



Lowell artist Ed Bray has held several odd jobs to support what he truly loves to do.

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## 10 QUESTIONS WITH ...

Lowell artist Ed Bray

# Still looking for a big break

By Jennifer Myers  
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**LOWELL** — Ed Bray has been a truck driver, a sheetrocker, a roofer. He has worked in a warehouse, a supermarket and at a gas station. He has delivered coffee and cooked in a deli — all to support his art.

Ed Bray is an illustrator. It is not an easy life, living for your art. It can be lonely and disheartening, but it is what he has to do.

"I draw. That is who I am," says Bray, 36, recently laid off as a box truck driver for a coffee company. "I do what I can to make a living and still have time for my art."

He grew up in Canton, and graduated with a degree in illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design. He works in pencil, marker and watercolor. His watercolor landscapes of the Midwest have been exhibited at the Fuller Museum in Brockton.

Commercially, he has done work for a number of clients including Wells Fargo Bank, Wilson Leather, Twenty-First Century Software, Harvard Business School, and Arthur's Paradise Diner among others.

Bray landed in Lowell five years ago and is a member of the Arts League of Lowell. He recently completed a 2010 calendar of illustrations of Lowell.

**Q: What is your first art-related memory?**

A: I had a one-man show in 1977 as a preschooler,

with my drawings hanging in the hallways. I also drew a late '60s model Volkswagen bug when I was a kid that was featured in an anthology.

**Q: What did you do after art school?**

A: I took off from New England in 1997 and went to Minneapolis because my brother was getting married out there. I just threw everything in my van and started from scratch. Most of the guys I grew up with were into drugs and were out of control. I needed to get away from the South Shore and get a fresh start.

**Q: What did you do in Minnesota?**

A: I started breaking into the commercial art field doing drawings of luggage. A courier would fill my apartment with luggage. I would draw it all and then the courier would come back and take them away. It was a good gig to have. I was drawing the luggage for the tags on bags for Wilson Leather. So, I'd be in an airport and see my work on someone's luggage tag, which is very cool.

**Q: How did you land in Lowell?**

A: I missed New England and, honestly, I was crazy about a girl that was here. That didn't work out but here I am. Lowell is affordable and has a decent art scene. I think the city is great. I love the history of the textile mills and what has been done to refurbish the old buildings. In Brockton they made shoes and in Canton we had a rubberband factory, but the South Shore just doesn't

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# Lowell artist Ed Bray is still looking for that big break

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seem to bring in the money that Lowell has to upgrade the cities.

**Q: Why are artists drawn to Lowell?**

A: A lot has to do with the history. Old buildings and bridges are very appealing to artists for some reason. I think it is because it is part of

a vanishing America. I did a lot of work on that theme in the Midwest, drawing old farms with falling-down barns and houses, a vanishing America. It tells a story.

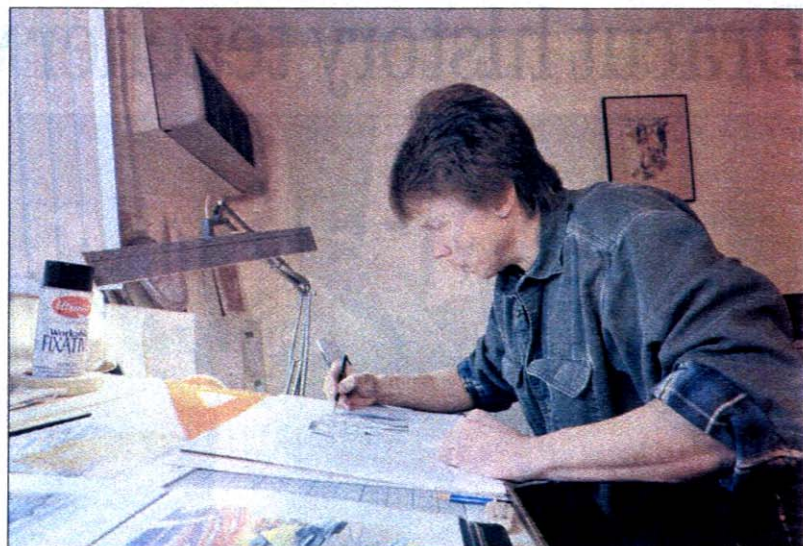
**Q: What is your favorite subject to draw?**

A: I like the vanishing America theme — the old buildings. I like to draw people, features and emotion and

trying to accurately capture a likeness is difficult. I used to draw 20-minute portraits at carnivals and fairs and actually had a gig at the Harvard Business School working in the president's backyard drawing portraits of alumni's kids. Drawing the mouth is difficult. And the eyes, like they say, they are the windows to the soul and getting them right brings out the emotion.

**Q: How has technology changed the business?**

A: There is a computer program called Maya, which is a 3D program that is replacing hand-drawn figures. In the business of drawing storyboards, some of the best in the business won't be working anymore. Some work is also being outsourced to China and other



Lowell artist Ed Bray says his dream job would be to work in-house for an advertising agency. But he said such jobs are hard to find because agencies only commit to candidates they're convinced can bring in big money.

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countries. Storyboards are one of the last drawing gigs that is really drawing instead of tracing over projected pictures, which was done a lot on the

'70s. It is a lonely business you don't meet with people anymore, you don't take art directors out to lunch anymore, everything is done over e-mail. I am a people person.

**Q: What is the strangest job you've been offered?**

A: I was on the street doing a job for Boston Brake and Tune-Up on Dorchester Avenue in Boston and a guy came up to me with a picture of one of his relatives in a casket and asked me to draw it for him. That's pretty weird.

**Q: What would be your dream job?**

A: I would love to work in-house for an ad agency. I could learn so much by being in-house. That would be my dream gig. When I was doing a job for an agency in Maine for

Colonial Life, I hand-delivered my drawings and begged them for a job, but these places don't want to take someone on and have to pay benefits. It would be really great to get an agent. It is hard to get one because they won't sign you if they don't think you can bring them big money.

**Q: Who are your favorite artists?**

A: John Singer Sargent, Norman Rockwell, Robert Fawcett, Bernie Fuchs. When I was in art school, I was going to be the next Bernie Fuchs. They all really knew how to draw, they understood design and composition, which a lot of artists don't today. Plus, they had really great names.

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