

2013 YEARBOOK

AUTOGRAPH
Autoph UNIVERSITY



2013 YEARBOOK

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Autograph University

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A NOTE FROM MATT RAYMOND

Founder, Autograph University | matt@autographu.com



At times autograph collecting can be a lonely hobby. We sit and write letters by ourselves or wait outside hotels in silent anticipation. Even when we're graphing in a crowd it often feels like every man for himself. But the fact is we're all part of a community. And the mission of Autograph University isn't just about how I can educate and entertain you, it's also about bringing collectors together to learn from each other. One way we've done that in 2013 is through the Master Class web show. The other is the Autograph University Yearbook. Both projects are close to my heart and I get excited thinking about what they could become. But I can't do it alone. I want to hear your ideas, questions and stories. Let's keep building. This book is just one example of what's possible when we work together.

It is my pleasure to present the second annual Autograph University Yearbook. Many thanks to those who contributed and to you for reading it right now.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Matt Raymond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

BOBBY BRISSE

www.facebook.com/bobbysautographs

Growing up a young basketball fan in Michigan in the 1980s, I couldn't help but root for the Detroit Pistons. There was one problem with that; my favorite player was Los Angeles Lakers forward Magic Johnson.

I was too young to really appreciate the Pistons-Lakers rivalry, but I remember cutting out a newspaper article of Magic Johnson when he announced his retirement due to contracting HIV.

Twenty years ago, my mom asked me what I wanted for Easter. Since it seemed she had some connections with the Easter Bunny, I was confident in telling her that all I wanted was a Magic Johnson basketball card. She stated how that could be difficult, but she would see what she could do. Well, the Easter Bunny delivered me three packs of basketball cards that day and as I opened each pack and flipped through each card, I could see the nervousness on my mom's face. Wouldn't you know it, the very last card in the very last pack was a Magic Johnson!

My Mom passed away back in 2011, and a sense of urgency in myself led me to set a two year window for meeting Magic and having him sign that card for me. I searched online for a public signing and found out that he would be in Mill Creek, Washington on October 16, 2012. Knowing it was during the week, my dreams were dashed as I

knew I would be working that day. It wasn't until an hour later when my boss handed me the schedule; what are the odds I was scheduled off on that Tuesday!

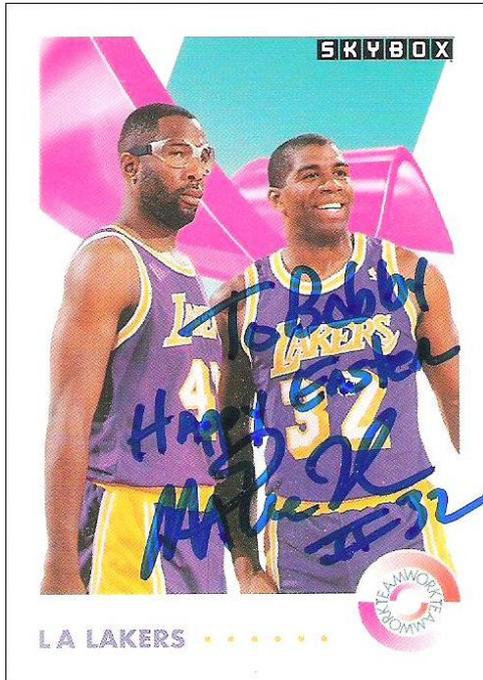
Vacationing is not something I'm good at, let alone traveling by plane across the country by myself. I left Detroit around 6 a.m. on October 16 and spent the next eight hours (with layovers) en route to Seattle. I rented a car at the airport and drove an additional hour to Mill Creek for the meet and greet.

I was fifth in line when Magic sat down at the table to start the signing. The store staff knew I had traveled a long way and cut the line off after me to give me an additional minute or so. As I walked up to the table, the handler of the signing said, "Magic, this person traveled the farthest to see you." I chimed in stating, "I came all the way from Detroit."

"What?" Magic said with a confused look on his face.

Over the next 45 seconds (which felt like an hour) he proceeded to ask me how my family was doing (which stunned me because he made it seem like we were lifelong friends) and I also told him how I'm a graduate of Michigan State (which he is an alumni of). The handler, trying to keep the line moving, said, "You paid for one inscription, what is it going to say?"

I proceeded to tell them that it was an uncommon inscription, but how my mom had passed away and all I wanted for Easter as a kid was a Magic Johnson card. I ask if he could write "Happy Easter" on it. He grabs the blue Sharpie, writes "To Bobby. Happy



Easter” followed by *Magic Johnson #32*. We snap a quick photo, I gather my things, and I head for the door.

After weeks of preparation and an entire day of living out of a suitcase, I was able to cross off #1 on my bucket list on October 16, 2012 at 6:17 p.m., Seattle time.

