It's amazing what a little encouragement can do.

A few months ago, several of us at the paragraph/byte factory received an email from the publicist for Rochester Contemporary's 6x6, asking if we'd consider submitting up to four pieces of artwork. "Artwork" was loosely defined, and when I replied that I can't draw a stick figure, I got back, "you can make a word collage."

I once worked with an editor who liked to say, "Paint me some word pictures." I used to think that meant flowery writing, and I can't draw those, either.

I thought for weeks about what I could do that wouldn't embarrass me -- even though 6x6 is anonymous. Unless someone bought what I did, no one would ever know I'd taken part. Not like writing, where every article bears my name. (I did not submit the accompanying picture.)

Finally, I went to the art store near the office. I gave the woman who greeted me my disclaimer about the stick figures and she pish-poshed me. "Everyone can do art," she said. "You just haven't exercised those muscles."

Being a physical person, I liked that image. So I told her my plans and she showed me what I'd need. She was so encouraging that I left almost in tears at the possibility of discovering something new about myself.

That night, I did my first drawing. I flashed back to junior high art class and for the first time appreciated how some kids felt during gym. But I told myself that the Impressionists, post-Impressionists and Modernists already broke the rules. So I had really couldn't do anything wrong. And who was I doing this for? Me. So it would be right.

The next night, I did another, the third night, another. I've drawn at least one thing every day since. I'm working on a theme, which I get from my hikes. Before breakfast, spending a few minutes with crayons puts me in a good frame of mind and before bed, combining colors with swirls and lines relaxes me for sleep.
From word pictures to the real thing: One of Patti Singer's crayon drawings, this one inspired by memories of a spring drive in the country but all made possible by the encouragement of clerk in a downtown art store. (Photo: Patti Singer/@PattiSingerRoc)

Every time I sit down, open the box of crayons and put a clean square paper in front of me, I hear Sally from the art store and think about how the possibility and positive words create a powerful picture.

**Patti Singer (/staff/3013/patti-singer)**

Clean living reporter: This is about all aspects of health -- physical, mental, social, spiritual and environmental -- that can make this community healthier. It's about providing information, education and inspiration so you can be healthier. Clean Living helps you understand what affects your health and what you can do improve your health and that of your family. When you can't do it alone, Clean Living explains how to use the health care system to deliver quality care at an affordable price. I've
been a reporter for most of my 30 years at the Democrat and Chronicle. I've written news and features, and covered sports, fitness and travel. Since 2009, I've covered health and health care from the patient's perspective. I'm a certified personal trainer and I hold a master's degree in health education.

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