

Crossing Harvard Square one day after work, I noticed three grizzled and apparently homeless men sprawled on the sidewalk. I had nearly passed by before I realized that one of them was my father.

Hardly homeless, he and my mother were the Resident Friends of Cambridge Quaker Meeting. At the time I was in charge of publicity for Harvard's 350th anniversary celebration. It was 1985 and I was seeing, there at my feet, the early stages of my father's ten-year bout with Alzheimer's disease. I soon left Harvard and

QUAKER. JUGGLER. SON. * AUTOBIOGRAPHER.

moved to Philadelphia to help my mother care for my dad—first at their Chestnut Hill apartment, then in the nursing home where he eventually died, his eyes frozen wide with the terror of incomprehension.

The disease devastated his memory. In the beginning he lost little things like keys, dates, and his train of thought. Then he lost names: of objects, of places, even, in time, of his seven children. He forgot how to read, how to write, how to hold a conversation, how to eat—probably his four favorite activities. He forgot how to turn his body left, and at doorways in his home he would turn right and right and right again, repeatedly ending up in the bedroom closet, confused and frightened. He finally forgot how to move his body entirely and he became bedridden for the last years of his life.

But that day I found him on the ground, at home with the homeless, the disease was still young. I hid my concern behind a cheery greeting and asked him what he was doing down there. He beamed at me and asked what I was doing up there. I laughed, adjusted my suit, and sat and shared with him this new perspective.

— David Sanders



* THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
PROJECT

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin is the most widely published autobiography of all time. In honor of Franklin's 300th birthday, the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary and *One Book, One Philadelphia* invited today's Philadelphians to submit memoirs of their own, using no more than 300 words. At the end of the project — May 17, 2006 — a panel of judges selected twenty autobiographies to appear on bus shelters throughout the city. Visit www.theautobiographyproject.com for more information about the project, and to read more Philadelphia stories.

The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary is a non-profit organization established to mark the 300-year anniversary of Benjamin Franklin's birth. *One Book, One Philadelphia* is a project of the Mayor's Office and the Free Library of Philadelphia.



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