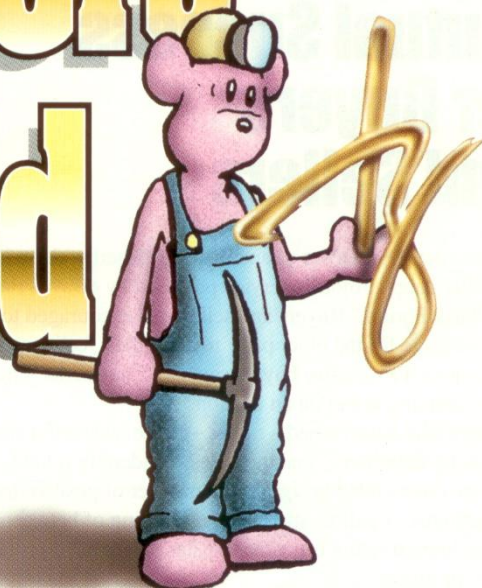


Autographed Card Owners Strike Gold



Finding the elusive “Ty” signatures thrills new collectors

By Jacqueline Greenwood

The allure of finding a Beanie Baby Collector's Card signed by Ty Warner has induced many collectors to rush into card collecting with the same frenzy as when the Forty-Niners rushed to Sutter's Mill in search of gold.

“Will this be my lucky pack of cards?” collectors wonder as they rip open pack after pack. Many collectors buy cases of cards in search of the golden “Ty” autograph. One collector purchased 75 cases only to discover he was not destined to become the owner of a rare signature card. With odds of finding an autographed card estimated at 1 in 40,909 packs of cards, collectors are just beginning to realize the rarity of these cards.

Steve Murphy, new business development manager of Cyrk, Inc., recently confirmed the actual number of signature cards.

“Only one of every type of card was autographed by Ty Warner and is numbered 1/1, making a total of 296 autographed cards,” Murphy said.

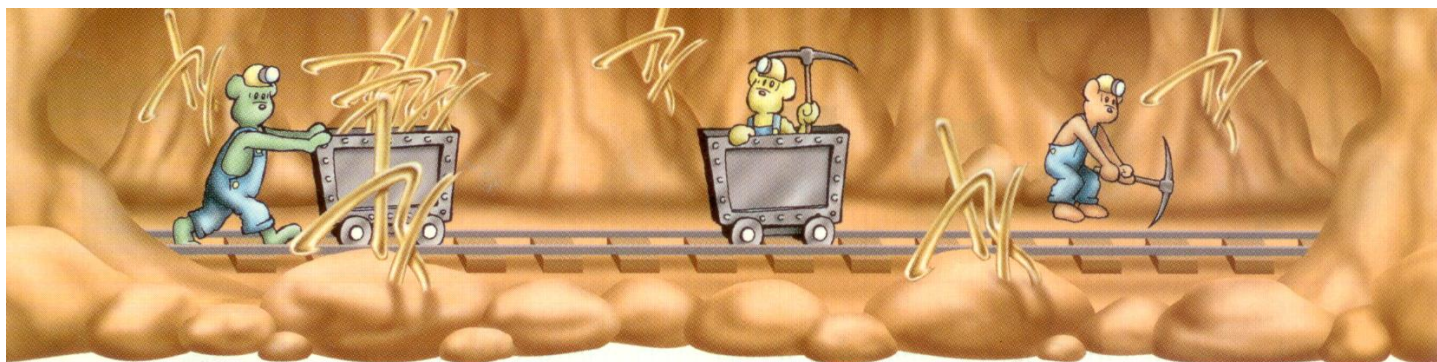
Although a pack of Collector's Cards claims there are 149 cards in Series 1, differences in coloring make the actual collection's total 296. Because there are four color variations for each Original 9 Cards, 15 Retired Cards and 25 Birthday/Rookie Cards, four autographed cards exist for each one of these.

For example, there is a gold autographed Bongo card, a silver autographed Bongo card, a blue autographed Bongo card and a red autographed Bongo card. Since there are no color variations on the Common cards, there is only one autographed card for each of these cards.

Just how many of the 296 autographed cards will surface is uncertain.

“Many collectors will never consider selling their autographed card for any amount of money. Others will be anxious to cash-in their golden tickets,” said Myrtle Cecil, Beanie ambassador for online auction site eBay. “Some autographed cards may go unnoticed, ruined, thrown out or never discovered since some packs may go unopened for years.”

