

AUTOGRAPH  
*Autoph* UNIVERSITY

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2012 YEARBOOK

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## 2012 YEARBOOK

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## A NOTE FROM MATT RAYMOND

Founder, Autograph University



When I started Autograph University my vision was to create a comprehensive collection of autograph-related resources to help you improve your collection, meet celebrities and get more enjoyment out of the hobby. I knew early on that I could present only a sliver of the available knowledge on autograph collecting by writing from my own experience. Because of that, I've created the Autograph University Yearbook.

The Yearbook is a collection of stories, commentary and wisdom from you, the autograph community. I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to this first edition. This was a team effort and I'm incredibly proud of this book.

Enjoy the Yearbook. I hope you will consider contributing in 2013.

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



## CHRIS GILLOREN

Approximately four years ago I was flipping through my baseball cards looking for a past Yankee player to send a through the mail autograph request when I came across a couple of Bill Monbouquette. While doing some online research of Monbo I discovered he had recently been diagnosed with AML which is a very progressive and often fatal form of leukemia. At that time my daughter had been in remission from the same type of leukemia for about three years and was doing really well (she still is). I felt that it would be in poor taste to send an autograph request and instead decided to send along a letter of encouragement by telling him my daughter's and my family's story and wishing him the best. I wrote that I had looked forward to him getting better and when he did I would send along my autograph request.

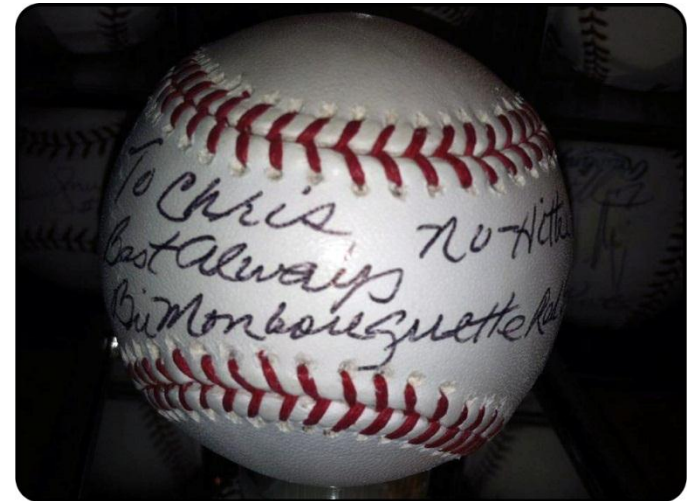
A short time later Monbo sent me a lengthy letter thanking me for the letter and wrote about his current treatment. He told me to send along what I wanted signed and also included his phone number. I never replied as I still did not feel comfortable asking for an autograph during this difficult time.

A month later I received another lengthy letter from Mr. Monbouquette updating me on his treatments and again asking me to send along what I wanted him to autograph and leaving me his phone number. I finally decided to call him and we spoke for a

good hour and a half about our families and his and my daughter's cancer treatments. From there we built a friendship and speak on the phone about once month and exchange Christmas cards.

We rarely talk baseball but instead talk about our families, politics or whatever else is going on. For the past few years he has invited himself to play in a charity golf tournament I run and donates his signature to some raffle prizes. Only this past summer did I send along a baseball which is personalized to me with "Best Always" along with his no hitter and Red Sox Hall of Fame inscriptions. It's the most prized in my collection.

“I finally decided to call him and we spoke for a good hour and a half about our families and his and my daughter's cancer treatments. From there we built a friendship and speak on the phone about once month and exchange Christmas cards.”



## ERIC SODERSTROM

On July 27, 1993, the Boston Red Sox lost a ball game. I'll never forget that.

I don't remember the score. I just remember seeing it on the top right hand corner of the *Cape Cod Times* the following day.

I didn't watch the game, probably because I was 11, and my mother, a teacher, most likely had us in bed early so we could work our way through the ol' summer reading list. I remember that my cousin, Steve, had slept over that night.

The next morning, we woke up wanting to know the score. I don't remember why, but the TV wasn't an option. So we went to get a newspaper – in those days, the Sports section was our iPhone – two quarters jingling in one of our pockets.