I spent the night in Washington and flew home the next morning. As I headed back to work the following day, I felt like a minor celebrity showing off my photos and autographs to all of my co-workers. I was the happiest person in the world up until November 9, when I received an email from a local Detroit area sports store with an upcoming signing: former Los Angeles Lakers forward Magic Johnson.

“He grabs the blue Sharpie, writes ‘To Bobby. Happy Easter’ followed by *Magic Johnson #32*.”



JEFFREY ROBISON

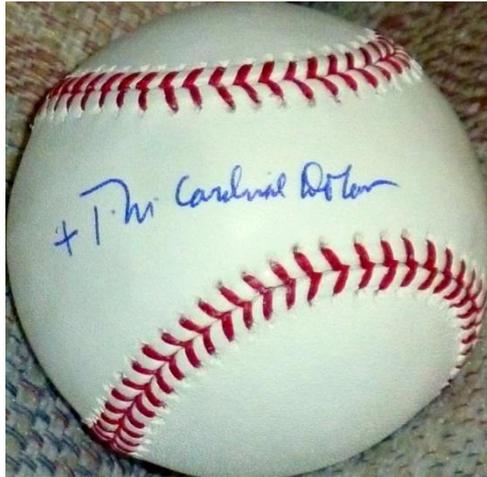
www.sportscollectors.net: sccrow

In February 2012 I sent a Buffalo Bills pocket pro helmet to Shane Nelson to be signed. I was hoping that he would sign it for me but I didn't expect what I received back. He signed my pocket pro as well as sent four autographed 8x10 photos and a four page letter. It was an incredible return at face value but it became a classroom altering one as well. I teach second grade and what I saw on one of the photos became a staple in my classroom for the past year plus. Nelson had inscribed "Focus, Effort, Commitment leads to Success". That saying really hit home for me. I immediately incorporated it into my classroom. I made a sign for over the whiteboard and discussed what it meant with my class. We would recite the saying pretty much every day. This year I took it even further by having pencils and pens inscribed with the saying. I can hold up five fingers and my class will hold up five fingers and recite Focus, Effort, Commitment Equals Success. It just amazes me that a little request for an autograph can have an impact on my classroom. That saying will be with me for the rest of my teaching career and there will be hundreds of students that will learn it. Thank you Shane Nelson.



KEITH R.

Twitter: [@MyYankeesJersey](#), [@RockStufff](#)



It was April 16, 2012, and I was visiting New York City. I had arranged to meet an out of town autograph friend before the Yankees game that night to wait by Yankee Stadium for arriving players. I forget now exactly who we picked up that day, if anyone, but a cool encounter came from that day's festivities.

It was almost game time and there was nothing going on outside anymore. We decided we would get ready to head in. Around that time there was a huddle with a few of the cops who were outside the stadium, with another official-looking gentleman with an ear piece. One of the cops that was huddled was an acquaintance of mine, someone I saw at the Stadium a lot, and that I got to talking to in previous visits. After his huddle, he came over to me and said the Holy Father was going to be attending the game this evening. I thought for a second, and said to myself, "Hmm, I didn't know the Pope was in town", and then quickly figured out he meant New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan. Cardinal Dolan is somewhat of a celebrity in New York, as he is the head of the church and has a huge personality. My buddy and I conferred with each other and decided we would wait and try for an autograph and photo op.

A few minutes went by and sure enough, there was Cardinal Dolan, a jolly older man but full of energy. As he walked toward us we asked for a photo op and if he would sign our balls (no pun intended). He was happy to oblige us and pose for a photo. As we each handed him our baseball, he made a comment how he doesn't sign many of these and started to tell us a story.

Cardinal Dolan told us he had a member of his congregation that gave him a baseball to have signed by the Pope on a trip he took to the Vatican. When he arrived there and was preparing to meet the Pope he took the ball out and the Vatican asked what it was. The Cardinal explained it was for one of his parishioners to have signed by the Pope. The Vatican told Cardinal Dolan that his Holiness only signed flat items and that he would not be able to sign the baseball. Cardinal Dolan understood and went back to tell his friend that unfortunately the Pope could not sign the ball. Shortly after that the man returned to Cardinal Dolan with the leather of a baseball, flat, and unstitched. Cardinal Dolan returned to the Vatican again, for another visit to the Pope, and this time was able to have it signed.

We all laughed at the end of the story, but I think my buddy and I laughed a little harder. We knew that guy had to be a crazy grapher, willing to go to any length to obtain that hard to get autograph—and he succeeded. I only wonder how long it took to stitch that ball back up!



SAM G.

www.sportsgraphing.com: Okajima5678

Well where do I begin? It was Spring Training 2008 and I wanted my favorite player Dustin Pedroia's autograph. He signed about five autographs that day—of course I was three people from where he stopped signing and I was pretty discouraged. Then in Spring Training 2011 I was one person away from where he stopped signing. Just my luck!

