How to grieve properly & write poetry & break shit & get over it

Step 1: fold the paper in half, form a triangle, and use the first crease to create catered meter laced with sincerity

At 11am

colored cranes have darker lines
when light outside is brighter

shadows framed by clear grey clouds
false in flight but strung together

beyond their nest of memory
world outside is turning

passing flock of black birds fly
wonder, do they mock or honor?

Step 2: fold the triangle in half again, the strongest shape doubled over, and crease your own body as you remember

At 11pm

darkened skies make sharper cranes
crisper lines of past refrains

lie beneath the hanging strings
and from below they’re flowers

angle of body changes folded angles
folds changed angles of grief
change angle of underneath and think

of time that’s passed but not for me
my cranes would hang for other things

Step 3: fold the triangle back over itself and peel back your memory as you unfold it again, peering into the fissure you’ve made
The first time I folded a paper crane, it was in 4th grade. We read *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* and then our class endeavored to create 1000 of them. I remember two specific instances from that time. I was folding a crane at home. I got to a certain point and I couldn’t remember the next step. I went to ask my mom, only to find out she also didn’t know the next step. I broke down in tears, crying inconsolably.

The second thing I remember is Parmveer and his orange crane. We all know the feeling of a day when nothing folds correctly. If, at step 12 you fold in the wrong half of the crane, it will never open. I think there were other mistakes as well, but that’s the only one I remember. He redid it though, a feat for a fourth grader with the attention span of a butterfly, and I remember him exclaiming something like, “Yes! Finally!” and then, in his enthusiasm, as he pulled the wings to the sides to give the crane depth, he tore it clean in half. We had a stunned moment of silence. Parmveer put his head down and began to laugh.

*Step 4: lifting the inside of the triangle, collapse it down upon itself, and imagine you can flatten out the reasons for folding*

a man attempted suicide, several years ago
no one remembers the exact time or date
and sometimes it seems like no one
really even remembers

no one died so
no one folded cranes
that spring, or even
that summer, but one
girl or maybe
daughter

thinks of memory
which is not-quite loss but
still is the inexact time or date
that she remembers losing her father
it was sometime before this was written

*Step 5: take a moment to interrupt your spiral into crinkled thoughts, turn them over for a moment and remember the folds that brought you here in the first place (if you fold one side at a time the work may be slower but more complete (repeat steps 3 and 4) but if you work both sides simultaneously you’ll find you’ve jumped into your story, step 7)*

while this is being written
chains of paper cranes hang along
these windows, commemorating
the lives of three students who were
killed in a car accident
on 2/28/2014
the cranes
were first folded and
hung during spring term 2014
a pile of them of them once accumulated
beneath the hanging cranes but was cleared
away before winter term 2015; by the time
you are reading this, the hanging cranes
may be gone as well

Step 6: this is not a step, this is a square, there are no folds, no steps, no filter for emotion, this step
doesn’t change your crane so instead change your tone, be angry at the mundanity of a step that moves
you no-where

Right now I am so explosively mad
at these goddamn cranes their
impermanent ephemeral visceral
goddamn existence fuck
them and this and my
inarticulate sieve of the heart and
neurons and tongue and god I ache for
the moment of transition

Step 7: here you will be working one square at a time; fold each edge into to the middle and then out
again, the greater the precision here, the better the result later, don’t skip this step for the sake of speed,
the less you process now, the better the result later

Certain phrases are underlined in blue because they need grammar or commas and isn’t that the cutest shit
you’ve ever heard, like I’m sorry I’m not expressing my grief properly, let me kill it with commas, let me
cater to the breaths you need to take, how fucking cute that this machine thinks that it can tell me when
people need to breathe or what a proper sentence is when all it knows about sentence construction is the
structure that pleases academia also known as culturally ingrained systemic abuse of language when in
reality the construction of a sentence can be so much more and actually matter to people when it isn’t
confined to a socially formatted construct and I swear to god the creators of Word were some masochistic
or schadenfreudic fuckers because they just underlined this whole sentence, like way fucking to prove my
point, you idiots.

I need to scream. As much as poetry
lets us break language into meaning and bend
meaning in to e/motion it’s also
a room for dancing but I
have forgotten how
So I fold and
eventually get some
thing beautiful where
previously there was no
thing at all.

*Step 8: this is an absurd step, ignore it, take a break*

*Step 9: you need to lift the flap, which would be easier if you hadn’t creased it the step before and it makes me irrationally mad that the instructions say ‘press here’ because that doesn’t make any sense when you’re folding a crane, don’t press here, press here, press here, press here, this is a bruise that hasn’t quite healed*

Paper cranes defy space
because an otherwise un
remarkable piece of pap
er that knows only two-
dimensionality becomes
a specific arbitrary set of
teps that fold the paper
into space and fold the
space around the paper
and suddenly the world has
changed imperceptibly
the way people do and
in other words paper cranes are poetry.

I need to scream because

grief has too many angles
to be looked at beautifully and I know you expect me to have rounded out the corners my existence, to have tied everything together with some nicely placed symbols and some well-worded metaphors but unfortunately for you I have done neither.

Us humans, we have jagged existences, and no amount of words can smooth those edges into something easy to swallow.