As I stepped out the door, I remember noticing, out of the corner of my eye, a stamped envelope addressed to the Boston Celtics sitting on the kitchen table. My mom was planning to mail it out that morning. My younger sister, Christa, had written a letter to her favorite player, asking him for his autograph. That had never, ever happened before.

Steve and I were both big sports fans. But our fathers raised us as Celtics fans.

(We were born in the early 1980s in Massachusetts, go figure.) I would bet the Boston Garden that one of us had on Larry Bird's black-and-green Converse shoes as we walked up the hill toward the newspaper dispenser.

Steve got to the machine first. Then he kicked it, I think. It was either a kick or a punch. I think there were tears also.

I tried to peek over his shoulder at the newspaper in the front-glass portion of the machine. All I could see was the Red Sox score. They'd lost.

I screamed because I was confused. "Steve, what's the matter? It's only one game!"

He backed way from the machine, so I could see the lead story.

Reggie Lewis, the Celtics' All-Star forward who'd also played college hoops at Northeastern in Boston, had died from a heart attack. We were old enough to know what that meant.

I just didn't know how I was going to tell my sister.

Her letter, to her favorite player, the only favorite player she had ever had, would not go in that mail that day. Or any other day.

Steve put two quarters into the machine and ripped out a paper. We walked home, dumbfounded.



**Later that summer**, my mother took me to the mall to shop for back-to-school clothes. There was an autograph shop in the mall. But it may as well have been the Boston Aquarium, the way I would press my nose onto those glass cases.

This time, however, sitting awkwardly on top of one of the cases, there was actually a fishbowl, with a stack of paper and a pen on the side.

"Do you want to enter the raffle? It's free," the guy behind the counter asked.

"Yes!" I said.

"What's it for?" my mother asked.

"An autographed Reggie Lewis card," he said. (It was on his 1991 Hoops card.)

I wrote my name and phone number on the paper, folded it in half and dropped the paper in the bowl.

You wouldn't be reading this story if you didn't know what happened next.

Somehow, Reggie had gotten Christa's letter.

Why would we believe anything different?

## DOUG CATALDO

The Trading Card Manifesto | <http://www.dougcataldo.blogspot.com>

As a kid I grew up in the New York area. For most of my life I was shuttled back and forth from New York to New Jersey because my parents divorced when I was three. I was really a resident of both the Garden State and the Big Apple for most of my young life. I had a choice to make, either the Yankees and their storied history of winning or the Mets and their storied history of sucking.

Television really made the choice for me. WPIX hosted the Yankees and had way better programming than WOR who played the Mets games. So I started at a very young age watching the Yankees. I watched in 1975 when they stunk, in '76 when they almost took it all, but I was captivated in 1977 by the awesome play of Mickey Rivers, Chris Chambliss, Graig Nettles, Bucky Dent, Thurman Munson, Roy White, Willie Randolph and Reggie Jackson.

There was unreal talent on the team and it showed. Getting Reggie from Baltimore put them on a whole different level. The friction between Reggie and manager Billy Martin is legendary. Ron Guidry had a terrific season and as a lefty myself, he became my favorite pitcher.

I would go to the stadium before the games and wait for the players to arrive. I will

always remember the yellow police barricades that were supposed to hold me back. I could easily slip under them to get close to the players.

One particular incident is what makes this card so special to me. I was waiting and waiting and waiting for Reggie Jackson to show up. I hadn't gotten his signature yet and desperately wanted to add it to my collection.

Famed announcer Mel Allen walked out of the stadium and was heading to his car. I practically grew up listening to his voice on "This Week In Baseball". I caught his attention and I asked him for his autograph. He was an amazing guy. He tells me to follow him, so I did, right into the player parking lot. Mel signs the autograph for me and starts asking me questions about the Yankees. Of course I answer them all. Then he sees a bunch of players walking towards the stadium and calls them over to sign for me. Ron Guidry was one of them, Fran Healy, Ed Figueroa and Fred Stanley were the others. I was absolutely jazzed. I still to this day have the autos.

