

Wensdy Whitehead

(1971-2023)

Wensdy Whitehead was born June 24, 1971, in Midland, Michigan. On May 7, 2023, at the age of 51, she died in hospice care from metastatic colon cancer in the loving care of family and her many origami friends.

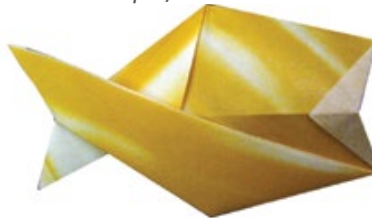
She was cherished by her parents, George and Winnie Whitehead, who were blessed with a daughter later in life. Wensdy attended many academic and artistic enrichment classes, including guitar lessons and learning origami. She received a full scholarship to Cornell University where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science in 1993. She lived in the German House, a residence hall, where students spoke German instead of English.

She studied in Germany, during her junior year, attending the University of Hamburg. In 1994, she joined the Army to become a translator. She then moved to Massachusetts in 1995 to work as a software design engineer at VideoGuide. While there, she received two patents in 2002 and 2005 for Interactive Program Guides. She lived in many cities in Massachusetts, mostly in Somerville, and later in Medford.

Wensdy began folding at age four, two years before she ever heard the word “origami.” Her mother started her off with a couple of traditional models, and by age nine she was off hunting for origami books to feed her creative appetite. After college, she became active in the origami community, becoming a regular at local origami groups and national conventions. These became the platform to showcase her own original pieces. Her folding sequences were both clever and accessible, and she had a knack for choosing interesting subject matter. Notable series include entire words and phrases created through folding single sheets, and integrating heart



BELOW. Gabby Guppy the Fish: created by Wensdy Whitehead. (Instructions in this issue of *The Paper*)



shapes onto traditional models to give them new meaning. She had success using the geometries of dollar bills and created a book on the subject: *Election Money Folds* in 2012.

One of her “breakout” models was the sorting hat from the Harry Potter movie. Everyone wanted to learn it at conventions! All that attention was very new to her; a bit stressful but she very much enjoyed it. She was very easy going and this made her very easy to work with and learn from.

She created a huge variety of models: simple, complex, one-piece, modulars, and dollar folds. She would fold from anything. She especially liked folding from recycled material. It was a fun challenge for her. Sometimes she would show up late to an origami gathering because she was up all-night designing.



ABOVE. Origami word: Created by Wensdy Whitehead. Folded from a single sheet of paper.



RIGHT. Love Bug, created by Wensdy Whitehead



Close up of Wensdy’s hand with a crane resting there.

She was well known for her collection of tiny little artwork; she could fold such intricate detail in very small models. One extraordinary model was a miniscule flapping bird.

Her designs have been on exhibit at the Peabody Essex Museum and other venues.

She had a fun sense of humor filled with folded puns. Outside of her origami accomplishments she was a smart, intellectual, and caring person.

Wensdy’s portfolio is available at https://origamiusa.org/files/wensdy_whitehead_portfolio.pdf

A memorial gallery page with diagrams is viewable at Origami Museum (<https://origamimuseum.org/Wensdy-Whitehead>) and via OrigamiUSA’s website at the In Memoriam page (<https://origamiusa.org/memoriam-wensdy-whitehead>).

On November 11th, an online gathering was held to honor and remember the life of Wensdy Whitehead. At the initiative of Lisa Corfman, this heartfelt event brought together her friends and fans of her creations. It was an emotionally charged meeting that lasted for several hours, filled with anecdotes, cherished memories, and a collective origami session where all participants folded models created by her as a tribute to her craft. Below, we share some of these memories (For more testimonials: <https://origamimuseum.org/tribute-to-wensdy>)

TO MY COUSIN WENSDY

By Melissa Whitney

Wensdy received a full scholarship to study computer science at Cornell, spoke fluent German (certified by the Goethe Institut), and was granted two patents for software design engineering. As a child, she could solve a Rubik's cube in a couple minutes. This geometric skill was the same spatial wizardry that she later applied to origami. I knew that she was an amazing paper folder and had exhibits in museums; but I didn't realize until May, when I met her origami friends, that she was a renowned origami savant, beloved by the origami community.

While sorting the belongings in her apartment, I found writings about her philosophy of origami and artistic engineering. *"Origami bridges engineering and art. Unlike many creative arts, little opportunity to add or subtract material when creating—only in starting from another shape of paper or working with a different number of units in a modular design can one gain or lose material. The engineering aspect of allocating paper to each part of the intended design provides a continual tug-of-war between the engineering and the art that pulls me in to be more creative and artistic than when I approach other art projects."*—Wensdy Whitehead

ORIGAMI FRIENDSHIP

By Lisa B. Corfman

Wensdy and I began folding together at a group called Paperfolders in New England (PINE), in Needham, MA. Early on, we had a conversation about her name. It was important to spell it right, W-E-N-S-D-Y.

As we grew closer, she visited me. If I had cheese or ice cream nearby, I would be delighted as she would stay longer. We both loved cheese. We connected. As Wensdy would say, we were not just friends, we were "ORIGAMI FRIENDS!!!" That was a strong bond. Origami artist Laura Kruskal was delighted by our friendship.

Trial after trial, Wensdy was my friend. In October 2011, I organized an origami festival with a month-long exhibit at the Umbrella Center for the Arts in Concord, MA. The responsibility was much more than expected. Wensdy came to the rescue and spent three weeks turning it into a positive experience.

Wensdy volunteered, exhibited, taught, and retailed at origami conventions including events in Cambridge, MA, in NYC, and more. She exhibited at the Peabody Essex Museum twice. I was privileged to curate an origami exhibition at the Charles River Museum in Waltham, MA and Wensdy was among the five of us: Wensdy, Erik and Martin DeMaine, an extraordinary floral folder, and me.

I say, "Thank you, Wensdy. You contributed so much. We will miss you, my friend!"

TO MY FRIEND WENSDY

By Jennie Deitsch

I met Wensdy at an origami convention at FIT in Manhattan. At this convention my sister Annie had been telling me about this cool lady I had to meet. Her name was Wensdy and she had this fantastic talent for folding the tiniest origami she'd ever seen.

Wensdy had a table in the origami exhibition of what she called minigami and I had to see it.

When I met Wensdy she showed me this collection of tiny little models she had folded. I was impressed with how she could fold such detail in such small models. Then she picked up what looked like an empty tic tac box with a tiny scrap of paper in the bottom corner. She told me to take a closer look and when I did, I saw that the scrap of paper was a miniscule origami bird.

Wensdy explained that it was a working model of a flapping bird. She said she tested it after she finished folding it and it worked fine. But she didn't like to make it flap too much because she was afraid of damaging her little bird. I asked her if she used some special tools to fold that small. She said no, just her fingertips. I was duly impressed, and we became fast friends.

I later found out that she was not only a fantastic folder but a very creative origami inventor. Wensdy came up with this very useful fold, she called a shovel fold. I was always amazed how she could write words and names and make pictures in origami with this clever fold of hers. We used to have so much fun with Wensdy.

Wensdy was a good friend, and I will always miss her.