

January 15, 2005
Cape May

Writing prompt from object – Origami crane

The origami book couldn't have been longer than 30 pages, and even twenty years ago, its crisp newsprint pages were yellowing. It was green and purple – garish shades that evoked Japanese secrets to us children. The folded owl on the cover looked incredibly complex. He loomed over the smaller critters, the ones with instructions actually found in the book. We could only aspire to figure out the mystery of the Owl after years of intensive folding paper practice, perhaps through the patient mentoring of a wizened Origami guru.

I must have discarded my memory of the book's bright paper samples as quickly as that paper itself. I only recall our later creative medium, newsprint. This was an endlessly renewable resource in our house. Newsprint – instigator of hundreds of knee-high smudges on run-past quickly-smacked walls.

First it was hats. Pirate captains of sofa-cushion sloops and the newly-cushionless sofa ships themselves. Maybe all the captaining gave me my fill of hats, since I never desired even a baseball cap when I got older. Like we all have a lifetime allotment of headwear, and I devoured my rations too early.

Next came the paper swords, a brief phase that accompanied the pirate hats well. But after minor injuries befell my sister and me, the sword concept was quickly extinguished – a command on high from two tall, superior officers. So next the book spat out frogs. Origami frogs! Even now, I could rip out this sheet in a fit of wistful exuberance and fold it into proper hopping formation. Ah – the ingenuity of the ancient Orient – they actually hopped! Thus was born years of jumping contests fierce enough to make even the celebrated Mark Twain jealous.

The folding sprees are some of my earliest memories of creating. On more ambitious days, often holidays, my sister and I would make mile-long paper chains, loop after loop after loop, blunting the scissors through overuse and demolishing my mother's staple supply. The chains were in the book too, though they were of such devilish simplicity that we wondered why there were even instructions included. We adored various color combinations, every rainbow order of all of the limited shades of construction paper available.

I treated the origami book with care and reverence, as I did all my books – the Charlie Brown encyclopedia volumes, the Wizard of Oz series, my mother's original copies of the four Winnie-the-Poohs. Long after the years of frantic paper-bending exuberance passed, my fetishization of the books themselves would follow me to adulthood. I added countless art books to my library, with more mature subjects like oil painting, figure studies, yet I still have the origami book, sleeping soundly between *Neoclassicism* and *Painting Watercolor Portraits*, folded away for now.