In September later that year I was one person away from getting him again at the Trop. This time I wanted his new SI signed and once again disappointment set in. In 2012 in Clearwater during Spring Training I missed the team bus pulling in when Pedroia signed. Once again I left discouraged and frustrated. Later that day he signed on the complete opposite side of where I was. I tore up my SI this time. I went to a few regular season games and he didn't sign any of the games I went to.

In spring training this year I hit the Twins outside coming into JetBlue Park. Then inside the park I went to the only corner where there was room along the crowded Red Sox base line. Pedroia comes out of the dugout and ignores us for at least 45 minutes. I wasn't surprised. Then after warm-ups he ran by the people waiting on the third base line and I thought that he definitely wouldn't sign. But the little kid next to me called to him and he came to our corner. My heart raced as he grabbed the kid's marker, a new blue Sharpie. He grabbed my card next and another kid's baseball before taking off. I finally got my white whale and it was definitely a moment to remember.

MARK DOMINGUE

In 2007 singer-songwriter Sammy Kershaw was running for Lt. Governor of Louisiana and I was approached to join his campaign as the official disc jockey for the tour. I traveled with Sammy and his team to different cities throughout the state and accompanied him on floats to DJ the parades. Being a big Sammy Kershaw fan you can imagine my excitement in getting to be a part of his campaign. After working the tour for six months I had developed a friendly relationship with Sammy and got him to autograph a guitar slide and several pictures for me. Still today Sammy and I remain in contact as friends and we even play in the same fantasy football league.



GARRETT BERTHIAUME

GB Autographs | www.gbautographs.com



2012 Brought me many new autographs and experiences. One thousand one hundred eight six to be precise. But at the beginning of 2013, one experience may have trumped all of those. It was January 8th—just over a week into a fresh year and I found myself on my way to graph in New York City for the first time. On the train into the city I didn't know what to expect. It was a book signing for legendary actor Jeff Bridges' new book so it should have been easy, but would I be there early enough? Would I completely waste my time? I had bought a few photos, but I had no idea if I could get them signed since it was a book signing, but I sure as hell was going to try.

When I arrived to the store, I was 3 hours early and only a few rows of seats back, so I knew I would get an autograph but not how many. After Jeff's talk, the line formed and I anxiously waited. When I got to the front Jeff signed my book, and I said very quietly, "Can you please sign my photo? I'm a big fan." His response? He smiled, and said "Yeah, just hide it from her (pointing at the handler from the publisher)." I smiled, but then a handler saw my photo, grabbed it, and threw it into my bag, and gave me the whole, 'No outside items' lecture. Mr. Bridges took my bag, signed the photo, and after a dirty look from the handler, I was on my way. To me, sometimes what I get out of graphing isn't the actual item, but the great anecdotes that come with them.

JUSTIN

www.just-in-justinsworld.blogspot.com | Facebook: [justinsworldblog](https://www.facebook.com/justinsworldblog)
Twitter: [@justfactsmaam](https://twitter.com/justfactsmaam)

My autograph story took place in 2011, at AutoZone Park, home of the Memphis Redbirds. I am from Memphis and usually make it back up there for a few weeks every year, hang out, and spend time with family and friends. In the past few years, we've made a habit of attending a Redbirds game while I'm there. The Redbirds have a solid team, and the ballpark is set up perfectly to have lots of fun. It's also laid out well for graphing purposes. In this particular story, I was set up next to the Redbirds dugout. It was a hot day so I had a feeling the players wouldn't be coming out until they absolutely had to, to warm up and such. So I decided to try to get some signatures as they came out of the clubhouse.

After I got over the embarrassment of almost asking the batboy for his signature, I had my items ready for whoever came out. Besides cards I also had a mini baseball, somewhat larger than a golf ball to get signed. It was navy blue and I thought it would look very nice with a couple of signatures in silver across it.

The first two guys who came out were more than happy to sign the ball. Despite the heat, they were very cordial and signed it, no problem. A few others players followed, all of whom I had cards for or didn't sign. Then out strolls number twenty-three, which my printed roster told me was pitcher Chuckie Fick. No cards for him, so when

another grapher called him over to sign I was ready to hand him my baseball and silver pen.

Instead of signing it and moving on like the other guys did, Fick stopped and tossed the ball up and down in his hand a few times. He wanted to know where I got it; I told him in the stadium gift shop several years prior. That's when he really became a big jerk. He first laughed at me for spending money on the "rinky dinky thing". Then he got the other graphers around involved, as he continued saying things like I couldn't afford a real baseball and he wasn't sure he should give it back to me. Eventually, he did sign it and hand it back, although after all of that, I'd have rather he didn't.