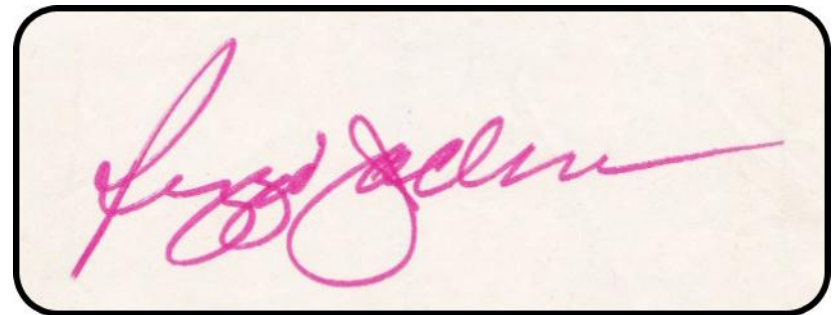
When I got back to the barricades, I was discussing what had just happened and these two gorgeous ladies informed me that I missed Reggie coming in while I was gone. I was devastated. You want to talk about going from a high to a low with no drugs ingested? My sadness didn't last long, the women gave me a gift. I am pretty sure it is one of very few, if not the only Reggie Jackson autograph signed in pink ink.

Reggie went on to be a Hall of Famer. His three homers in the 1977 World Series made one of Major League Baseball's most memorable moments. The Yanks

repeated in 1978 and well you know the rest...

This Reggie Jackson card contains the auto of my favorite baseball player ever. Reggie and the Yankees got me into collecting. When he was with the A's I followed his career and their championship runs. The first library book I ever checked out was a short kids biography about him. This card epitomizes how autographed cards should be handled today. It comes with a certificate of authenticity, it is hard-signed and it contains a clean, full signature. Full disclosure, it's called accountability. You don't see it much in the hobby today. Companies should demand these kind of sigs from today's stars. Of course I grew up to do a collectibles radio show and the first guest on my show bucket list was Reggie. I got to do that interview at the 2004 National Sports Collectors Convention.

“I am pretty sure it is one of very few, if not the only Reggie Jackson autograph signed in pink ink.”



## MARK GEIGER

Eli Manning was in town with the rest of the Giants for two additional nights following their loss against the Packers in late December 2010. They could not get back to New York because of a huge snowstorm that swept through the east coast. I had autographed the Giants Saturday night and again Sunday night with no success, so I decided against going back to the team hotel on Monday. That all changed when I got a text from two former autographers telling me that a Facebook friend posted that she is serving Eli and the offensive line at a local bar and grill. Thinking I was the only one with this inside information, I drove to the restaurant.

As I approached the place I saw 15 autographers outside. Turns out my inside information was common knowledge. I talked to a few of the autographers and found out that Eli signed for a few of them inside the bar, but shut it down after signing three or four. As I was thinking about what to do, I saw two autographers go into the bar and get turned down. The linemen that Eli was with shooed both of the graphers away without even giving Eli a chance to say 'No'. I thought I would wait it out and catch Eli as he exits. Looking at the crowd of 15 graphers and how close the bar was to the hotel, I knew Eli would sign no more than two items on his way out. Factoring in that he would likely target kids or give a quick graph, I had to get more creative. Then it hit me, I was going to confidently walk into the bar and approach them with a round of beers. Desperate move, but it was the best I could come up with.

I ran with the idea and went into the bar. I noticed they were drinking Heineken, so I bought what the \$20 in my wallet could get me. I approached Eli's table with four beers in one hand and my photo and marker in the other hand. The offensive linemen and Eli weren't feeling it at first, but lineman Dave Diehl stood up and came to the rescue. Without me having to ask, Dave grabbed my photo and said, "Sign it for him. This guy's buying us beer." Eli grabbed the photo and blue sharpie from Dave and gave me an every letter signature. I walked out of the bar with \$20 less in my wallet, but a nicely signed Eli photo. I passed all of the autographers outside of the bar with my head held high. Hours later I got word from some of the graphers who waited for Eli. Like I expected, Eli only signed two hurried autographs when he exited.

"Sign it for him. This guy's buying us a beer."



