

Yogi Berra's Autograph – 1959

Just about a year ago, I had the privilege of meeting Ron Guidry. He was promoting the book *Driving Mr. Yogi*, which he co-authored with Harvey Araton, and I managed to get a signed copy. It is a story about Ron Guidry and the unique and special relationship that developed between him and Yogi Berra during spring training with the New York Yankees.

Ron Guidry was very personable and he took the time to speak with me and lend credence to many “Yogi-isms” during our chat. One thing that stuck in my mind about that day in Ft. Lauderdale was the fact that Ron Guidry was still in awe of Yogi Berra.

I was privileged to see Yogi play as a member of those powerhouse Yankee teams of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Perhaps my most memorable moment came in 1959.

I actually had Yogi Berra's autograph.



I attended a game at Yankee Stadium with my father that summer. After the game he suggested that before we headed home, we should take a walk around the ballpark to where the players exit. That way, we just might get to meet some of the ballplayers up close. We took our time leaving our seats and made our way around Yankee Stadium to the door marked “Players Only.” When we arrived, there were about thirty people waiting who apparently had the same idea. Our patience paid off. Approximately twenty minutes later, Yogi walked out with two other ballplayers. Even as an eleven year-old, I recognized him immediately. I also noted that the great Yankee catcher was much smaller than the two players that walked beside him.

I said to my father excitedly, "Dad, there's Yogi!"

Yogi was wearing an open collared shirt and carried a small satchel in his hand. He must have heard me because slowed down his pace, looked directly at me and said, "Hi-ya kid."

Dumbfounded, and at an obvious loss for words, I replied back, Hi."

Looking at me with that crooked smile he always seemed to have, he said, "You got something to write with?"

I remember looking towards my father as he rummaged through his pockets and all he could come up with was a folded paper napkin, probably left

over from those hot dogs we ate during the game. Seeing my father's futility, one of the players next to Yogi reached into his pocket and retrieved a pencil.

"I guess that'll do," said Yogi. "Hey kid, turn around. Lemmie use your back."

With that, I remember turning around feeling Yogi's hand on my back as he steadied the napkin and wrote his name. When he was done, he handed it to me.

"Here ya go, kid."

I actually had Yogi Berra's autograph on a napkin!

I would love to know where that piece of paper is today.



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