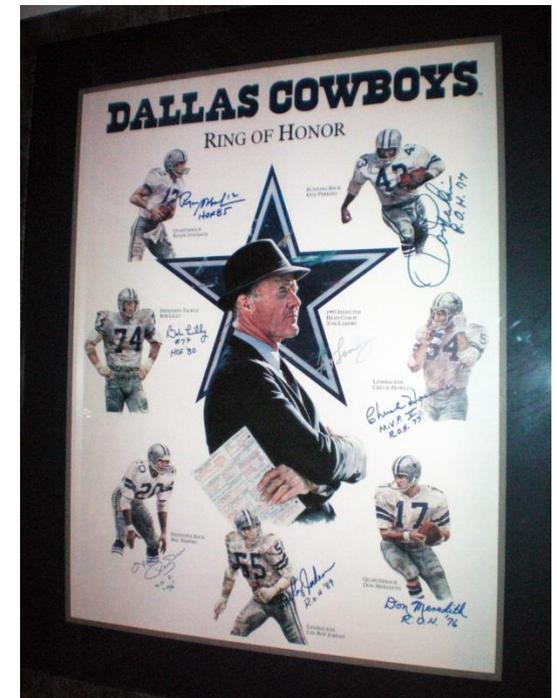
It still, to this day, bugs me that he would be so stupidly and unnecessarily mean to a fan. Even one of the other players who walked by while Fick was jawing motioned for my ball and pen and made a point of signing it very nicely and handing it back without saying a word. Needless to say, while the other players were very nice and considerate, especially on such a hot day, Chuckie Fick still ranks #1 on my "Worst Autograph Experiences" list.

“It still, to this day, bugs me that he would be so stupidly and unnecessarily mean to a fan.”

DAN ARNOLD

This Ring of Honor poster is the first item that I had autographed. Bob Lilly is the first autograph that I got on the poster but he was not the hardest to get since he lives about 20 miles from Austin. The next autograph I got was Tom Landry who was doing a grand opening for a Sears store here.

He was only going to be there for an hour and a half so I got there about 30 minute before. The line was over 300 deep and it took two and a half hours to finally meet Mr. Landry. He stayed there signing for over three hours until everybody in line got an autograph.



ALEX S.

Though I thoroughly enjoy acquiring autographs in-person, I am terrible at recognizing faces, which sometimes makes me nervous when snagging signatures. What if I misidentify an individual and ask the wrong guy? That would be embarrassing. To help me out a little, I started finding headshots of the individuals I have cards of for that day's game and printing them out so I have something to reference.

A couple years ago, I was at a Rochester Red Wings game waiting for team manager Tom Nieto. I waited and waited because he was taking forever to come out. Finally, I saw him wander out the door and I walked up to him to ask for his autograph. "Would you sign these for me, please?" I kindly said.

As I'm holding out the Sharpie and waiting for him to take it and autograph my six cards, he replies in a semi-annoyed voice, "That's not me." Taken aback and slightly confused, I responded, "Uh, are you sure?" And he affirmed in a "you're an idiot" tone that it was not him.

Of course, it was all my fault. When I made up my sheet of headshots earlier in the day, I accidentally copied and pasted an image of the team's pitching coach, Bobby Cuellar, rather than the guy I actually wanted, manager Tom Nieto. I even recall thinking to myself a couple times how much Nieto looked like Cuellar in the picture I had. Well, I soon figured out why.

I don't know if he left before or after Cuellar came out and helped correct my error, but I never got Nieto's autograph that day.

“As I'm holding out the Sharpie and waiting for him to take it and autograph my six cards, he replies in a semi-annoyed voice, ‘That's not me.’”

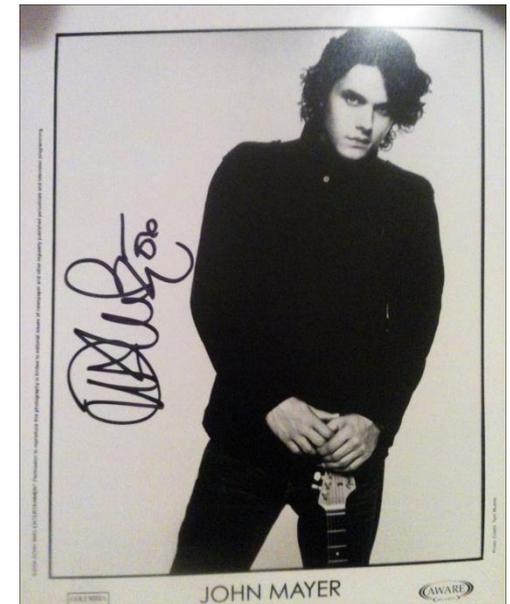
SCOTT PAGE

The summer of 2007 my wife Julie and I were at a Yankees/Brewers game and we decided to go early—or I should say my wife was nice enough to go early with me as I wanted to take a shot at getting a few Yankee autographs. Before no time there were 100+ people down on the Yankee dugout. Fortunately my wife was on one end and I was on the other. After Jeter was done in the batting cage he headed toward us, and as he approached he looked up at all the people and some started just throwing items (including what seemed like a dozen baseballs) down at him. My wife waiting patiently held her ball up and he pointed at her so she threw him the ball (fortunately he caught it). He signed it VERY NICELY on the sweet spot and rolled it back to her on top of the dugout and he left, not signing another.

I couldn't tell you how excited we both were, I was shaking. Everyone else was saying, “You must be the luckiest person.” Some fans stuck around getting others but nothing like Derek Jeter. Unbelievable! After that we continued to hang around down by the dugout and just before the game began I saw Robinson Cano just sitting there so I politely asked him to sign my ball and he did. It couldn't have been any better of a day at that point. Then just as Mr. Cano threw the ball up to me, Don Mattingly looked up and I asked my childhood favorite player if he would mind signing and he kindly did. That was the end of it. I had the best autograph day of my life and to this day my wife and I still talk about how lucky we were.

MARK COOPER

In the summer of 2007 I backpacked through South America. Three days after I returned I got what I thought at the time was food poisoning. I had trouble breathing and couldn't sleep. I saw my doctor and was immediately admitted to the hospital. An hour later, I was taken to the emergency room where I stayed for almost three weeks. I was on a ventilator, lost 40 pounds, and was given a 50-50 chance to live. While ill I missed a John Mayer concert for which I already had a ticket. The girl I was dating at the time knew that I was upset so she contacted Mayer's tour manager. The first thing I saw upon returning home was an 8x10 signed by Mayer. Seeing the autograph put a smile on my face at a very scary time and got me thinking about graphing again. I think if I ever do meet Mayer I'll be sure to tell him that story.



EDMUND

I am always telling people the best way to get an autograph is to politely ask and then let the player come to you. Screaming his name, pushing people, and chasing after him won't get your items signed. Those are the reasons he doesn't sign. A perfect example of this: Kobe Bryant.

Just a few months ago, toward the end of the season, the Lakers were in town playing the Spurs. All the autograph collectors in town know his routine. Every night he's in town, he goes out to eat. Same time every day. One night, there was an exceptionally large group of people waiting outside the hotel. He came out and everyone went nuts. Screaming, pushing each other, trying to get past his security. He got in a car and left. One individual who was a little more violent than the others said something along the lines of "What an asshole, I can't believe he won't sign." Yeah, you just trampled a couple kids, and *he* is the asshole. As Kobe's car was pulling off a few cars pulled up behind his and picked up a bunch of the autograph collectors. What followed was some of the worst human behavior I have ever seen by a group in public. A car chase, in and out of traffic, a mob of people running alongside a car in the middle of the street. Some pretty clever evasive maneuvers by Kobe and his driver. The whole thing was unreal.

While everyone else was out chasing him down, I and two other guy who behaved themselves went to get something to eat. While sitting at the window, Kobe's car

pulls up across the street, he gets out, pulls his hoodie over his head and ducks down a stairwell to the River Walk.

The car pulls off, and the collectors show up late and chase after the car. We're the only ones who saw where he went. I'm still eating my burger, so when one of the guys asks if we should go after him, I say, "No. Let him have some peace for dinner. And I seriously doubt that he'll ever sign another autograph here again with the way people are acting." Even with my negative outlook, we head back to the hotel. All the people chasing him are already there and very confused. The car is sitting in valet, everyone got out except Kobe. There's a few hardcore optimists arguing that he's still sitting in the car, and we should just go knock on the window. Team security walks out as another car is pulling up. Pau Gasol steps out and you hear a loud gasp of disappointment. Pau looks like his feelings were just hurt, but he signs for the few who wanted him.

Two hours go by. The three of us know Kobe is still out. The crowd is dwindling down till it's just the last six or seven people. The ones who come out for every team, not just the big names. They're the ones who will wait around till the next morning if they don't see him come back. They decide to check out the places he's been known to go. The two guys I've been hanging out with and I aren't going anywhere. It's almost 1 a.m. and we're too tired to be playing the cat and mouse games like everyone else. As soon as they disappear down the street, Kobe pops around a corner walking back to the hotel. How those guys missed him will remain a mystery. We kept our distance from him and didn't want to trap him like everyone else. Right as he got to the right position between us and the front door, we call out to him, "Kobe, do you have time

for a couple autographs?" He whips around in shock, "What the hell are you guys still doing here?" He waves us over, signs a 16x20 for the first guy in silver, then does something shocking to anyone who graphs the NBA. He switches markers and signed a jersey for each of us. Then says "There, now go home."

“What followed was some of the worst human behavior I have ever seen by a group in public. A car chase, in and out of traffic, a mob of people running alongside a car in the middle of the street.”

JEFF JUCO

www.facebook.com/jmjautographs | Twitter: [@juc91](https://twitter.com/@juc91)

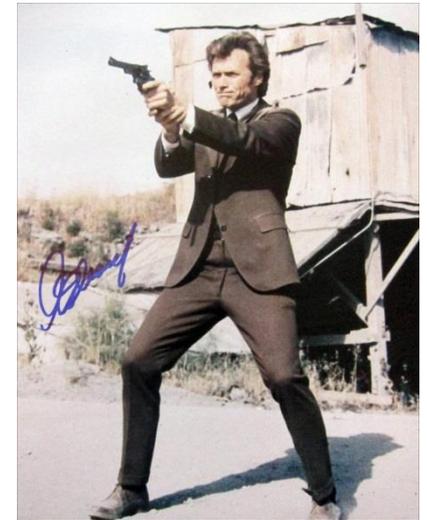
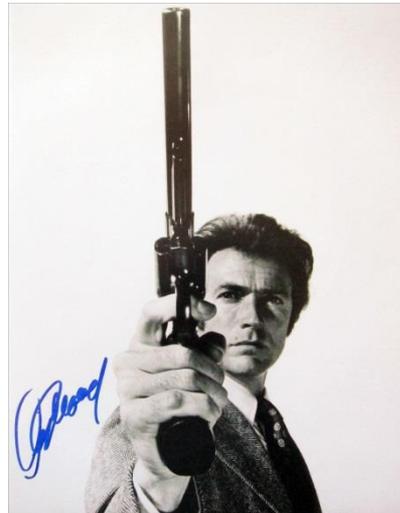
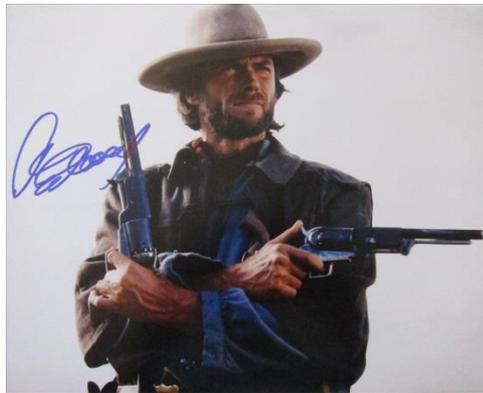
Email: jmjautographs@gmail.com

It had been over 10 years since I last got Clint Eastwood, so when I heard he was hosting an event I didn't even think twice about going. The drive to the event was an hour and a half so coming back empty handed would make for a really long drive. While I waited in my car for Clint to arrive I noticed a few more graphers in the parking lot and we all know that too many can make getting an autograph more difficult. It's about 5 p.m. and I finally see Clint riding in a golf cart coming up to the event entrance. As I ran out to him there are at least 20 other graphers behind me. I approached Clint and asked for an autograph and he says in his best Clint voice, "I'm done doing that" and walks into the event. One of my friends in LA told me the night before he didn't sign at his premiere for *Trouble with the Curve*, so I'm not having a good feeling and already dreading the long drive home. All the graphers decided to go home and get on the road as it could be a good 3-4 hours till the event would be over. I decided to stick it out as next week I was moving to Southern Cal and this was my only shot at Eastwood.

We waited and waited. Then around 9 p.m. we decided to walk into the event and check out the scene and to make sure Clint didn't leave out of a side door. There were five of us and we stuck out like a sore thumb in the ballroom as everyone was dressed up. We spotted Clint but just at that time we got kicked out by security. At



least he was still there so we waited outside the building and about 45 minutes later Clint comes out with a security guard. Our friend needed the photo op so we let him go first and we didn't rush him for autographs. We lined up and asked Clint if he would sign, he thanked us for being respectful and cordial and said yes he would sign. What happened next still amazes me, it was like we were in an autograph firing line. I got one 11x14 signed and then he went down the line signing while I re-loaded with another 11x14 and he kept signing, talking to us and enjoying seeing some of the younger pictures of him. The five of us got at least four 11x14 photos signed each! This ranked as one of my top autograph encounters as I have been a big fan of Clint Eastwood and he definitely made that long drive home a very short one!



TOM REYNOLDS

My story is from the Yankees Luncheon for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay. This event was set up perfectly from beginning to end. I walked into the Tampa convention center in awe! First thing I saw was a silent auction of signed game used and authentic merchandise. I put in two bids but with no success. I moved on to the line for the Yankees autographs and had to wait a while until it started.

Then the pandemonium began. I wanted to get Derek Jeter as my first graph but the line was too long for me to wait as you have 40 minutes to get all the autographs you can. So I moved right into the Mariano Rivera line and got him to sign a painting for me perfectly. Then I scattered to the Robbie Cano line and got a jersey signed, then Brett Gardner on a ball. Derek Jeter's line was so long that I proceeded to Cano's line again before going for C.C. Sabathia. I couldn't believe it—I banged out two Sabathias, another Cano and two more Garners. I began to run around a bit to get others such as Andy Petite, Ron Guidry, Phil Hughes, Kevin Youkilis, David Wells and a few others Yankees. Wow, what a rush.

I wound up with 29 autographs total and a sit down lunch with the Yankees players and staff. The admission fee was a donation of course but being a Yankee fan this was a perfect day.

BRETT

I've always heard Roger Waters was a great signer. As rock musicians go there are few who are more important than Roger. This is the guy who wrote, sang and played bass on arguably the greatest and most popular rock album of all time, *The Dark Side Of The Moon* (not to mention the bulk of Pink Floyd's other classic material).

Since he was touring the world playing *The Wall* (another one of Floyd's best albums) live I knew this was a great opportunity to get him. After doing some research, I found out that Roger usually arrives at the venue at 4:30 p.m. to soundcheck and stops to sign at every venue but ONLY on his way in, one per person. So on June 28th I went up to Albany, New York with two Pink Floyd albums in my hands. You never want to be the guy stuck with only one item on a day when someone known for being a strict one-per decides to sign multiples on a whim. Crazy stuff has happened.

I arrived at the venue at 4:25 thinking I was cutting it pretty close, but when I saw a small group of graphers waiting near the back entrance to the arena I assumed I was in good shape. Well, I assumed wrong. After waiting for about 25 minutes a tour staffer came out the back door to smoke a cigarette and told us that Roger had already arrived—had stopped to sign—and was now on stage doing his soundcheck. He also told us Roger usually arrives at 4:15, not 4:30 as I (and the other graphers)

had heard. He also gave us another piece of good intel that would help me later... he told us that Roger travels with a personal security guy and any time Roger stops to sign this "military-looking guy" will be by his side. Since it was nearing 5 p.m. we had no reason to doubt what this staffer was telling us. At this point we all walked away with that totally bummed feeling you get when you narrowly miss out on a great opportunity.

The good news was that the next night Roger was playing a couple hours away in Hartford. I grew up there so I called my parents and told them I'd be coming down for a visit—but not to expect me for dinner because I was going to the Roger Waters show. I called up my brother and told him he was coming with me (that way I had someone else to get my other record signed). We arrived at the back entrance to the Hartford Civic Center—a ramp that goes down under the venue—at 3:45. No way was I going to be late this time! There were a couple other graphers there and about a dozen more joined us over the next half hour. At 4:10 a car pulls up and a man with a walkie-talkie in his hand gets out, but there's no one else in the car. He's a big guy with a flat-top haircut. It's the "military-looking" guy! Now I know Roger must be close.

I have one album in my hand (The Dark Side Of The Moon) and I give the other (The Wall) to my brother. The military guy tells us to line up, only one autograph per person. It's happening! But...uhhh...no sign of Roger yet. Sure enough, like clockwork, at 4:15 a van with tinted windows rolls up as the military guy directs it where to go. The van stops just before it goes down the ramp underneath the arena and the

window rolls down. There he is, Rock and Roll Hall of Famer, founding member of Pink Floyd, Roger Waters!

The signing happened quickly. Roger stayed in the car and you handed him your item through the window, but he was nice enough. As I'm in line and Roger started to sign the military guy called out "Roger will only use his own marker to sign, no switching." Now, if you know The Dark Side Of The Moon you know that the whole cover is black. I'm worried that if Roger is using black or blue it won't show up on my album! I had planned to give Roger a silver marker that was fully prepped and ready to go in my hand.

I call out to military guy from my spot 4 or 5 people deep in line, "But I have silver!" He calls back a quick and succinct, "Nope!" Now I'm thinking crap, what do I do, he can't sign black on black! At this point I'm next in line and there isn't time to do anything but hand my record to Roger and hope for the best. YES! I now see that Roger's marker is the fullest, most brilliant, perfect GOLD paint pen that I've ever seen! We all know how fickle metallic markers and paint pens can be. Roger's paint pen worked absolutely flawlessly. Combine that with Roger's HUGE signature that he always gives and that record is now easily one of the best looking items in my entire collection. A quick "Nice to meet you, thank you" to Roger and a minute later his van was rolling down the ramp into the venue. My brother got the other record signed too (I let him keep it) and a few hours later I went to the show.

Mission accomplished!

MATT RAYMOND

Autograph University | www.autographu.com | Twitter: [@mattraymond](https://twitter.com/mattraymond)

Spring 1996
Staten Island, New York

We stepped off the Staten Island ferry at St. George's Terminal beneath a crystal clear blue sky. My mother unfolded a map and navigated us south on foot along Bay Street until the scent of sea water vanished, overtaken by the odor of car exhaust and asphalt. I was in heaven.

Until this point our mother-son trip to New York had gone by the guidebook including visits to the Empire State Building and Little Italy, but it was this last stop that I had anticipated for months. This final destination was no mere attraction—we were on a pilgrimage to the mecca for any 14-year old Wu-Tang Clan devotee. The Wu Wear store on Victory Boulevard.

Upon my insistence we arrived just as the shop opened and I pushed through the front door like I had a golden ticket to Willy Wonka's factory. But Wu Wear was more walk-in closet than wonderland. A lone employee stood behind a counter only steps from the entrance. Off to the left a handful of wall racks held brightly-colored t-shirts, hoodies and skully caps emblazoned with the Wu logo. Conspicuously missing were the iconic black and yellow styles the group wore in the videos. Is this all they had? The clerk frowned and nodded. I settled on a nearly neon red and blue winter hat,

paid my money and turned to leave. As I reached the door I noticed a flyer taped to one of the shelves advertising an appearance by Raekwon—my favorite Wu member—the following Saturday. Just my luck, I said to my mom.