## TOM OWENS

Reforming Collector and Author of “Baseball By The Letters” blog  
<http://www.baseballbytheletters.blogspot.com>

It started for me on an elementary school allowance. I couldn't imagine spending TWO postage stamps writing to a baseball player. Therefore, I'd send a self-addressed postcard.

In 1972, Bob Veale was my first response in care of the Red Sox. A year later, Jesus Alou replied in care of Oakland. “TO TOM, Good luck, Jesus Alou.” Proof that my letter was being read super-charged my efforts.

The idea of a return envelope was a revelation to me. Seeing teams like the Cardinals provide photos for players to add to their fan mail energized me. Learning that a generation of players hired photographers like J.D. McCarthy or Doug McWilliams to print postcards for fan mail, all at the player's expense? Wow!

Thanks to fellow Iowan R.J. “Jack” Smalling, I learned about home addresses through his pioneering directories. Remembering those pre-Internet days, his research still stuns me.

I never set out to build the world's largest collection. I wouldn't write to someone if their past or present career didn't interest me. I feared sounding like a fake in my letters.

Fast forward to 2010: I was shocked at the number of retirees demanding fees for autographs. Worse still, my response rate had dipped. That's when I came to a collector crossroads.

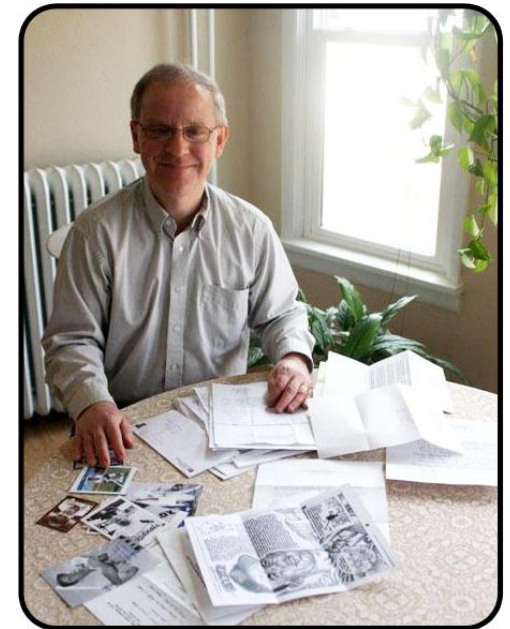
I chose to switch from signatures to stories. I'd use the same skills of nearly 30 years in the hobby to keep writing to men from baseball's past. I wasn't sending anything to get signed. I'd ask three questions and enclose my SASE.

I share the results at

<http://baseballbytheletters.blogspot.com>

I see some troubling trends in the autograph world. I don't think any will spell doom for the hobby. Why not? The information-sharing ability of collectors using the Internet means that we have a chance. Sites like Autograph University and hobbyists like Matt Raymond are keys in this competition.

Work together. Believe there's still enough slices of autograph pie for all of us.



## AUSTIN BALEN

It was 2009, and although in the past and future I've gotten a lot of autographs in a day, but this one was special. It was hot, around 109 on the heat index at The Bank, and Jimmy Rollins comes over and signs three autographs, one of them was mine, he had a five or six minute conversation with each of us, signed his autograph, shook our hands and left, it wasn't my best day graphing, but it was certainly a memorable one.

## DANIEL VENN

<http://www.freewebs.com/dscards>

I have gotten pretty lucky with some sweet autographs over the years...having lunch with Jim Thome, snagging a perfect every letter Walter Payton autograph with *Sweetness, 34*, and *Chicago Bears* inscriptions...but I'll go with a recent favorite.

Collectors in Minnesota know that Bert Blyleven can be a bit of a grouch. He sidepanels almost every ball, saying "This is my sweet spot" when you ask him for a sweet spot. However, a few years back he did a signing at a Twins pro shop. I got there bright and early and waited outside for a few hours in the Minnesota winter. Bert was about 15 minutes early, and got the signing started right away. The first time through, I had him sign a 20x30 poster of the "I Love to Fart" photo. He noticed my baseball sweatshirt, and asked if I played. The line was surprisingly short, so we hopped back in. The second time I had him sign my Twins Legends ball. He remembered me, and asked which position I play, I told him I pitch. We hopped back in line and got up to the table right at the end of the signing. He SS'd an OMLB, and added his career total of K's. There was about 5 minutes left, so we hung around, hoping to snag a picture with him. The Pro Shop handlers tried to hustle him out the door at the end, but instead, he stopped and talked to me. He spent at least 20 minutes chatting with me about pitching, showing me his curveball grip and how I can improve mine, and giving me pitching tips and pointers. Getting a private pitching lesson from a HOFer is a memory I'll never forget!

