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One Thousand Paper Cranes

I was fifteen, and I needed a wish.

Armed with origami paper, a laptop and a wikiHow article, I set to work. My hands were shaky, and the instructions were hard to follow. My first few cranes ended up wrinkled, ripped, and curled up like squashed spiders. I might have made a better crane if I'd just crumpled the paper up into a ball. Was it supposed to look like it had two heads?

I was determined. I was sick, so sick that I'd been out of school for months now, and the local doctors no longer knew what to do with me. My mom and I had been to Richmond; they recommended a procedure that almost killed me. One doctor at Boston Children's was so well-known that there was a movie about him; he couldn't figure out what was wrong, either. We'd been everywhere, in-state and out.

In Japan, they say that if you make one thousand cranes, you get a wish. If I didn't get a miracle soon, I didn't know what I'd do. I couldn't even practice my instruments anymore. It felt like part of my identity had been stripped away.

I was ready to finally give up, when, on my fourth try, I succeeded.



I had made a crane.

I wish I could tell you who I gave my first crane to, but in reality, I don't remember. Knowing me, it was probably my homebound tutor, or someone else who was around the house at the time. I do know that, pretty quickly, I was making them faster than I could give them away. I started giving them to doctors, friends, family, anyone who I thought needed something to smile about. If I was to be remembered for anything, I wanted to be remembered as someone who had made someone smile.

My little sister started eating them, just to tease me. "Tastes like chicken," she told me, smirking.

It was April of 2017. Following trips from hospital to hospital, desperate to find a diagnosis (or a doctor who could even understand my condition,) we wound up in my mother's hometown: Cleveland, Ohio. One medical workup later, my mom and I finally had answers.

"I don't know if this is a good idea," said my mom. She was pacing back and forth, even though she was exhausted; she'd spent several sleepless nights with me in the ICU. I was tired too, still recovering from a total colectomy and having only started eating liquids the day before.

"My hands still work," I pronounced, placing another neatly folded crane down in my lap. I didn't need to look at them anymore. "And I'm not as sick anymore. Take me down there."

My mom says that people were stopping to watch, some taking photos and videos; she claims that one doctor even cried. I'm sure that, somewhere on the internet, there's a video of me playing the baby grand on the first floor of the Cleveland Clinic, still in my hospital gown and with a beeping IV pole attached to a central line. All I know is that in the middle of one of my songs (a medley that I arranged myself) a man walked up to me, very quietly placed a vase of yellow flowers down next to me, and left.



Later that day, he approached us again, and I gave him a handful of paper cranes as thanks. "Thank you," he said. "My daughter would like these"

He and my mom kept in contact for the rest of the trip; apparently they had been through similar struggles. After all, he was here taking care of a sick child too. A few days later, he texted and told me that he had a request. His daughter needed a wish.

Luckily, I had plenty of those.

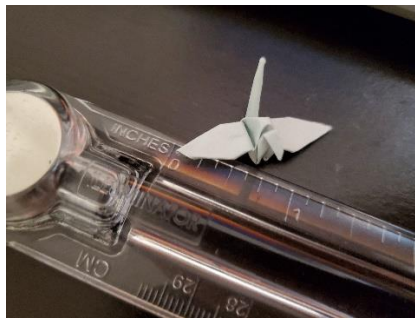
Things started getting better from there. I was able to go back to school for my senior year, and even play the piano and cello again. I was handing out more paper cranes than ever. Fast food workers, cashiers, teachers, anyone I'd talked to for longer than five seconds. "For good luck."

I know 1/1000th of a wish isn't much. I know I'm not changing the world by handing out cranes. And I know that, even if there is someone up there, handing out wishes to people who make a thousand cranes, none of that is going to change lives. The world is too complicated for that. The world needs money, it needs laws, it needs political and social change.

But I still believe there's value in something simple like that. The little things aren't going to change the world, but it's hard to hold a handful of rainbow-colored cranes and be sad. Somewhere out there, there's at least one thousand people I've made smile, and that's good enough for me.

As for what I haven't managed to give away?

This is one crane:



This is one hundred cranes:



And this...



...is twenty one thousand, four hundred and sixty cranes.