Introduction

When I was a child, I was something of a nightmare. I never took naps, I ruined every playpen I was ever placed in, and when I did get quiet, it usually meant I had done something destructive. My parents tried everything to keep me still for just five minutes. Drawing seemed to work; reading worked better. Then one day I was given a book that had very few words. One page started with a square, and the next page ended with a fun new shape. It was different than any arts and crafts book I had been given before; I didn't need pencils, scissors, or glue. I just needed paper.

Of course, with my memory being as bad as it is, this story from my childhood comes courtesy of my mother, who loves to remind me how *she* introduced me to origami. If it's a question of *my* first memory of origami, that's another story entirely. In the early 2000s, I had long since fallen out of favor with origami, preferring to spend my time reading in my room. My father had bought our first home computer, which I used primarily for homework and chatting with friends. However, I grew bored rereading all of my books for the fourth (or tenth) time, so I logged into my AOL account, waited an eternity for the dial up tone to stop defiling my ears, and typed 'origami' into the web search bar.

What I found was an early era website. All black background, small white font you'd need a magnifying lens to read, and a thin strip of spreadsheet cells running down the middle of the page. As ridiculous as it would look nowadays, it was like Van Gogh's "*Starry Night*" in my eyes. Not only were there plenty of models to choose from, they were more impressive than anything I had seen before. I never knew such complexity could be achieved with one single sheet of paper. So, being the type of kid who loved a challenge, I dove head first into the most complex diagrams available. Deciphering the blurry scans of hand-drawn instructions was half the challenge, while the other half was pushing forward with models well beyond my skill range, using only loose-leaf and printer paper. I went through all the complex diagrams on that site, and started looking for more

Soon after I discovered that website, I also discovered torrenting. Though peer-to-peer sharing is still a major part of the internet, it is nowhere near as prevalent as it used to be. I spent countless nights downloading low quality music, hearing Bill Clinton's famous line about White House relations, and praying I didn't infect my laptop with yet another virus. I also, much to my present day embarrassment, downloaded a few origami books. While there wasn't much initial guilt costing multimillionaire executives a few dollars, I felt an unshakable sense of shame downloading someone's passion project, something they painstakingly crafted themselves and for which they would likely receive little beyond community praise. That mindset rang true for everything else I wanted to download, and I soon found myself righteously bereft of diagrams to fold.

Refusing to pirate others work, and becoming increasingly busy with high school, I once again forgot about origami. But as with any teenager, I soon grew bored listening to my teachers drone on and on about subjects I either didn't care about or already understood. Thus, while sitting in junior year AP Comp, I pulled out a piece of paper. I wasn't interested in folding a thousand cranes, nor could I remember any of the models I had folded years before. I wanted to try making making my own designs. I figured it would be a piece of cake. After all, I'd already folded plenty of complex origami, and was one of the top students in my class. It would seem, however, that the phrase "arrogance and ignorance go hand in hand" was coined with me in mind, and I'd soon come to

appreciate the tremendous amount of time, skill and effort it takes to not only design origami, but to design *good* origami.

My first design... was not good. It was a worm. Or perhaps a grub. Either way, I wasted about half the paper, used a fish base for no discernible reason, and the resulting mess would always tear right at the last step. Knowing what I do now, I would've tossed that model into the garbage and pretended it never happened. But if I had done that, I doubt I would've ever tried designing another model again. Instead, thanks in no small part to my youthful narcissism, I loved that model, and thought myself the next great artist, even listing this new model as an "Opus." Having made many models after that fateful day, I wanted to share my apparent genius with the world. My family obviously supported me, in the same way a parent nods and tells their child the blob with sticks they drew looks *just* like an elephant. I needed validation from other origami artistes like myself. So once again, I turned to the internet.

I found a forum and posted my works there, naively waiting to be showered with praise. I would soon be rudely informed of the harsh truth; I wasn't the grandmaster of paperfolding I thought myself to be. To put it bluntly, I sucked. This obviously came as a shock to my pompous sixteen year old mind. I had to prove them wrong. So I kept coming back, periodically posting with new models, and sure enough I'd get heckled off the digital stage. But as time went by, and I humbled myself enough to take in some constructive criticism, the negative reactions became less frequent. Finally, after accepting that my models just weren't up to snuff, someone, to my shock, asked me for a diagram.

Now, for anyone praying this would be the part where my self-indulgent spiel would wrap up, sorry to disappoint. When that first diagram request came rolling in, I had three major problems to address. The first and most immediate issue was that I had absolutely no idea how to make a diagram. Initially I wrote instructions, which were about as helpful as sign language to a blind person. Then I made photo-diagrams, but this was back when phone cameras made everything look like a bigfoot sighting so they were no good either. Eventually I resigned myself to learning how to make a digital diagram. I went on the still fresh, still fun YouTube and found instructions for a program that could help me. And in a similar fashion to my initial foray into origami design, I watched half the video, decided I knew what I was doing, and churned out sub-par instructions. I hope my diagramming has improved as much as my designs, otherwise the next hundred pages are going to be a little awkward.

Considering the word origami comes from the Japanese "oru," meaning to fold, and "kami," meaning paper, you'd think any product with "KAMI" splayed across its packaging would be some high quality stuff. Turns out, most of what is sold under the name kami is about one step above loose-leaf. This was the second problem I faced when trying to make diagrams of my designs. What good would a digital representation be when the real life version wasn't at its full potential? And since I took several hiatuses from origami over the years, I never organically developed the need for better paper. I just hit a wall. Thankfully, while posting yet another model to be scrutinized, someone sent me a link to a video. In it, they showed how to combine tissue paper and aluminum foil into the cleverly named tissue foil. This changed everything. Not only was I able to give my models the Cinderella transformation they deserved, I could use more advanced techniques without the paper tearing.

Now the last issue I had with diagramming was rather simple. Around the time people

began requesting diagrams, I had about forty models made. Of those, people thought only a handful of designs were interesting, and on top of all that, the number of models *I* actually liked could be counted with one hand , even if I lost a few fingers. It took me almost a decade to make the collection you'll see in this book. Some took that entire time to come to fruition, some are second or seventh attempts gone right, and some were flashes of inspiration and feverish folding. But all of them were models I was unsure of, pieces I posted online wondering whether or not people would like them. Whether I could make something that I would be happy to fold and happy while folding. And others have been more than happy to tell me what works and doesn't work for them. So this book is not just the best of what I had to offer, but also a thank you to the community that has helped me grow.

I'm sure there are more than a few people wondering why I basically told you my life story. That's because origami is part of my life story, interwoven into my own history. Major events, triumphs and failures, even times I was just sitting around, I had a piece of paper in my hands. The very reason this book is free is because of my childhood assumption that origami artists shared, and because I wanted to give people a book they could download guilt-free.

In the end, origami is not just a hobby. It's a way of being, a way of seeing the world. The title is derived from this. Every model in this book begins with something I learned about life while folding it, some small insight into the design process, or just something introspective and interesting. These are the bases of folding, the foundational reasons I believe origami is worth learning, worth creating, and worth sharing with all of you.