## AMANDA SHULMAN

The Real Shiksa | <http://www.therealshiksa.com>

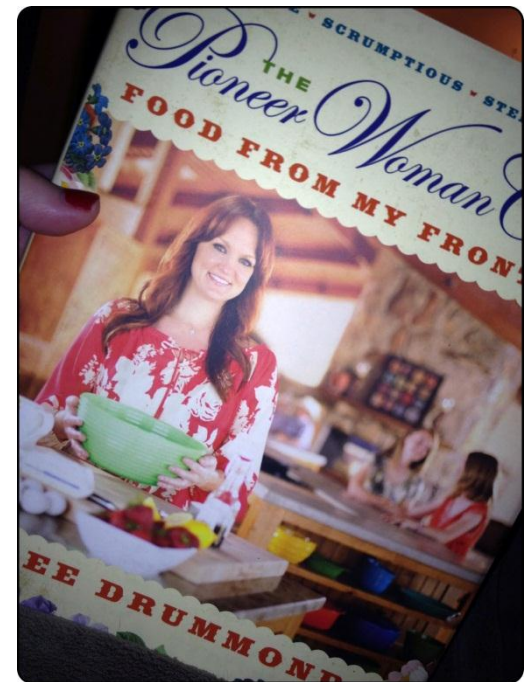
Guess who I met??

(Anyone who is my Facebook friend or follows me on Twitter already knows...)

REE DRUMMOND! The Pioneer Woman herself!

Last Tuesday [March 13, 2012] I received this gem in the mail – Ree's newest cook book. Isn't she purdy? The colors and photos are eye-catching. I don't think there is one open white space in the entire book!

If y'all haven't piddled around Amazon much, you should. I was able to pre-order this book for almost half off the retail price AND received it in the mail the day it was released. Thank goodness, because I couldn't wait to take a peek :)

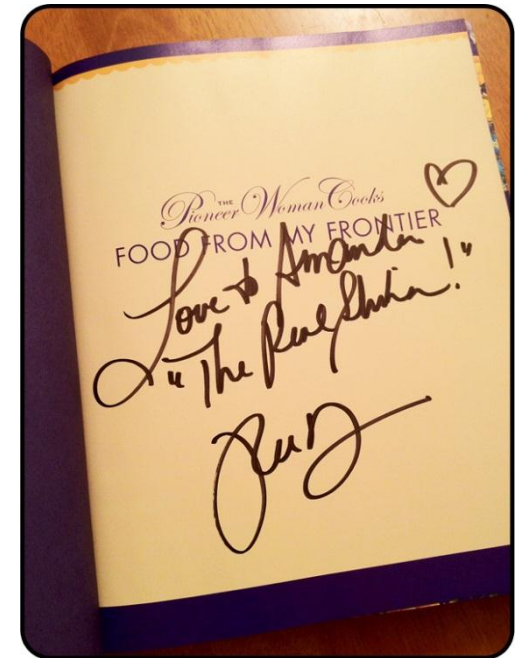


If you thought the new book excited me, imagine how excited I was to find out she was coming to Brookline, Mass. for a speaking engagement and book signing at Brookline Booksmith!! I dragged Mr. Shiksa with me (OK, not really, he didn't oppose at all!) last Thursday after work to wait in line at the book store. Unfortunately there were only standby tickets left for her talk, so we skipped the talk and headed to the bookstore. We only had to wait about an hour and we were only 15 people or so in down the line. That meant a quick exit. That made me (and the hubs) happy when we saw the huge crowd growing as time went on.

Ree was such a sweetheart, and just as genuine in person as she is in her writing and on her new show (Food Network's "Pioneer Woman"). She took some time to chat and sign her cookbook. Look!!

