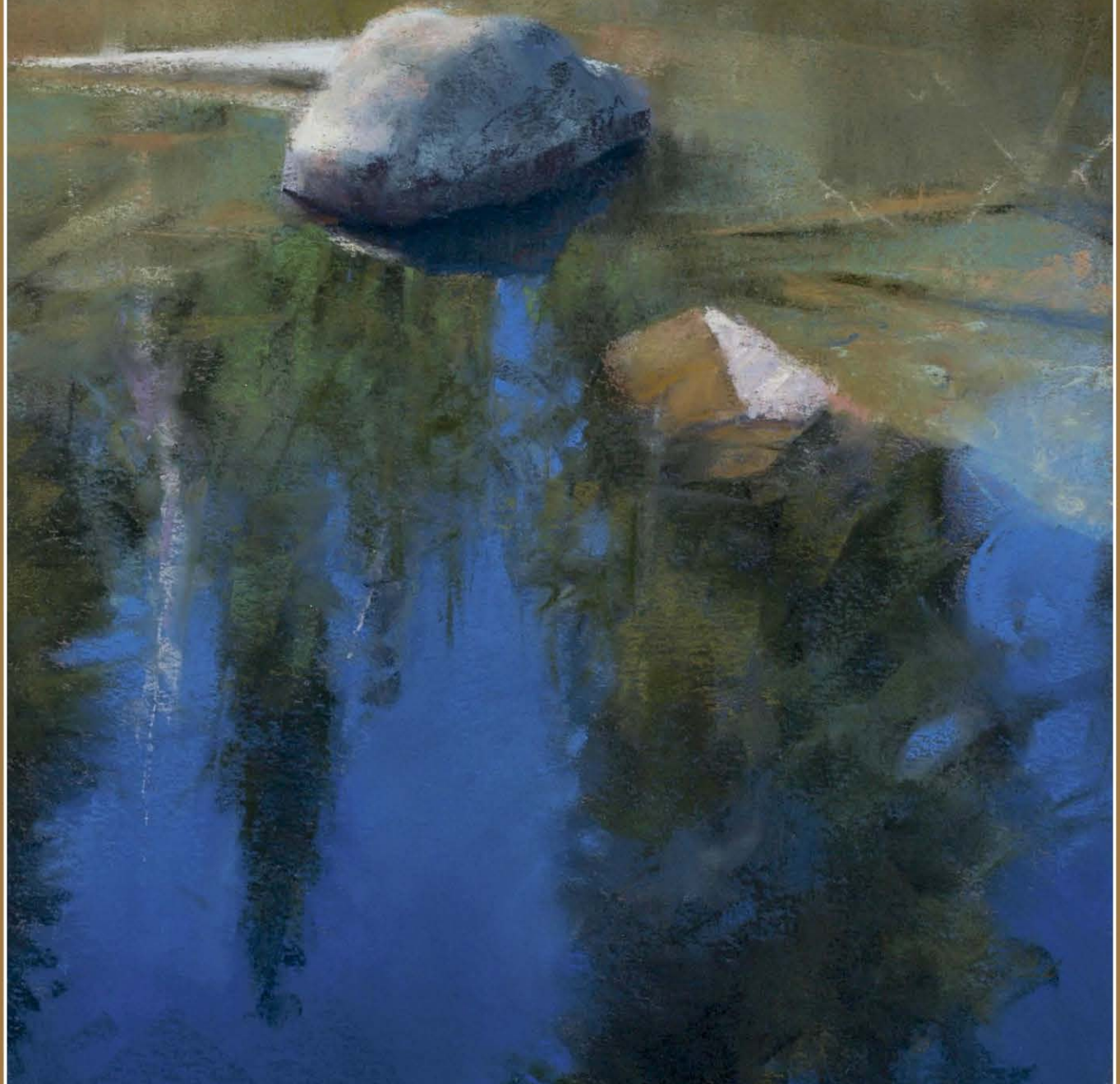


THE EAST BAY MONTHLY

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The King of Crayons

Bryan Ware puts recycled crayons into the hands of hospitalized kids.

Five years ago, Bryan Ware was enjoying a dinner at a joint that provided his two sons with crayons for drawing on their paper placemats—a prerequisite for all family restaurants these days. A manufacturing consultant, the Danville resident was curious about what happened to the crayons. Because they can transmit germs, they are typically tossed in the trash after one use. That got Ware thinking there had to be a way to recycle the 75,000 or so pounds of crayons—not just from restaurants, but schools and homes as well—that end up in landfills annually. And so he started melting down pots full of old crayons and got a physical therapist pal to design a mold to make a thicker crayon easier for children in hospitals to grip. Ware began distributing the recycled crayons to hospitals and schools for free and established The Crayon Initiative.

The organization has gained a lot of media attention and created a ton of good vibes. It's also experiencing some growing pains.

Paul Kilduff: When you think of where crayons end up after their life cycle, you probably conclude they just end up in a landfill. But they don't even biodegrade, right?

Bryan Ware: Nope.

PK: That's not good.

BW: Yeah, it's a petroleum-based product, so it just sits there. If you wanted to dig it up 100 years from now, it would look like a crayon.

PK: Today, just about everybody has a bin or cart for recycling, compost, and the landfill. Would you like to see a crayon bin or box?