“You know, Method Man is coming here today,” said the clerk.

What did you say?

“Method Man is doing a signing from twelve to two if you want to come back.”

Just my luck! I pointed to a poster of the group behind the counter and asked if I was guaranteed to get it signed. She said yes and I handed over ten dollars much more enthusiastically than in my last transaction.

With two hours to kill we walked across the street to Wu Nails, a salon affiliated with the Clan through its owner Patricia Diggs, sister of RZA, the group’s mastermind and primary producer. After snapping a photo of the storefront and picking up a souvenir bottle of *Grenada Green* nail polish we were down to an hour and fifty-six minutes until show time. I trekked back across the street to start the line—a line of one—by the entrance of Wu Wear while my mom sat down on the sidewalk in front of the salon and cracked a book.

An hour passed before the line doubled. Then as midday approached momentum built as fans descended upon the Wu Wear store from every direction. Each surrounding street was an artery pumping people onto the crowded sidewalk. A



Photo by Matt Raymond's mother. The 8x10 would be signed a year later.

Hot 97 promotional van pulled up just before noon blaring hip-hop and brought with it a heightened sense of anticipation for Method Man's impending arrival. What was once a line behind me became a swarm of people spilling out onto Victory Boulevard. We grew restless watching one o'clock—then two—tick by uneventfully. The mob continued to grow in size as word spread throughout the surrounding neighborhoods. I stretched on tiptoes and strained my neck to see my mother. She sat calmly eating a granola bar and waved to me, hiding her concern behind a warm smile.

"METHOD MAN!"

The cry rolled over the crowd like a wave and we turned at once to see the rapper running full bore toward us down St. Pauls Avenue, his hands tugging up his baggy jeans which fell again and again with each stride. He reached the van and pulled himself to the roof, caught a microphone tossed from below and whipped the mob into a frenzy. (Later I would learn my mother was in the middle of it all snapping photos.) Method Man hopped down and bounded up the steps, disappearing into the store. By now more than a hundred people stood between me and the signing which should have already been over had he arrived on time. At this point there was no way of knowing how long he'd stay.

The throng surged forward—any semblance of a line faded hours ago—and I clung tightly to my poster, trying to keep it from being bent, sweated on or otherwise damaged (as my body had already been). I was exhausted and losing hope. Then Method Man reemerged, leapt back onto the van and the crowd roared.

“Aight, I’m signing only for the babies. Only for the babies, aight? Nobody else.”

What followed blew my mind. People rushed forward with children in their arms. Not young fans. *Infants and toddlers*. In every case the sea parted to let them through, pushing me further away. And not only were they running toward the store, they were scurrying home to grab a child to bring back along with a piece of tattered notebook paper. A diapered baby became a VIP pass to get in the club.

I was furious. I am the one supporting the music. I am the only one here who actually has merchandise to get signed. I was first in line!

I weaved my way forward trying to get within earshot of the bouncer at the front door of the shop. Upon reaching him I pleaded my case, waving my poster in front of him and retelling the guarantee I received from the clerk nearly six hours earlier. I came all the way from Massachusetts, I shouted over *Hot 97’s* jams. And I was first in line! He said there is nothing he can do and I persisted. He shot a glance inside the store and shook his head and I asked him to do the right thing. He sighed and puffed out his cheeks and looks out over the crowd and I crane forward over someone’s shoulders because I just want to get in to meet one of my heroes and get the autograph I was promised when I handed over my money for this fucking poster.

“Ok, you’re the last one in,” he said, hurrying me in and slamming the door behind me.

Inside it was eerily quiet, a stark contrast to the roaring animal outside. To my right a handful of black Sharpies sat on a table in front of an empty chair. There were about a dozen people in line and I took my place at the rear. A moment later a fist in my back.

“Move, black,” said a husky voice.

I spun my head but he was already by me. Method Man, heading toward the table in the front of the store. Finally, I was only moments away from a happy ending. Then I heard the ding of the door swinging open and through the glass I saw the crowd erupt again as the rapper ascended the van a third time. His message was incomprehensible from inside but the meaning of what he did next was clear as the bright blue sky. He turned toward the street and dropped down behind the van, reappearing several seconds later sprinting up St. Pauls Avenue while fans ran alongside him like a scene from Pamplona. Smaller and smaller he became until he was just a dark speck on the horizon, then nothing.

I crossed Victory defeated, head low while my poster skipped against the ground. My mother rose to her feet and put her arms around me. We turned and headed back toward the terminal without a word. And then the sky turned black as if the sun was flicked off. The rain came down all at once, soaking us through. We ran. We needed to get out of this place.

INFO

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/autographu

Email: matt@autographu.com