She asked what "The Real Shiksa" was and when I told her, she asked how long I'd been blogging for, naming me a "newbie." It was endearing! The entire time Mr. Shiksa was trying to think of something funny to say to her, or ask her, but in the end didn't want to embarrass me. How sweet.

Take a gander at her site if you get the chance; Ree has AMAZING recipes (not all WW-friendly,



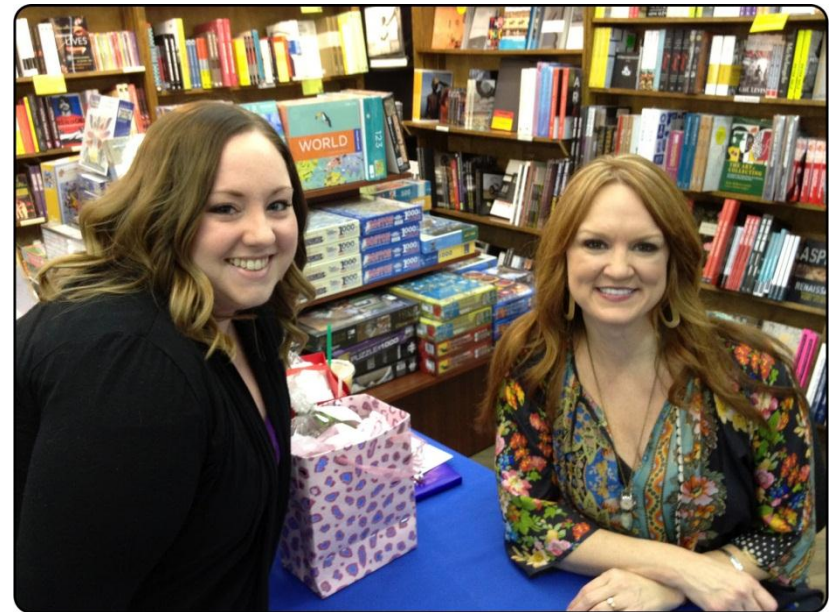


but you could tweak them to fit your diet) that you'll want to try immediately. Her honest blogging and photography welcomes you into her world, and sucks you in. You may start to think you live on a ranch in Oklahoma too.

So nice to meet you, Ree!

xoxo

The Real Shiksa



## ROB BERTRAND

Cardboard Connection Radio | <http://www.cardboardconnection.com/radio>

My favorite autograph story was meeting former Chicago Blackhawks goalie Eddie Belfour at a Hawks playoff game in the men's room. Standing at the urinal I zip up and turn away and see that I was standing next to him. I waited for him to come out and said that I was standing next to him but it didn't seem appropriate at the time but if now he would sign my ticket. He laughed and did.

## CALEB HICKS

I am a bit spoiled when it came to my first EVER autograph. I got the legendary John R. Wooden to sign a program for me. I had attended his annual basketball tournament in Indianapolis that year. I had purchased a program on my way in and we got there early enough for the shoot around. I was people watching and still have the exact moment in my mind when I saw Mr. Wooden slowly approaching his seat.

Upon arrival I noticed there was a line starting to form right in front of him. I remember sprinting full speed to get in the line. It seemed like it was taking forever at the time, as soon as I was next in line the P.A. announcer announced the playing of the National Anthem. Before the playing he asked for a moment of silence, and informed the crowd that Mr. Wooden's brother had just passed away 2 days prior. So here I am bowing my head standing right next to the legend, while he is obviously grieving from the passing of his brother. I had made my mind up at that time that I was just going to return to my seat and let him be. As soon as the anthem was over, I turned and started to head back up the stairs to my seat, and that's when it happened.

Mr. Wooden reached his hand out and grabbed me by the shoulder, and asked me,

"Son do you play basketball?" I answered back, " Why yes sir I do." That is when he said to me, "Well I always have time to sign for a Hoosier basketball player."

By far to this day I still get chills when I think about it, and it only proves to me the class act that Mr. Wooden was.

