

Jeremy's Crane

by Andrew Fink

I saw magic for the first time when I was eight, on the day Jeremy Chendo showed me that paper cranes can fly. He was not a remarkable child in any physical way, with a slight frame, a bristle of black hair stuck on top, and small, slanted eyes that always smiled. He was special because he was a boy who did not try to look up my dress on the playground, and I liked him in ways I wouldn't understand until I was older, when he was gone.

We were seated in the back corner of the room, where, if you were careful to position yourself so that the head of the child in front of you covered Ms. Bergman at her desk, you could do anything you wanted. She was not a teacher who believed in active learning, but one who preferred to lecture from her desk in a high flurry. I would imagine that her voice was actually coming from the flock of songbirds stringing the power lines outside, or that she was not really there at all. That day, I was watching Jeremy fiddle with a paper square, folding it this way and that, creasing and uncreasing, smaller and smaller until he held in his hand a crane no larger than a spinning quarter. The crane's body was still flat and pointed, and though it was too small to push your breath into, he placed the bottom against his lips and blew anyway.

From where I sat, it looked like the body expanded at an alarmingly slow rate, as though it took every ounce of breath from his lungs to fill the small cavity to capacity. The sides popped apart, the top flattened and rounded up, and when it was nearly bursting, he held it in his hands and blew the crane through the air towards me.

The crane's trajectory was far too even-keeled, and as it crossed the space between us I could almost hear it flutter, though it might just have been the wings outside. I caught it, and was surprised to find myself holding something which should not have been alive. It looked up at me, fully aware of my shock, and almost as though my disbelief had injured it, it looked away and placed its tiny head

beneath its wing. I looked back towards Jeremy, but he was staring out the window, where the birds were unmoved by his mimicry. I asked him how, but he did not answer. The small crane pecked at my hands, and I did not know what to do with it. I did not know what to do with an act of magic. I did not know what to make of Jeremy Chendo and his miraculous breath. So I kept it, and the crane still sits on my mantle, frozen and breathless now, my reminder that nothing magical lasts forever.