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Autographed Card Owners - The Lucky Ones

Tori Kerber - Gold Spot

For Tori Kerber, age 5, finding her autographed Gold Spot card will be a special childhood memory. On January 3, 1999 (Spot's birthday), several customers were sitting on the

floor opening Collector's Cards in Eileenie's Beanies in Chino, California. Sherry Kerber was helping her daughter, Tori, open her packs of cards. Store owner Eileen Mudgett was explaining the cards to her customers, saying they should be looking for a card with gold writing on it. In the second to last pack, Tori and her mother discovered one of the most prized autographed cards, a gold autographed Spot (the dog without the spot) card.

"The cheers of joy were so loud customers in an adjacent store thought a party was going on," Mudgett recalled.

As soon as the commotion settled down, the card was placed into a protective case. The Kerbers said they did not plan to sell it in the near future.

Jennifer Hudak - Gold Splash

One day, Jennifer Hudak of Ohio returned home with 10 boxes of Collector's Cards to open.

"I became interested in the Ty trading cards when a local



gift shop marked all Ty calendars, binders and trading cards to 50 percent off. Each pack of cards was on clearance for \$1," Jennifer recalled. While opening her fourth box of cards, Jennifer discovered an autographed Gold Splash card.

"I felt like Charlie finding the golden ticket in the bar of candy in 'Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory.' I was dancing in the middle of the floor when my husband said, 'Did you find a gold one?' I said, 'Better!' and told him it was an Original 9 autographed card."

Since then, Jennifer has purchased six more cases. She said she plans to sell the card to help pay for a family vacation.



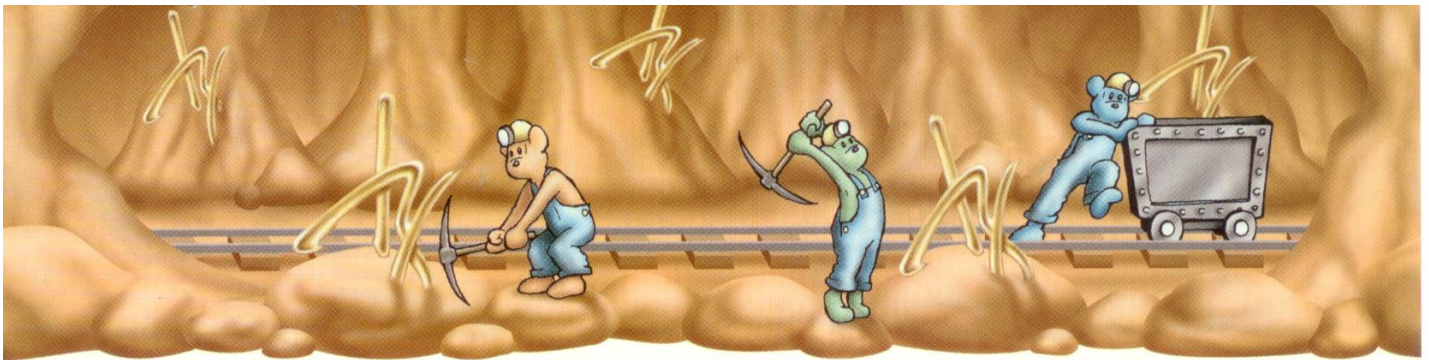
Samantha Stanfill - Red Patti

On New Year's Day, 12-year-old Samantha was allowed to pick out one box of cards from the case her father had purchased. He planned to save the unopened case an investment to resell.

"She kept commenting that she felt lucky," remembered her mother, Tammy Stanfill. "We sat and watched her open the packages. Around the third package, Samantha gasped and her mouth flew open. She said, 'Look!' and held up a clear red Patti!"

As Samantha was still looking at the card, her mother glanced at the card again and saw a swash of gold on the card she was holding up. She quickly said, "Let me see that!" Tammy couldn't believe she was seeing an autographed Red Patti card.





"I immediately jumped up and hugged my daughter. We both jumped up and down. Gave each other a high-five and screamed and yelled," she recalled.

Since then, Samantha started her own card collection and has had a lot of fun doing so. The remaining cases of cards her father was intending to sell have now been opened. A few weeks later, the Stanfills put their card up for auction on eBay.



