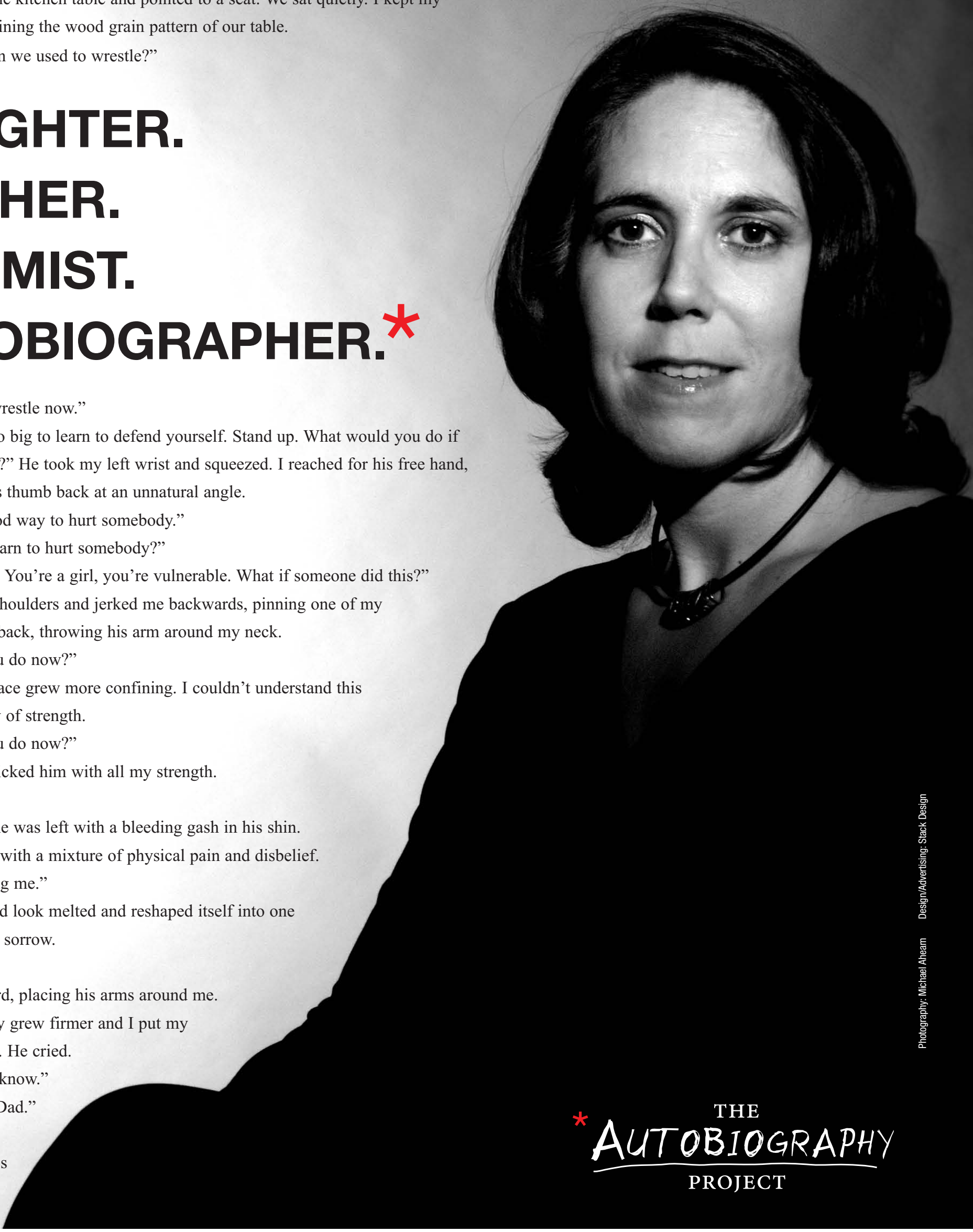


I must have been in the sixth grade that day he drove me home from school. When I was in the seventh he had his car accident and Mom wouldn't let me ride with him anymore. The moment I opened the car door I could tell: rigid posture, pursed lips. Drunk again. When we arrived home I tried retreating to my bedroom.
"Why do you always run to your room after school? Let's talk."
He sat down at the kitchen table and pointed to a seat. We sat quietly. I kept my head down examining the wood grain pattern of our table.
"Remember when we used to wrestle?"

DAUGHTER. MOTHER. OPTIMIST. AUTOBIOGRAPHER.*

"I'm too big to wrestle now."
"You're never too big to learn to defend yourself. Stand up. What would you do if someone did this?" He took my left wrist and squeezed. I reached for his free hand, gently pulling his thumb back at an unnatural angle.
"Yes, that's a good way to hurt somebody."
"Why should I learn to hurt somebody?"
"Don't be stupid. You're a girl, you're vulnerable. What if someone did this?"
He grabbed my shoulders and jerked me backwards, pinning one of my arms behind my back, throwing his arm around my neck.
"What would you do now?"
His violent embrace grew more confining. I couldn't understand this excessive display of strength.
"What would you do now?"
I kicked him. I kicked him with all my strength.
"Oh damn!"
I was freed and he was left with a bleeding gash in his shin.
He looked at me with a mixture of physical pain and disbelief.
"You were hurting me."
The dumbfounded look melted and reshaped itself into one of overwhelming sorrow.
"Oh, God!"
He leaned forward, placing his arms around me.
His hug gradually grew firmer and I put my arms around him. He cried.
"I love you, you know."
"I love you too, Dad."

— Melissa Mandos



* THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
PROJECT

Photography: Michael Ahearn
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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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