

## Magnetic Moments

Locked inside my van parked curbside at Pat's Steaks, I yelled to my friends, "Magnet! Mag--net!" My voice muffled by the rain, the idling motor, and the metal and glass of my captor, I again shouted, "Mag--net!" Standing outside striving to hear, Ed questioned, "Mag--net?" "Yes," I said with relief, "Mag--net!"

I knew that a magnet was the virtual key to open the powered doors on my wheelchair-lift equipped van. Positioning a magnet over switches, concealed in the right taillight, would

# PROSECUTOR. TRAVELER. BROTHER. AUTOBIOGRAPHER.\*

swing open the doors and enable entry.

My voice straining, I convinced Bob, George, and Ed that a magnet was our answer. But where does one find a magnet at midnight on the streets of South Philadelphia? The trio set out to solve the problem. Scrambling about, accosting puzzled passers-by and local residents, my friends quickly produced a small magnet.

Our feeling of success was premature. Try as they might, my friends were unable to activate the switches. I listened intently as they took turns ineffectually sliding the magnet over the taillight. Engineers they are not.

Abandoning the magnet, my friends sought to pry open the van's top-hinged rear window. Gaining only narrow access, the lock plunger could not be reached. Fortunately, a homeless man stepped forward, pushed up his sleeve and offered his thin arm. Partially inserting his arm, he said, "I can't." "Sure you can," urged Bob, slapping the man's elbow through the opening, allowing him to unlock the door.

Dilemma solved! With a handshake and cheesesteak we thanked the man who eagerly helped strangers. A life-long quadriplegic, I am well versed in needing help. Sometimes I am reminded that it can come from the least expected person at the most opportune time.

– Jim Staerk

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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](http://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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