

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. I was babysitting one afternoon when I was thirteen and the mom was scooping chicken nuggets onto plastic plates.

"Don't you like my cooking?" she asked, feigning a frown.

"I'm not hungry." A lie so big I could taste it. I knew later I'd raid their stash of chips and cupcakes.

One afternoon the mom summoned me. On her way to put the baby down, she said,

EDUCATOR. IDEALIST. CUPCAKE LOVER. AUTOBIOGRAPHER.*

"Let's chat in a minute." Just before she came back, I pushed a piece of blue-frosted cupcake into my mouth. I swallowed hard and pasted on a smile as she breezed into the kitchen.

"You know we love you," she began.

I nodded.

"I know a doctor who runs a weight-loss program—"

BANG!

She said it. "Weight." I kept my eyes fixed on her face as the room spun around me. The less this bothered me outwardly, the shorter the conversation. Her face exhibited real concern. She went on. Weigh-ins, some number of calories, supervision. I wondered what time it was. I hoped I didn't look as fat as I felt.

Finally, one of the kids called to her and time started moving again.

I slipped into the bathroom. I felt sick and embarrassed and I thought about leaving. After a moment, I caught a glimpse of my face in the mirror. With the humiliating realization that it had been there since the start of our conversation, I licked the smudge of blue frosting off my lip, opened the door and walked back onto the battlefield.

— Robin Fradkin



* THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
PROJECT

Photography: Michael Ahearn Design/Advertising: Stack Design

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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