

Home was an eight-block stretch of Howard Street running north from the B&O Railroad tracks at Tusculum Street to the Reading Railroad lines that paralleled Venango. The intersecting streets—Clearfield, Lippincott, Wishart, Allegheny, Westmoreland, Ontario, Tioga—sound now like old battlegrounds and dead generals, but once this grid pulsed with pounding feet, the tramp of doomed cattle, the wails of babies and fire trucks and lunch whistles.

The Artloom Carpet factory adjoining Howard Street racketed around the clock with the incessant shuttle of monstrous looms, creating rugs from

FATHER. SAILOR. FRIEND. AUTOBIOGRAPHER.*

a cat's cradle of colored yarns unraveling from inexhaustible spools. The noise was like blood pulsing in your skull, passing the threshold of pain even in winter when the metal-meshed jalousie windows were closed against the cold.

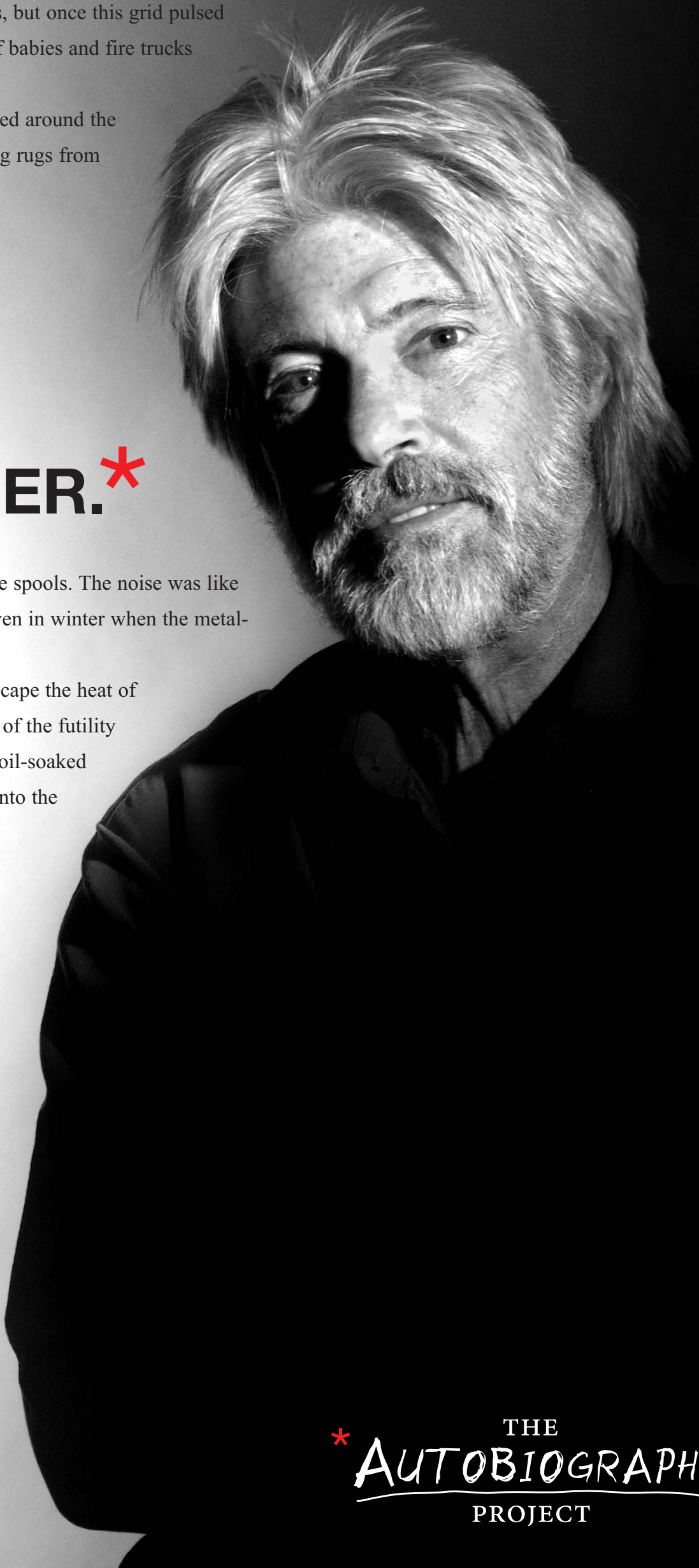
In summer months, families on Howard Street, hoping to escape the heat of their row homes, would sit mutely on front porches, certain of the futility of speech, awaiting a breeze that might blow away the hot, oil-soaked air from the factory. As a family, we had long since gotten into the habit of hoping for little and saying nothing.

At the northern end of Howard, the Cross Brothers Meat Packing plant processed terror-stricken cattle from boxcars parked on a spur behind Venango Street through manure-encrusted corrals into kill rooms. Here, the knives waited to quiet the bellowing of these incongruous urban herds and permanently close their bulging, white-rimmed eyes. The smell that choked surrounding streets heaved itself from here, breaching the huge doors of the abattoir (left open during the day for curious boys to crowd around) and leaching through the walls at night when the slaughtering would stop.

Buildings flanked the street shoulder to shoulder, creating a long, malodorous valley lined with slim hopes and old cars, running nowhere.

Nowhere, that is, but home.

— Shawn Hart



* 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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