BW: I don't think we'll get to the box at the curb. I do believe, and it's something that's being worked on, that there will be local drop-offs—I don't want to name any names, but a local chain store of some kind across the entire country. That becomes the community drop-off. Just bring it there, and we'll get it from them.

PK: To determine the new crayon's colors, do you sort them by color and then add more color?

BW: No, there is enough color left in all of them. We basically break it down into 10 buckets: red, orange, yellow, blue, green, purple, pink, white, black, and everything else. When I say blue, if it's sky blue, navy blue, more blue than green blue-green, it goes in blue. It all mixes together, and you get a good uniform blue color. We separate out whites because restaurants are very heavy in the primary colors, so if we need to make pink, we can take a lot of the reds that we have and mix it with white.

PK: Are you creating new colors?

BW: Yeah. We're not Crayola. You're going to get a red crayon.

Is it crimson red every single time? No, it's red. The ones that change the most really are pink. There's some variation in the pink and yellow because it's so light; sometimes it's a little darker or muted than a bright yellow when you look at it. When you actually color with it, it's a pretty good yellow.

PK: Are you doing this out of your house?

BW: Yes.

PK: Wow. How long?

BW: Actually manufacturing, we're about 18 months in.

PK: Are you thinking about moving into a warehouse?

BW: Yes, very much so. We've actually been trying since November, and we've had four fall through. We have several that we're looking at

been a very poor response from individuals. I was expecting a lot more people to get involved from a financial perspective, and I'm not talking big money. We've reached out on Facebook. We have 38,000 followers. If each one gave us \$5, we'd have enough to operate for the next six to 12 months. That's all we're asking for. I'm not asking you to write a \$1,000 check. I'm asking you to write a \$5 check.

PK: People understand recycling paper, cans, and bottles. Is it a stretch for them to think in terms of crayons?

BW: Yes, until a year ago. Now we're getting crayons from individuals every day of the week. We get envelopes that have literally five crayons that somebody didn't want to throw away to a box load, to 'Hey, I went and asked some of my neighbors, so now we have this big box.'

PK: You would think that one of the big crayon companies would want to be involved with what you're doing.

BW: We're not taking away from their sales. We rely on their sales, because that's where we get our crayons. To me, it's a no-brainer. Just from a PR perspective, I think would be huge for them.

PK: Every industry has a trade association, so there's probably the American Crayon Institute or something like that. You need to go to their convention in Sarasota, Fla., or wherever, and do a little dog-and-pony show. Have a few drinks with some guy from Crayola, and there you go. A little free advice.

BW: Thanks.

PK: Can anyone do what you're doing at home?

BW: Here's the problem: Each of the molds that we use for production costs \$10,000 apiece.

PK: Really?

BW: Yeah. They're big machines. It's an injection-molded mold. It weighs 300 pounds, made of machined steel; lasts forever. The second thing is now that school's out, I get 1,500 to 2,000 pounds of crayons each week on my doorstep.

PK: What does your wife think?

BW: She's very supportive. She loves me a whole lot. She understands the mission. She understands why I'm doing it. She also understands at some point she needs to put a little pressure on. 'That space would be a very good thing. If you need to go get another storage unit, you need to go get one.'

For more Kilduff, visit the "Kilduff File Super Fan Page" on Facebook.



BRYAN WARE VITAL STATS

Age: 44 | Birthplace: Buffalo, N.Y.
Astrological Sign: Virgo
Motto: "Failure isn't an option." "There's always a better way to do something."
Website: TheCrayonInitiative.org

right now, but hopefully one of them comes through very quickly. I spend four hours a week on the floor taping up and packing boxes to be shipped out. If we had the space, we have hundreds and hundreds of volunteers that want to help us; it's just counterproductive to come to the house.

PK: You're relying a lot on donations, of not just crayons but also money to do this. How does that work?

BW: Right now, it's fully reliant on donations. We sell nothing to the hospital; we're a 501(c)(3). It's fully supported by that influx of cash and crayons from donors. My family and I have put a lot of money into it.

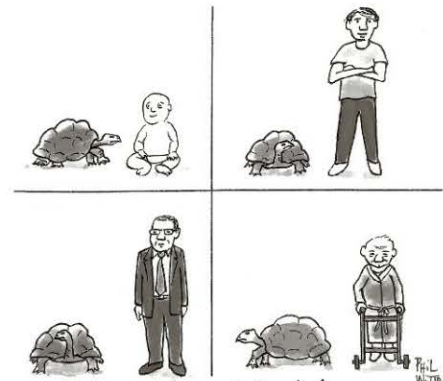
PK: You've put in \$30,000, right?

BW: Keep going.

PK: More than that?

PK: About four times more?

BW: Yeah. It's something that I believe in. We are looking at different revenue streams as we move forward, because, quite frankly, it's



Bill and his pet tortoise

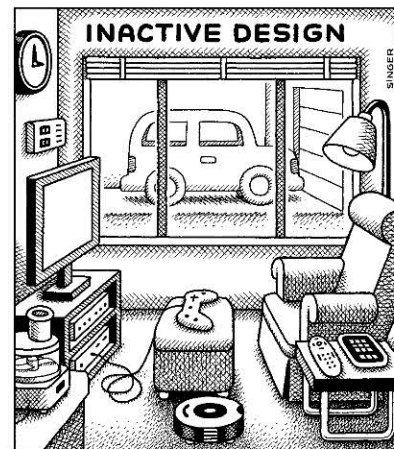
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