Jessica Benuzzi - Gold Bessie

Jessica Benuzzi, a resident of Chicago and staff writer for *Mary Beth's Beanie World Monthly*, opened her first packet of Ty Collector's Cards at a local Beanie Baby show. It carried all Common cards. She purchased three more packets and still nothing special.



"My heart started pounding. I couldn't believe it. I was one of the lucky winners!"
— Jessica Benuzzi

While walking past a Chicago gift shop a week later, she spotted the foil packets through the store window. She couldn't resist buying a full case with six boxes of Collector's Cards. She would give two to her mother, two to her sister and keep the remaining two boxes.

"As soon as I got home, I chose the two boxes I was going to open," explained Jessica. "I immediately started opening packets. I counted eight packs left and crossed my fingers. I opened another and there it was – the autographed gold Bessie card! My heart started pounding. I couldn't believe it. I was one of the lucky winners!" she exclaimed.

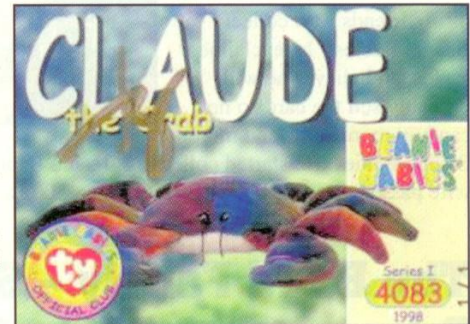
Her first phone call was to her sister, Cynthia Torrence, a pioneer Beanie Baby collector who introduced Jessica to Beanies in 1996. Jessica keeps her prized card in a secure glass cabinet with her other treasured collectibles.

Like a true card fanatic, Jessica opened the 96 remaining packs. She found an Original 9 blue Splash card and numerous red, blue and silver Retired Cards, all for a mere \$300.

"The most exciting part of collecting Ty Collector's Cards is anyone can win," Jessica said. "It's a lot of fun talking to other card hobbyists. When I say I found a signed card, everyone wants to see it." — Jackie La Berg

"C" and "D" from Missouri - Claude the crab

At home, "D" and her husband were opening cases of cards looking for the ones they needed to complete their collection. Every once in a while, D's husband would joke and say,



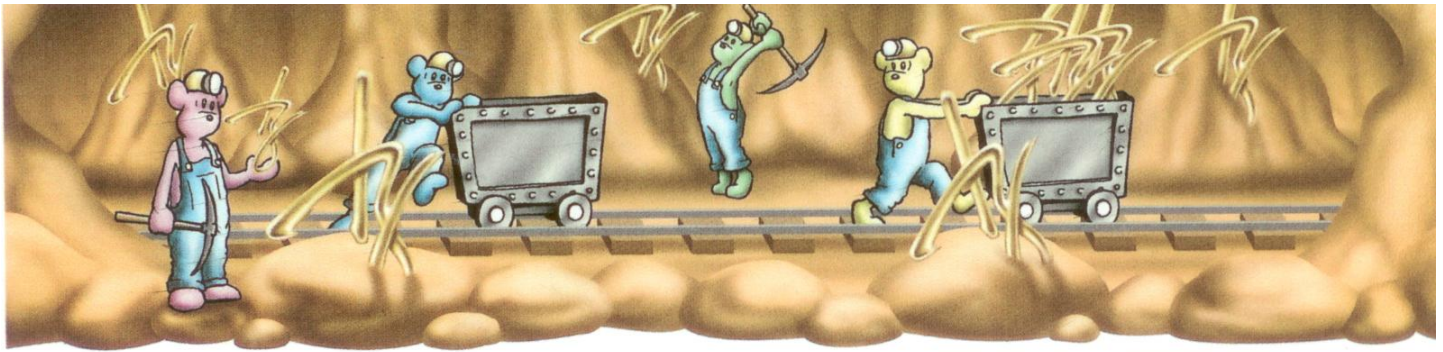
"Oh, a signed one." She got tired of him kidding her and told him he would have to forfeit two packs of cards if he did that again. The following evening, her husband said, "I sure wish Ty would stop scribbling on these cards!" Naturally, she thought he was up to his tricks again.

She explains, "I was in the midst of vocalizing my feelings about his little game when he tossed the autographed Claude card on the top of the box I was opening. Needless to say, I was absolutely speechless, and then had to apologize to him."

She and her husband decided to put their card up for auction on eBay to help recoup the investment they had already made in the cards.

