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Can I Have Your Autograph?

By Stephen Schochet

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by: **Stephen Schochet**

Being a celebrity means dealing with fan demands for autographs, ranging from polite and appropriate to rude and overbearing. One time Katherine Hepburn was performing on Broadway and tried to exit backstage through a crowd of jostling autograph hounds. Bodyguards helped her to her limo and once safely inside the very private star rolled down the window and shouted, "Run em down! We'll clean up the blood later!" The crowd scattered and the limousine sped away, pausing long enough for Hepburn to roll down the window and wave goodbye to her fans, accompanied by an evil laugh. Strangely enough, when she lived in Beverly Hills the seclusion loving Hepburn developed the habit of sneaking into her neighbor's houses as a hobby. She became expert at climbing trees, avoiding alarms and dogs, and revealing herself just before her nervous neighbors called the police.

Walt Disney had the strange experience in the 1930s of having his name famous around the world when his face was not. Often he would forget his identification and that combined with his casual attire sometimes kept him out of fancy restaurants. Later in the 50's he became a recognized figure because of his television hosting duties. The lack of anonymity made it increasingly difficult for him to walk through Disneyland without being badgered for autographs. Disney struggled not to be brusque while explaining he didn't have time, he was trying to make the park a better place. In the 60's when the company was trying to purchase Florida marshland for a second amusement park, he was warned by his advisors to stay away from the state, the real estate prices would go up once the identity of the buyer was known. But Disney couldn't resist. Eating in a Orlando diner Walt was approached by a curious waitress, "Pardon me. Aren't you Walt Disney?" Walt who was known for being brutally honest, replied, " Hell no! And if I see that sob, I'll give him a piece of my mind."

Stars making movies at Universal Studios often try to avoid tour guides leading autograph hounds. One particular fellow became ingenious at tracking down Michael Caine, who toyed with the idea of having the young man fired, then decided, "What the hell, I'll just sign" and was gracious. It turned out to be a good move, the tour guide was Mike Ovitz who later became the most powerful talent agent in Hollywood.

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When stardom is new, autograph signing can be a thrill. One night in Paris the 60 year old Cary Grant and 25 year old Sophia Loren wished to go out to dinner. "But the people will come up to us. I can't stand it!" said the jaded Briton. "I love it," said Sophia. When they left their hotel Grant complete with his hat pulled down, dark glasses, his scarf wrapped around his face, and his huge overcoat looked like the Invisible Man. Sophia looked like Sophia. As they walked the streets of Paris people began to come up to her for autographs which she joyfully signed. After a few fan encounters Grant began to get jealous. Down came the hat, off came the glasses, the coat and the scarf and soon he was standing under neon lights to get noticed.

Another English actor named Grant was thrilled by his breakout stardom due to the movie *Four Weddings And A Funeral* (1994). Hugh Grant would drive around New York looking for theaters where the film was playing then get out and wait in line, happy for the attention and to sign autographs. Later when he was arrested in Los Angeles for hiring prostitute Divine Brown, he turned down requests to

put his signature on tabloids containing his mug shot.

Some actors just sign despite their annoyance. One time Arnold Schwarzenegger was being interviewed at a press junket when a reporter asked him for an autograph for his mother, a big no-no. The star grimaced and said, "Of course. I wouldn't want to disappoint your mother." He paused then added, "I'm sure you have disappointed her enough already."

Autographs can cause internal conflicts for stars who take themselves too seriously. During the making of *Klute* (1971) Donald Sutherland received a written request from a fan who wished for an autograph for his daughter. Sutherland showed the letter to his humorless girlfriend Jane Fonda who expressed a strong opinion that he should not sign it, autographs imply that movie actors are somehow superior to others. Sutherland bowed to her philosophy and wrote a letter stating his reasons for refusing the request. The man wrote him back, "Dear Mr. Sutherland, thank you for your letter. We think you are full of it but we ripped off the signature and gave it to our daughter."

Stephen Schochet is the author and narrator of the audiobooks *Fascinating Walt Disney* and *Tales Of Hollywood*. The *Saint Louis Post Dispatch* says, "these two elaborate productions are exceptionally entertaining." Hear realaudio samples of these great, unique gifts at

www.hollywoodstories.com

orgofhlly@aol.com

Collecting Autographs For Fun & Profit

By Daphne Succes

Autograph collecting is a fun and rewarding hobby, but it's also a lucrative business for many

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entrepreneurs. As a hobby, autographs are a terrific way to own a piece of memorabilia that has been personally signed by your favorite actor, musician, athlete, etc. Collectors across the globe are always looking to add the unattainable signature to their collection.

Autographs can be obtained either in person or through the mail. If you are fortunate enough to live in an area where sports competitions or movie filmings are plentiful, then you may have a lot of in-person autograph opportunities. For everyone else, collecting through the mail may be the most economical approach. Athletes can be written in care of their sports team, celebrities in care of their television show or on location at a film set while musicians can be reached through their agent or a venue at which they are performing.

The value of an autograph depends on who the signature is from. If you don't want to pay for an appraisal, surf the internet for autograph dealers and see if you can find an average cost for the signature. If you are looking to sell autographs, the number of potential customers can be impressive if you know how to market your business. A well-publicized website or a presence with online auctions is often the best success for any business, including autographs. If you plan to sell autographs, you will need to be upfront with customers about how the signature was obtained. If it was through the mail, let them know. If the autograph was obtained in person, perhaps you would include a Certificate of Authenticity noting the date and location that the signature was obtained.

There are a few things to remember when seeking autographs. Whether in-person or through the mail, always be polite in your request. Say "please" and "thank you." If you are attending an autograph show, take your own item to be signed along with a sharpie permanent marker. If you are sending mailed autograph requests, always include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Never request more than 2 items to be signed at any given time – many celebrities consider this to be rude. Some of the best items to be signed include photos, blank 3x5 index cards, t-shirts, baseballs, golf balls, footballs, books, etc. Courtesy is the key to obtaining an autograph – whether as a hobby or for resale.

Daphne is a Writer, Business Owner, Motivator and Self-Starter and full-time Mom. She started Passion Parties by Daphne in the Summer of 2005 as a hobby while working full time. It has since become a full time passion for her and hope to quit her full time job soon. She enjoys writing articles about small businesses and family and tries to motivate other women with the same desire. She can be reached at 1-877-TOY-DIVA

<http://www.daphnespassion.com>

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