Doesn’t that line want to make you gag?
Step 10: similarly to how in step 3 you collapsed the triangle into a square, in step 10 you compress the square into a diamond, a strong mineral but not shape, although perhaps still sturdy enough to contain a room (because of step 8 it’s not easier to lift the flap, but it is easier to press down the edges of the diamond, and this makes me rationally mad, that the frustration had a purpose)

imagine, if you will, a room between these walls
between these walls of wood and iron beam and brick
and somewhere in this building
between these walls of forget and remember
let go and hold on
a room full of cranes
full of colors
hope they save them store them hold them
in this building like body a keeper

Step 11: if you work one side at a time, you fold differently than me, and I don’t understand your methodology because you repeat steps 7 to 11, dwelling longer in rooms made for leaving; instead, work both sides simultaneously and move or hold on to step 12

It’s funny how we become
our own method, which
ever one we learned.

I like the connection of cranes
and grief, I think
there are beautiful things to be said there, really
fucking beautiful things,
but I don’t think I’m the right
person to say them, because I
am myself afraid

Here’s a list of the poetic pain someone someday can turn into a meaningful something:
(1) grief is communal and contagious (this memorial was made for a loss I experience only through being witness to the pain of those I care about);
(2) these cranes have begun to fade in physical presence (they slowly fade away as communally people care less); (3) one person folds a crane every week and puts it where the pile once was (grief is never really gotten over, only integrated into one’s life);
(4) grief is omnipotent (other’s loss will always unearth my own, and no matter how ‘over it’ I am, it will always come back, see (3), wonder: is this selfish or beautiful?);
(5) if they stored the cranes somewhere in this building, that’d be an amazing metaphor for the way we store grief, out of sight and buried away, but always present in our bodies but
(6) they probably just threw the poor things away, because grief has a timeline in corporate American called get over it now because can you please stop being sad we have work to do and our toxic productivity and suffocating masculinity demand you stop those emotions, stop them right now, no, you don’t really feel them, if you still feel them at this time you’re crazy and broken and that’s a fact. Best Wishes, Sincerest Apologies For Your Loss.

Step 12: fold the sides of the diamond into the center, come together within yourself, your body is yours, your container, and be sure you are folding the split legs of the diamond, or your crane will never open

I wanted to write something beautiful because I wanted to make you feel something and I wanted to make you think I was any good at this inane practice or business of injecting language into my body, punctuating like x-rays to see the breaks in my bones, enjambing caesuras like needles to suck out my blood, as if I believed somehow a form could peel the skin away from my skeleton, tear the muscles up one by one, as if somehow my body could be pulled into poetry.

Step 13: turnover and repeat step 12, inhale

Not every painful experience can be made beautiful and easy to swallow.

Not all grief is here for poetry.

Step 14: for both sides of the narrowed diamond, narrow your focus and bring the folded edges towards one another

I’ve heard people say depression is like “every day is cloudy, even if the sun’s out” and I’ve heard that helps some people but personally I don’t like the weather metaphors or any
metaphors really because they can’t contain

blunt corners and sharp edges and spilt
emotions everywhere, splattered on the inside
of our walls, we’re just too afraid of our own
depths and it’s easier to be afraid than to be exposed,

this void is better ignored than embodied,
easier to cover and block than to say out loud
push away and press down and pretend to let go
it’s easier it’s easier it’s easier than naming.

Depression isn’t clouds, depression is your dad slit
ting his wrists and throat with razor blades and tryi
ng to call you after he does it (don’t worry, he lives)

and most of the time you won’t bother to think abo
ut it because right after it happened you didn’t both
er to think about it because you had homework to d

o and now sometimes you think about how messed
up that is but mostly you think it is strange to griev
e for a loss that never quite happened to begin with.

Step 15: For some reason these instructions have skipped the step where you fold up the sections that
become the head and tail, and the step where you create the head, but after step 14 you will have a
narrower diamond of the same shape, but its face will be smooth and the folds that become the wings will
be hidden; for each side, you will fold up longer side of the diamond, but in the meantime use this
instructional void to center yourself

Funny thing is, I really am okay, it’s just sometimes the rooms you think you’ve locked away open up,
and even at 2am, and even years later when it feels like no other body remembers, the cranes will still be
there.

Step 15 (continued): fold up the legs, and now, changed angle, they’re a neck and tail and choose an end
to close the fissure, for now, fold down the top and you have a head

The last time I remember making a crane was yesterday, when I was trying to count the number of folds.
I’ve made a lot of cranes this term, and I’ve been leaving them around campus in no particular places but
hoping that someone will find them and take joy in a moment of tiny art.

I started folding them more often over this past winter break, just because it was nice to create something
beautiful. And someone and I exchanged paper cranes with song lyrics written on them; they always
wrote them on the outside of the crane, and I always wrote mine on the inside. I don’t know why, just
because then you have to unfold the crane to even find its message, and then if you still want art you need to fold it up again, and I guess that’s how I like to think about friendship. I come back to this because I’ve never lost a friend, and I can’t imagine what it’s like to lose someone who understands your cranes.

*Step 15 (continued): re-open the wings, head and tail folded between*

And I did choose a form, these 23 poems arguably
the number of folds in a crane, and also how old
they’d turn this year, 2016, those three
men I never knew but mourn through others any
way maybe I’ll never know if that’s selfish
or human but by the time you’re reading this
the hanging cranes will probably all be gone

*Step 15 (continued): holding the wings, pull gently to fill your crane, give it dimensionality but, as we know, pull slowly*

At 11am or 11pm

weekly someone folds
one crane, a guard
w/here the rest once were
but weekly swept away

their memory

time passes time allotted
but in this body
like building
room for folding
this crane is needed this
building like body
a keeper of grief
this room like need

lingers on: