

1000

A one-act by Kekoa Dowsett

July 12th, 2023

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1000 was originally produced by Jesuit High School as a part of Jesuit High School's 2023 Playwriting Festival on May 25, 2023 at the E.L. Wiegand Studio Theatre in Portland, Oregon. The production was directed by Morgan Bielstein, with costumes by Han Tran, lights by Alice Waldeck, and sound by Alice Radford-Brown. Amelia Loop was Assistant Stage Manager, and Ted Pelster was the Stage Manager. The cast was as follows:

GENNY.....Hayden Sohn

BENJI.....Isabel Diab

KEN.....Chloe Heller

TORI.....Holly Courter

ELIZA.....Caitlin Thomas

我慢

For my Ji-Chan and GG,
For Grandma and Grandpa
For Mai, Genevieve,
Aunty Cindy, Uncle Tom
And the rest of my ohana

Mahalo nui

必勝

WHO:

GENNY, 17, female, Japanese-American, inquisitive, a lover of bugs and underground pizza parlors, enjoys corduroy and overalls, laughs with her teeth, finds words like "ludicrous" particularly fun to say.

BENJI, 16, male, Japanese-American, Genny's brother, mature beyond his years in the surprising way only a child can be, likes 90's Seattle grunge, plays the drums, his knee always bounces to some unknown rhythm.

KEN, 57, male, Genny and Benji's father, warm but tired, always barely staying awake just so that he can do something for someone other than himself, a freelance editor who works from home, a decent cook.

TORI, 17, female, Genny's best friend, always willing to lend a helping hand, feels things very deeply (almost too much for her own good), intelligent, a bookworm.

ELIZA, 83, female, Genny and Benji's grandmother, likes to play (and win) card games with her grandchildren, a retired nurse.

WHERE:

Honolulu, HI, present day.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:

Though it is essential to the story that both Genny and Benji are played by people of color, the ethnicities/races of Ken, Eliza, and Tori do not matter.

(Fold 1: Square Base.)

(Lights up on GENNY sitting on the floor with a square of colored paper in front of her. She reaches for it, picks it up, and holds it up to the light, searching for life in its flat monochrome. She then begins folding it. Deliberately. She takes time and care to do so, pouring every ounce of her nose-scrunching focus into every crease. After some time she holds it up and, pulling the corners down, reveals a paper crane. It is simple and not very impressive. Still, she admires her handiwork for a moment before setting it down.)

GENNY

(To the crane. Or to the audience. Or both.)

Cranes.

My grandpa—my *oji-chan*—was obsessed with cranes.
 He used to lean close to
 My brother and I
 Whispering stories
 With a sparkling glow in his eyes.
 Stories that made our eyes look more like his.
 Stories about how when we die,
 Cranes would carry our souls
 On their wings,
 Off into the setting sun.
 Stories about the day when he knew
 Thousands of cranes flew
 All at once.
 The day when the rising red sun fell
 And scarred the land of
 His mother and his father.
 Stories about the little girl.
 The little girl who was just like me, he would say.
 The little girl named Sadako.
 The little girl who ran races with her friends
 And was always in a hurry.
 The little girl who grew sick from the scarred land.
 The little hibakusha.
 The little girl who folded 1000 cranes,
 Because if you fold

1000 cranes, he would say,
 You would get one wish.
 A special wish.

(Blackout. GENNY exits.)

(Fold 2: Bird Base.)

(Lights up on BENJI in his room. The single paper crane is now accompanied by a few more—about a handful or two. BENJI has some scattered around his room along with a small stack of origami squares. He is in the middle of folding a crane.)

BENJI

(With rhythm.)

Folding, folding, folding.
 That's all my life is now.
 Fold the corners together,
 Crease.
 Fold the edges together,
 Crease.
 Fold a square, then
 Fold the edges in and
 Crease.
 Fold the corners up,
 Fold the sides in,
 Fold the corners back down and
 Crease.
 Genny was always better
 At folding than me.
 Ji-chan was so proud
 When she folded her first one.
 Ji-chan just laughed
 When all I folded was a paper ball...
 A-ha!

(He fumbles with the wings and pulls them apart, just as GENNY had, but the crane is misshapen and dopey looking. BENJI sighs in frustration and sets it down. He squats down or lays on his stomach and looks the crane in the face.)

This is all my life is now.
 Paper crane after

Paper crane after
Paper crane.
"Tsuru" Ji-chan called you...?
Genny would know—

(He pauses.)

I miss her.
I really miss her.
Sure I can see her,
When I'm not in school,
But I miss *her*.
Sure she's still Genny,
But she's just tired now.
Tired and thin.
The hospital lights
Wash all the color from her cheeks,
And the warmth from her lungs.
She tries to stay strong
I know she does
But
It gets worse—
I know it gets worse.
Each session, she loses more.
More hair,
More color,
More Genny.
Its hard to tell if the treatment
Will kill her first
Or the tumor.

(He looks expectantly at the crane for a response. He sighs and tosses it to one of the small piles. He goes over to his drum kit and starts to play. The music starts slow and soft, but as he lets himself go in the music, it grows in tempo and intensity, reaching a crescendo. The lights whip and whirl with the beat, sending BENJI into a memory.)

(Lights restore on BENJI in his room about a year prior. He is still playing the drums, but has since transitioned to a thumping grunge rock beat. The cranes have not been folded yet.)

GENNY

(From off.)

Benji.

(BENJI continues to play.)

Benji.

(BENJI continues still.)

Benji!

BENJI

(He stops abruptly.)

What!?

(GENNY enters, her face bunched in a scowl.)

GENNY

You have been playing those things for *hours*—would you give it a rest or just go over to Cameron's house? I'm trying to do homework!

BENJI

(In classic sibling fashion.)

Homework, shmomework. This is art Genny, and art doesn't "rest." Besides, Cameron's got a date.

GENNY

Well—WAIT! *The* Cameron Williams has a *date*? Like the same Cameron Williams who got his head stuck in the bars at the zoo?

BENJI

The very same. And get this—it's with *Naomi Young*.

GENNY

No. Way.

BENJI

Yes way.

GENNY

This is incredible. I mean have to applaud Naomi, just—

(A chef's kiss.)

—immaculate taste.

BENJI

I know, right? He's a real keeper that Cameron, won't be long now til he is wooing her with his guitar skills and vast knowledge of Midwestern cuisine.

GENNY

(Fanning herself and pretending to faint.)

Oh my, if only I'd gotten to him first!

(They giggle like idiots.)

KEN

(Distant.)

... Benji! Benji!

(BENJI snaps back to the present. He looks around his room and sees the cranes and papers scattered everywhere. He glances over to GENNY, but she is no longer there. In her place is his misshapen crane, looking expectantly up at him. He walks over and picks it up, looking it over.)

BENJI

(Calling off.)

Yeah?

KEN

(From off.)

Cameron's here!

BENJI

Ok! Down in a sec!

(He smiles to himself before setting the crane down on the drum kit, grabbing his bag, and jogging downstairs. Blackout.)

(Fold 3: Inner Folds.)

(Lights up on KEN who sits at the dining room table with his laptop in front of him. The handful or two from BENJI's room are now accompanied by a few more and scattered across the table and on his keyboard. KEN has a small stack of colorful origami paper and is folding a sheet into another crane.)

KEN

(Tired.)

I don't know how
 Genny used to fold
 So many.
 Even when she was little,
 As soon as her grandpa taught her how,
 She just kept folding.
 And folding.
 One after another.
 Five years old and she would come up to me and say
 "Daddy, daddy look!"
 And hold up a handful—
 Big, small, colorful, crinkled;
 All sorts.
 She probably folded well over a thousand
 Before she reached seven years old.
 But she was saving her wish.
 At first because
 She could never decide—
 A horse one year,
 World peace the next.
 But as she grew
 She knew
 She wanted to save it for
 Something special.

(He pauses and unfolds his crane. He admires it for a moment before placing it down on his keyboard and looking at it.)

Even though we're folding for her,
 She folds.
 On treatment days, from her bed—
 It brings her joy.
 And when her hands are shaky and numb
 We fold.
 At home, work school—
 It brings her joy.
 And just to see
 The feeble smile
 To see the glint in her
 Eye—it's almost like she is back.
 Like Genny is Genny again.

(His watch suddenly starts beeping and he checks the time. He brushes the crane off his laptop, cracks his knuckles and begins typing, presumably resuming work he'd been putting off. As he does, he slowly starts nodding off as light swirls around him, into a dreamy, warm memory.)

(KEN blinks back awake and it is about a year prior. The cranes are nowhere to be found. He stares, glassy eyed at his screen. GENNY enters, carrying a mug of hot tea in either hand and a book under one arm. She smirks at her dad zoning out.)

GENNY

Dad? Hellooo...? Anybody in there?

KEN

(He knocks on his head.)

Nope.

GENNY

Well, I've brought you some caffeine to keep your circuits fueled and some company to keep you from falling asleep on your keyboard like last time.

KEN

(Weary.)

How thoughtful.

(He takes the tea from her, eyes still numbingly glued to the screen. GENNY sits at the table. A beat.)

GENNY

So, what's happening in the exciting world of...?

KEN

Running. Cross-country running, specifically. "The Great Mile: How Running Saved My Life" by Tim something or other.

GENNY

Oh! That sounds... interesting...?

KEN

(Dryly.)

It is—

(Reading from his computer and assuming the role of the pretentious Tim something or other.)

"...and as I crossed the finish line, I gasped for fresh air. It was over. I did it. I was so happy..." blah blah "blessed" blah blah "thankful" blah blah bleh.

GENNY

Ahh... Very interesting, I see.

(KEN grunts in sarcastic agreement.)

(GENNY cracks open her book and starts to read. KEN's gaze slides over to her.)

KEN

Russian still?

GENNY

(Without looking up.)

Yup.

KEN

Dostoyevsky?

GENNY

Nope. Tolstoy—War and Peace.

KEN

Ahh... You at a war part or a peace part?

GENNY

Peace... I think... Something weird is going on with Pierre and Anatole...

KEN

Mmhmm, yes, I will pretend like I know exactly what that means...

(GENNY looks up and they share a goofy look before chuckling and returning to their reading.)

(They sit in quiet company, accompanied only by the sound of KEN occasionally typing and GENNY flipping a page. Without looking at each other, they take a sip from their mugs. The lights fade as a few hours pass. They restore on KEN and GENNY slumped over, asleep on their respective reading material.)

(KEN's watch begins beeping, but as if from a distance. It grows and grows until KEN snaps awake, but back in the present. He blinks, bleary eyed, and looks around. The cranes are once again scattered on the table. The crane he was folding lies on his keyboard, flattened from his face resting on it. He picks it up and opens it back up. He shuts his laptop and places the crane across from him, looking at it for a moment. He looks at his watch and suddenly gets up. He grabs his laptop and a few extra sheets of paper and quickly heads out the front door. Blackout.)

(Fold 4: Head and Tail.)

(Lights up on TORI who sits in an empty classroom. There are now a few hundred

cranes onstage, covering the other desks and seats. TORI has a few cranes and loose papers on her desk and sticking out of her backpack. She folds one as she speaks.)

TORI

(Fondly.)

I never understood kids my age,
 I never thought they understood me.
 But I think Genny and I understood each other.
Understand each other.
 I keep talking about her
 As if she were already gone,
 But I can't help it
 If that's what it feels like,
 If it feels like I've already lost my best friend.

(She pauses, unfolding the crane. She places it in front of her and takes out a pen. On one of the wings, she draws a star, on the other, a smiling face.)

I barely see her now.
 They don't let me visit her a lot
 Because I'm not family.
 Which isn't true because I was her family.
Am.
 Am her family.
 I am her sister.
 We both wanted a sister and
 Somehow,
 We both got one.
 One to talk about all the
 Simple and sisterly things.
 And though I am always welcome at her house.
 It still feels so odd,
 Odd like how empty homeroom feels.
 Odd not having her there.
 So I don't go.
 Except to drop off cranes.

(She smiles at the crane. The school-bell rings and with color and light, sends TORI into a memory.)

(The lights restore on TORI without her cranes. She sits in the same classroom

from about 6 months before. She gazes listlessly off into space. Other actors as students begin to trickle in before GENNY jogs through the classroom door, and, catching her breath, sits next to TORI.)

GENNY

(Exasperated.)

Hey Tori...

TORI

Hey Genny... What's up? You okay?

GENNY

I have no idea at this point—I just took the *worst* chem test of my life and I have no idea how my grade is gonna recover...

TORI

Ohh Genny... Well at least you just have to make it through fifty minutes of Warner and then its off to the weekend!

GENNY

Yeah, I guess... Oh shoot! That's right! Tori—you don't happen to have the notes from yesterday, do you...? I didn't get a chance to take them down last night because a certain two "musicians" were using Benji's room as their recording studio.

(TORI begins taking a sip from her water bottle and nearly chokes on it when GENNY mentions this.)

TORI

I am so sorry... Those two...

(She shakes her head.)

But yeah, here you go—

(She pulls out a notebook and flips to a page filled with scribbling. She hands it to GENNY who looks at it with horror.)

GENNY

Oh my god, this is all from last night?

TORI

Yup, Warner thought it'd be great to assign two chapters.

GENNY

Boy... Okay, well thanks Tor, you literally just saved me like four hours.

(She pulls out her own notebook and starts to copy the notes down.)

TORI

Yeah, now you can use that time to work on your college apps!

GENNY

(Without looking up from her notes.)

Don't even get me started—

(The school bell rings again, at first as it were from a distance, but with each successive ring, the ringing grows louder. As the ringing reaches a peak, TORI snaps back to the present. The classroom is empty once again, except for her cranes which fill the empty seats. TORI looks to GENNY's seat, and in her place is the crane with the star and face on it. She collects it along with a few others and puts them in her bag. She gets up and exits the classroom. Blackout.)

(Fold 5: Wings.)

(Lights up on ELIZA. She sits alone in a cemetery, across from a solitary grave. It reads, "FUSAO UCHIYAMA / 内山房夫" The stage is filled with nearly one-thousand cranes. ELIZA has a small stack of origami paper to her side and folds a sheet of floral paper into a crane while she speaks.)

ELIZA

(Warmly, to her husband.)

It was nice.
 Nice to see Genny
 With the same passion
 For cranes,
 The same glint in her eye
 As you did—
 Her grandpa.
 "Ji-chan" they called you.
 She would always light up when
 You'd sit them down
 And tell them stories.
 Benji would smile and nod,
 But Genny,
 Genny would hang on every word.
 You were so proud,
 So happy that she loved them—
 The cranes—
 Just as much as you did.
 How proud you would be
 To see her eyes now,
 To see her eyes that look like yours,
 And fingers that fold with the same
 Practiced
 And seasoned care
 That yours did.

(She pauses and unfolds the crane. It
 is careful and simple, much like
 GENNY's. She twirls it by the tail and
 sets it down on the grave. She admires
 it.)

She didn't shed
 A single tear
 At your service.
 I just remember
 Her looking up to the sky,
 Searching for a crane—
 The crane—
 Carrying your soul on its back.
 She never saw it
 But she knew it was there,
 That it flew over her on the
 Days when she missed you the most.
 She knew,
 Just as I do.

