

THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
PROJECT



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The Autobiography Project Honors the Stories of Twenty Greater Philadelphians

Philadelphia – June 26, 2006 – The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary and *One Book, One Philadelphia* (a project of the Mayor's Office and the Free Library of Philadelphia) are pleased to announce that the autobiographies of twenty Greater Philadelphia area residents have been selected for publication on bus shelter posters throughout Center City Philadelphia as part of The Autobiography Project.

The honorees range in age from eleven to eighty-one and their topics reflect the heterogeneous makeup of the Greater Philadelphia community. Among the autobiographers are an incarcerated person, a 5th grader, and an ESL student, and they chose to share stories about everything from dealing with an alcoholic parent, to living on Howard Street in West Kensington, to celebrating the end of World War II.

Starting on June 26 and running through July 23, 2006, these twenty autobiographies will be published along with the honorees' photographs on bus shelter posters throughout Center City, Philadelphia. A map of the shelter locations will be available online at www.theautobiographyproject.com beginning June 26.

The stories were brought to life visually under the creative direction of Debra Stack and Stack Design, with photography by Michael Ahearn.

Honorees will be recognized with a special reception and exhibit of the stories on **Monday, June 26**, at **Freeman's auction house**, located at 1808 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, from **5:30-7:00 p.m.** Media are encouraged to attend.

The Autobiography Project Background

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin is the most widely published autobiography of all time, and in honor of Franklin's 300th birthday, Philadelphians were invited to submit a memoir of their own using no more than 300 words.

Throughout a six-week writing period that began on April 5, 2006, participants were offered writing support services at free drop-in writing centers at Drexel University and Free Library of Philadelphia branches; online, with interactive feedback; or by attending a writing workshop. Organizations and institutions with a group of potential participants were invited to request a free writing workshop at their institution.

The project came to a close on May 17, 2006, at which time a review and selection panel that consisted of writers, writing teachers, aspiring authors, and readers selected twenty autobiographies out of more than 300 submissions for publication on bus shelter posters.

When The Autobiography Project asked Philadelphians to “tell us your story,” this is how they responded:

- “‘Am I going to be OK?’ Knowing this gut feeling, I tell myself, ‘Hold on, girl. You’ve survived West Philadelphia. You can handle this.’”
- “I’ll forever remember selling fish in the neighborhood fondly, and I thank my grandfather. In my heart I will always sell fish there, even if I cannot go back.”
- “For about a week I couldn’t sleep, because every time I closed my eyes, I would picture Rob slumped face down in the grass with his head leaking blood.”
- “I didn’t discuss my weight. In fact, the word “weight” felt like a bullet I had to dodge out on the battlefield every day. My survival depended on dodging that bullet.”
- “But when my Aunt and I arrived to collect my prize and Phil was found to be Phyllis, the dugout seat went to a real boy and I got two box seats behind home plate.”
- “I could beat this thing, but I was too miserable, too worried about the upcoming classes to concentrate. Once I fell behind I lost all hope of getting back, so I just kept falling.”
- “Factory whistles and sirens blowing into our open windows -- everything got quiet, work ceased. Car horns blowing -- it must be -- THE WAR IS OVER! Tears and laughter!”

To read the complete collection of autobiographies, visit www.theautobiographyproject.com and click on “Your Autobiographies.”

The Autobiography Project is sponsored by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Daily News*, Philly.com, and SEPTA and is supported by Drexel University and the Greater Philadelphia Wordshop Studio.

The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, a non-profit organization supported by a lead grant of \$4 million from The Pew Charitable Trusts, was established to mark the 300-year anniversary of Benjamin Franklin’s birth (1706-2006) with a celebration dedicated to educating the public about his enduring legacy and inspiring renewed appreciation of the values he embodied. The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary was founded in 2000 by a consortium of five Philadelphia cultural institutions: the American Philosophical Society, The Franklin Institute, The Library Company of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the University of Pennsylvania. In addition, an Act of Congress in 2002 created the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Commission, a panel of fifteen outstanding Americans chosen to study and recommend programs to celebrate Franklin’s 300th birthday. The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary can be found online at www.benfranklin300.org.

The mission of *One Book, One Philadelphia* is to promote reading, literacy, library usage, and community-building throughout the Greater Philadelphia area. Independence Blue Cross is the lead sponsor of *One Book, One Philadelphia*. In 2006, *One Book* had over 300 sponsors and community partners that created programs in celebration of the Franklin Tercentenary. These included author lectures, book discussions, musical performances, museum exhibitions, and children’s programs. *One Book* is a joint project of Mayor John F. Street and the Free Library of Philadelphia. For more information about this and other Library programs, visit www.library.phila.gov.

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