I try to collect any and everything Notre Dame football related. The Irish are my thing and that is what I cherish the most about collecting. My first ever real experience was back in 2009 at a spring football event that my father had come across online. He surprised me with tickets to an all access breakfast with the football team. The morning we got there we were talking to a couple of patrons and they explained to me that after the breakfast was the only time all year that the football team would line up and sign autographs for the entire season as a team. I quickly sprung into action not having anything of value to get signed. I found myself in the book store that morning looking for any and everything to get signed, and then I saw it. The Play Like A Champion Today football sign, reprint. It was perfect, it could fit the entire team and was exactly what I wanted. My first ever piece turned out so beautifully with the entire team on it. Ever since then I have been hooked on graphing.

We were so fortunate to have the mecca of sporting events this year in Indianapolis. The 2012 Super Bowl was a complete success, and I am so proud to have taken it all in that week. I worked extremely hard to get the autographs of some of the greatest players past and present all on one piece. I had purchased a full size Super Bowl helmet about a month before the big game and took the entire week off of work to

pursue this once in a lifetime opportunity. This was my first ever experience really being around professionals and I actually took quite a bit away from the experiences. I was not a hound like some guys, but caught on very quickly about where to stand and how to be at the right place at the right time from them. I met a lot of wonderful people that I am privileged enough to now call friends from our experience that week together.



## MATT RAYMOND

Autograph University | <http://www.autographu.com> | Twitter: @matrraymond

March 27, 2012  
Boston, Massachusetts

Hundreds of anxious fans lined the sidewalk in front of Suffolk University's Ford Hall. Behind the theater, there was just one. Searching for a stage entrance I walked up an alley-sized street in the shadow of the State House. Up ahead, a skinny young brunette in a pencil skirt peeked nervously from behind an unmarked door. Her attention was directed toward the far end of the road and didn't notice my approach. I asked her if she was expecting him soon.

He was one of my comedy idols. He was Bill Murray.

"Uh, yes," she said hesitantly. She righted herself. "Who are you? What are you doing back here?"

"Just passing through," I told her before reaching the end of the street and ducking around a corner. There I found another collector who had been staked out with a copy of *Quick Change* on Laserdisc.



A man of many moods, a meeting with Murray was by no means predictable. What was certain was his well-known reputation as a rough signer. Even with our small numbers, the odds were long. With a half-hour to go before the panel discussion he was in town to moderate, we watched a trio of police officers arrive at our corner which only made me feel worse. It was one thing to sidestep a college stage manager. It was quite another to circumvent the cops.

Just before 6 p.m. a white Lexus sedan rolled to the corner. The rear passenger window rolled down and Murray's index finger poked out at us.

"Get these guys out of here! I don't want to see these guys!" he yelled to the cops.

My shoulders shrugged. My heart sank. My hope vanished.

"No, see he's joking," the other collector said, ensuring the officers could hear. "He's got a smile on his face."

With only a sliver of confidence restored, we approached the car which had pulled up to the unmarked door. The street was only slightly wider than the vehicle and had no sidewalk. We called out to Murray from several yards beyond the trunk as he unfolded himself from the backseat. With one step he'd be inside the building. He chatted excitedly with the welcoming committee and hovered near the stage door which was opened toward us. Our pleas went unheard or ignored. He momentarily

dropped out of view then reemerged. Time was running out. I had heard him mention in a Howard Stern interview that he didn't mind signing autographs for fans but didn't appreciate the "professionals". In one last ditch effort I tried to communicate that I wasn't the latter.

"Mr. Murray, I'm a huge fan—you can personalize it!"

Breaking away from the pack, he took two steps toward me then stopped. His eyes rolled. "Oh, blow me with the personalization!"

He grabbed my Sharpie and scribbled his name across my 8×10. I asked him again to personalize but he ignored my request and proceeded to sign the Laserdisc. I fumbled the camera out of my pocket. Murray pointed to the cops, "You want to hit some guys tonight? Ask these guys, they know where everyone is in this town." He turned back toward the door, his arm extended behind him to hand back my pen.

I urgently requested a picture with him and was again ignored. Juggling the signed photo and camera I reached for the Sharpie and watched helplessly as it bounced off my fingers and fell to the pavement.

