

I sat in front of the teacher's desk in an assigned seat, otherwise I'd have sat far from that desk. I had nothing against the desk or the woman behind it; this wasn't her fault. That didn't, however, keep me from wanting to hide behind my peers' raised hands. "Switch assignments and we'll correct."

I felt my face redden and a fist wrap around my throat from inside, pulling from my stomach. I wiped my eyes, always red from these constant, terrible moments.

"Sage? Can I see your homework?" came the familiar, trying-so-hard-to-be-patient, teacher-sigh. She'd learned early not to expect much from a girl who never had anything to offer.

ARTIST. POET. MUSICIAN. AUTOBIOGRAPHER.*

Just say 'I forgot it at home,' I thought.

Instead I made a strangled noise and felt the skin surrounding my eyes sting as a tear rolled off my cheek. I croaked again, trying hard to speak, feeling a million eyes on me, studying this croaking creature, too lazy to do homework and so cheap that she cried to avoid punishment.

But this was punishment—for something I couldn't control, something nobody had prepared me for. Shrinks only told me to breathe, relax, but how could I relax when a million eyes were staring, disgusted by each tear that slid onto the desk in front of me? How could I breathe with my heart twisting around my lungs, constricting, knotting up? Middle School is hell for almost everyone, but this was different. You remember twelve-year-olds taunting each other, "swirlies" and after-school fights, but these eye-rolling glances were far worse. I was unprepared, shy, and so different. I could beat this thing, but I was too miserable, too worried about the upcoming classes to concentrate. Once I fell behind I lost all hope of getting back, so I just kept falling.

— Sage Waring



* THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
PROJECT

Design/Advertising: Stack Design
Photography: Michael Ahearn

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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