

Whether by chance or by choice, I have spent a large chunk of my life in the presence of developmentally-disabled individuals. Yet for some reason I struggle to take to heart the lessons (sometimes wordless) they try to teach me.

Every day I have a new quarter-life crisis: frustrated living at home, no life direction, missing college, no money, nothing good to wear. Basically, the only positive thing going on right now is that the Phillies are playing well. But let's be honest—this is Philadelphia—it won't last forever.

I am not used to being pessimistic, but lately my attitude has been less than upbeat.

SISTER. PRANKSTER. SPORTS FAN. AUTOBIOGRAPHER.*

So these days, there is one lesson by one handicapped girl that I am really trying to embrace.

Not too long ago, I spent a day babysitting a group of handicapped teenagers. One of my charges, Jessica, came into the room, tote bag in hand, eager to show me what was inside. Jessica took out two ratty-looking dolls and thrust them in my face. I asked her what the dolls were named. With impaired speech, she told me “Hayride” and “Chinese Buffet.” (Now fast forward through a day of punching and hair-pulling, bloody noses, escapees, accidents, faked sickness, real sickness, and a traumatic turtle experience.) Jessica's mom came to pick her up, and I asked her the significance of the names. Her mother told me that she named her beloved baby dolls Hayride and Chinese Buffet because “those are her two favorite things.”

Maybe if I spend a little less time stressing about my five-year plan and a little more time pinpointing my favorite things, the road to my inevitable midlife crisis will be more bearable.

Today, I name my metaphorical dolls “Crossword Puzzle” and “Soft Pretzel.”
Feeling better already.

– Kimberly Rothwell



* 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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