Joseph M. Bossi - Teddy the teal bear

While sitting in his car having lunch, Joseph Bossi discovered an autographed Teddy the teal bear card. (continued on page 48)



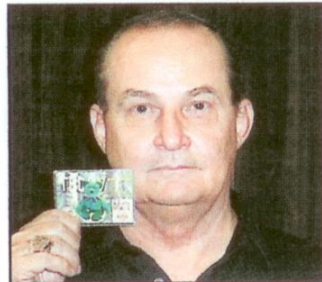
"After purchasing five boxes over a period of time, I still had not found an Original 9 card. When I saw the autographed Teddy the teal bear card, I blinked. I could not believe it."



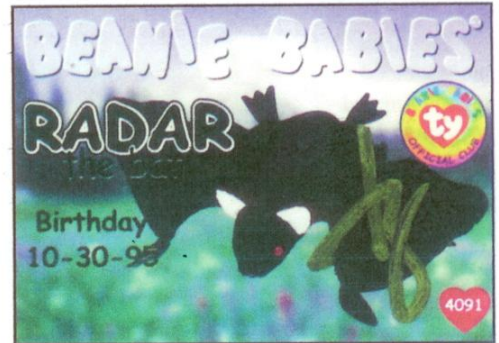
Joseph was so excited that he drove back to the store to show the saleswoman his card.

"I have since shown it to all of my friends who collect Beanie Babies," he exclaimed.

Joseph believes he will probably sell the card so he can buy more cards and more Beanie Babies. He started collecting Beanie Babies after his wife passed away and now has more than 500 Beanie Babies.



"As I opened the foil, I could see a silver Hippity on top and then two cards later was a silver Clubby," John explained. Now fairly excited about the fact that he had received two silver Birthday cards in one pack, he opened his next pack.



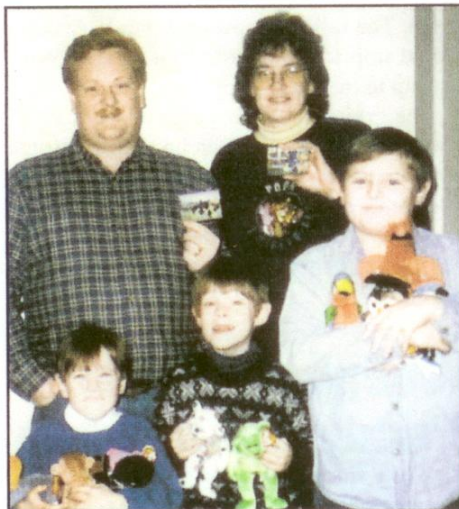
"When I got to the center of the pack, I was greeted with an autographed silver Princess card and the very next card was an autographed silver Radar card," he continued. "I think for a moment or two, we all felt like we were in a dream."

John found two autographed cards in one pack. Princess and Radar are consecutive cards that must have been stuck together.

When asked if he plans to sell the cards, John responded, "If the price were right, I would more than likely sell them and put the money into some sort of investment for my kids, since they are the whole reason behind us collecting the cards anyway."

The Baird Family - Silver Princess and Silver Radar

On Friday, January 8, 1999, John Baird went into a local store in New Hampshire to buy a second box of Ty Collector's Cards in hopes of completing his family's set of Common cards. He brought the box home and just before dinner, decided to open it to check to see which slider card they had received. He then decided to open just one pack of cards.



Mitchell Straight - Red Batty

On Christmas morning, 8-year-old Mitchell Straight of Pennsylvania found six packs of Collector's Cards tucked in his stocking. In one of those packs, Mitchell found a red autographed Batty card.

After studying it, he exclaimed to his parents, "Look at this one, it's signed!" Prior to finding this card, he had complained about his sister's luck to his mother, saying "Chelsea always gets the good cards." Mitchell and Chelsea had only received about six packs of cards each before Christmas. They have been collecting Beanie Babies for over two years. Mitchell said he plans to keep his autographed card "because Santa gave it to me."

Arthur J. Schiavo - Gold Patti

On January 17, 1999, at a Beanie Baby Show at Forrestal Village Mall in New Jersey, Arthur J. Schiavo from Pennsylvania was there with his two sons

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and wife selling Beanie Babies and individual Collector's Cards. He purchased five boxes of cards from a fellow dealer and went back to his booth to open his cards.