"Oops," Murray said flatly.

Then he was gone. He was exactly as expected. Enigmatic. Schizophrenic. One part Frank Cross, one part Ernie McCracken and, thankfully, one part Bob Wiley.

“He rolled his eyes. ‘Oh, blow me with the personalization.’”



## LARRY RAYMOND

In the spring of 1966, at the age of 13, I was blinded when a commercial white wall cleaner splashed into both of my eyes. It was a very traumatic experience for me and my family. There were many generous expressions of love and concern from my family, friends and community. One of the nicest and most meaningful gestures was from my uncles in Bellows Falls, Vermont.

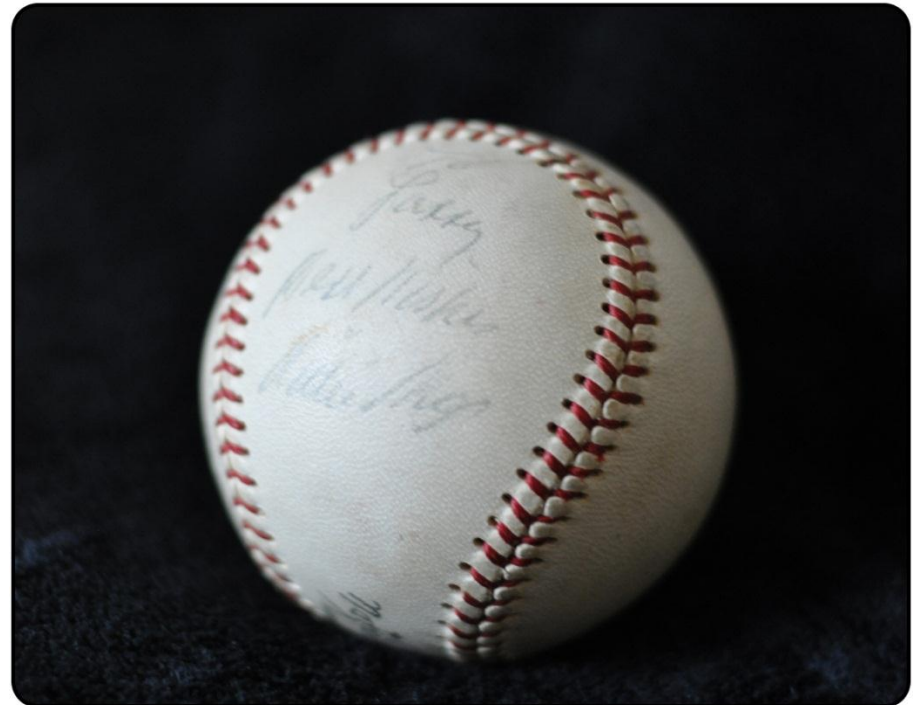
They had a friend from North Walpole, New Hampshire, who was a National League umpire. Bill Jackowski was contacted and told of my accident and he offered to obtain a signed baseball from anyone playing in the National League. When told of this offer, I was very excited and began thinking of whom I might want an autographed baseball.

Sandy Koufax, Henry Aaron, Roberto Clemente, Willie Mays. The choices were numerous and all would have been treasures. After some serious consideration I decided on Willie Mays.

At the end of the season when Mr. Jackowski returned to North Walpole, he gave my uncles two balls to give to me. One was the Willie Mays ball, that said “To Larry, Best Wishes, Willie Mays”, and the other was a ball that was used in the final game of the World Series signed by Jackowski – who worked that series as an umpire – dated October 9, 1966. The game was won by the Baltimore Orioles 1-0 over the Los Angeles Dodgers, finishing a surprising sweep of the series.

These two baseballs were the first of my autograph collection and after 45 years, they still hold a special meaning in my life. They also have a special place in my son Matt's collection.

“Sandy Koufax, Henry Aaron,  
Roberto Clemente, Willie Mays.  
The choices were numerous and  
all would have been treasures.”



## INFO

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The PDF is available at <http://www.autographu.com/2012yearbook>

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Matt Raymond shares tips to improve your autograph collection and meet celebrities at Autograph University. <http://www.autographu.com>

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