change in him since he started working. The depression cloud was dissipating; he was softening, and even smiled occasionally. He was more preoccupied than normal, but at least he wasn't brooding. Always private, he was being almost tight-lipped, even hiding the canvas from Sue's curious eyes. When he finished he drove to the Art Center and entered it into the contest.

The following Friday night they were to announce the winners at an open house. He was handsome in his tuxedo. Larry looked young for forty. Sue wore an exquisite blue floor length gown with a low cut back, the pearls Larry gave her for their tenth anniversary, and matching heels. She pinned her long, blond hair in a tight bun at the nape of her neck with a pearl studded clip. On the way to the Art Center Larry squeezed her hand. "God and I've been talking for the past few days. He used this painting to show me how to find peace. We're ok now." That is all he said, but for Sue it was enough. The gallery was full of mingling art patrons. Muffled conversation filled the large room. A large woman in her seventies stepped to the microphone clearing her throat. Greeting the assembly, she droned on about the Arts. Finally, she was ready to make the anticipated announcement. "Third place, for 2,500 dollars, goes to Geoffrey Lindale for his, Morning Meadow." Trees, flowers, and butterflies covered the canvas, tranquil in understated beauty. The peace nearly drew you into the painting. You could almost smell the flowers and feel the soft breeze coming from Morning Meadow. "Second place, for 5,000, goes to Mitzy Douglas for her, Lion and the Lamb. The king of the jungle laid quietly, his large head resting beside a soft, white lamb. They were nestled together in peaceful slumber, without a care in the world. Peace radiated from the near embrace of these natural enemies. "And our 10,000 dollar, first place winner is Larry Rhine for his, In the Midst of the Storm." The eagle's nest was perched on the edge of a ten-thousand foot cliff. A storm raged, threatening to destroy everything in its path, with lightening, thunder, and treacherous winds. Two tiny eaglets slept soundly, snuggled in the soft down taken from their mothers breast. Their parents sat close by watching over them. Oblivious to the danger around them, these eagle fledglings knew only contentment and trust. Larry took the microphone. "God promised us that he'll never give us more than we can bear. As long as we're in this body we'll have storms, even then our spirit can still find peace. I forgot that for a while. But God reminded me he's always there, even In the Midst of the Storm."

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About the Author

Dr. Sharon Schuetz is an ordained minister and holds a BA in Religious Education and a PhD in Clinical Counseling Psychology. She and her husband, Michael, have been married for 33 years. They have three children and seven grandchildren. Like most writers, she has loved writing since she was a child.