(She looks up to the sky and closes her eyes. A gust of wind blows through the trees of the cemetery, and with light and color, whisks ELIZA away and into a memory.)

(The lights restore on ELIZA and GENNY, about a year prior, standing in front of the grave and with flowers in their hands. The cranes are gone. The two women lay their flowers down and step back for a moment before GENNY wraps her arm around her grandmother and hugs her. ELIZA returns the hug. The two hold each other in silence for a moment.)

GENNY

(Not moving her gaze from the grave.)

Seen it yet?

ELIZA

No, but there was an eagle that passed over the other day. And a fat blue jay a few days before that and—

(Clearly unimpressed, GENNY turns and looks at ELIZA, cutting her off.)

Ah. Right. No, I haven't.

(They both turn back to the grave and take in the moment.)

GENNY

Do you remember how he used to play ping-pong with us?

ELIZA

Of course—how could I forget? He would always play his hardest against you two.

GENNY

Yeah, didn't matter that we were a good 60 years younger;

(Assuming a gravely impression of her grandfather.)

"Losing builds character; you find your weaknesses."

(They share a laugh.)

ELIZA

(Through a smile.)

I do remember though when you and Benji beat him for the first time—he was such a sore loser! He tied that silly headband on his forehead and was all serious for the rest of the afternoon.

(GENNY giggles, remembering her Ji-chan's antics, and ELIZA follows suit. As the laughter fades, their attention returns to the grave.)

GENNY

Do you miss him?

ELIZA

Of course I do. Not a day goes by when I am not thinking of him. But I know he is with me. Just like I know he is with you. You may not see the crane he promised you, but he is always there—

(With that, a crane calls from the sky above them. It flaps its wings and passes over them. Both look up in wonder and awe, smiles blooming on their faces. They watch as the crane flies away and feel a gentle wind pick up. Wind chimes twinkle in the distance, hanging from some unseen tree. The twinkling suddenly becomes a cellphone ringtone, growing in volume until it reaches a crescendo.)

(ELIZA snaps back to the present, her phone ringing at a normal volume. GENNY is gone. The grave and flowers are gone. Cranes litter the stage once more. ELIZA fumbles with her purse as she takes her cellphone out. She reads the number as she walks to an unoccupied part of the stage. As she walks, another cellphone rings. And then another. And then another. As all four cellphones ring in discordant rhythm, BENJI, KEN, and TORI all enter, one by one, and walk to another

unoccupied part of the stage, each with their cellphone in hand. The dissonant ringing grows in volume until the four all answer simultaneously, plunging the stage into tense silence. The four hold their breath as they listen to the voice on the other end. Blackout. BENJI, KEN, TORI, and ELIZA exit.)

(Fold 6: Flight.)

(Lights twinkle and flicker onstage. They twitch and spark to life before sputtering out. Finally, they flutter and dimly fade in, illuminating the stage in a gentle, somber, magical glow. Hanging from the ceiling are cranes on strings that completely fill the stage with color. There are 995 of them. Five strings with no cranes also hang from the ceiling. A beat. BENJI enters. Followed by KEN. Then TORI. Then ELIZA. BENJI holds the dopey looking crane he folded earlier. KEN clutches the crane he accidentally fell asleep on. TORI, the crane she drew on. And ELIZA, the floral crane from the cemetery. Each hang their respective crane from one of the empty strings. After they do so, they exit. A beat. GENNY enters. She holds the crane she folded at the beginning of the play. She walks through the hanging senbazuru, taking it in. She finds her way to the final empty string. She affixes her crane to it. She takes one final look around before closing her eyes and breathes in deeply.)

GENNY

I wish...

(Letting herself fall back and rest on the wings of the cranes that envelop her, she takes flight. Blackout.)

(End of play.)