Arthur was opening the second to last box when he discovered a gold Patti card.

"I was so excited," he recalled, "I ran up to the lady who sold me the cards and gave her a big hug. I hadn't even noticed that it was also autographed!"

The son of the dealer who sold Mr. Schiavo the cards pointed out the Ty signature to him. "I gave the dealer a \$30 tip," he said.

While boasting about his signed Patti card at the show, Arthur was offered \$1,500 for it, which he did not accept.

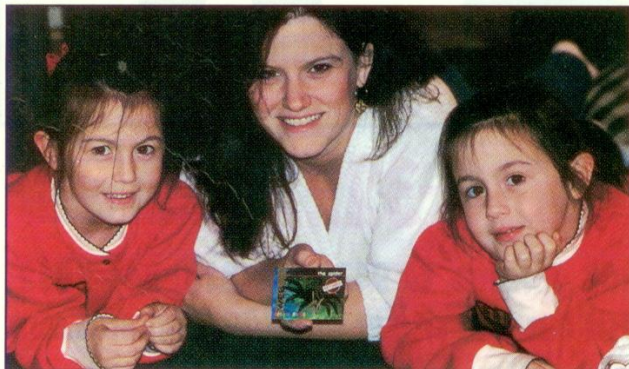
"Later I found a silver Pinchers in the last box," he said.

The next day, Arthur put both cards on auction on eBay. His gold autographed Patti card sold for \$3,550.

Stacie Shifflet - Red Web

Stacie Shifflet of Ohio and her 5-year-old twins, Katie and Taylor, have had many fun-filled moments opening more than 82 packs of Collectors Cards. When they opened one particular pack, they noticed a card that was "messed up."

Stacie says "I remember thinking, 'Man, I got ripped off. This card has something all over it!'"

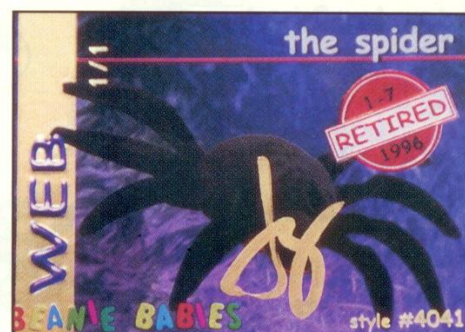


Stacie Shifflet shares her love of Beanies and Collector Cards with her daughters.



It wasn't until she was putting her cards into her notebook that she realized the scribbling on the card actually said "Ty." You can imagine the excitement in the

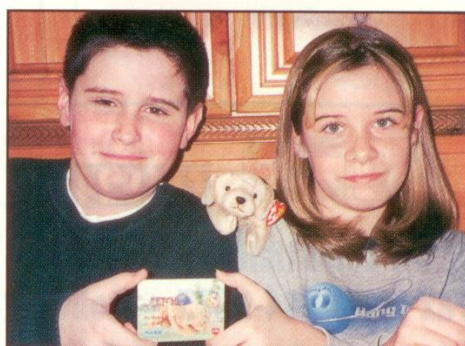
house! Stacie said she plans to continue collecting the cards and hopes one day to have a full set. With her kind of luck, you can bet that day will come. — Claudia Dunne



Ryan Houston - Red Fetch

Eleven-year-old Ryan Houston lives in Ohio with his parents, Scott and Angela, older sister Amanda and twin sister Erin. He has been collecting Beanies for two years. His grand mother owns a shop called Nana's Collectables where Ryan has helped out and gotten paid in Beanies.

For Christmas, Ryan's dad gave him a couple packages of Ty Collector's Cards. In his second package, ryan found an autographed Fetch card. Off all his gifts (including the Sony PlayStation) this was, by far, the most exciting one. Ryan is hoping that since his sister has a Beanie names after her that Ty will introduce a St. Patrick's bear named, of course, Ryan.



Ryan Houston, with twin sister Erin, found an autographed Fetch card on Christmas Day.

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Autographed Card Owners - The "Not So Lucky" Ones Autographed Card Gets Tossed

Back in early November, when Collector's Cards first appeared at retail stores, Tiffany Winston of Tennessee purchased a pack for her son and daughter while hunting for the 10 new Beanie Babies.

"As we were driving home from the store," Tiffany recalled, "my children opened their pack of cards. I remember telling them, 'Don't mess those puzzles up, they'll probably be worth something one day.'"

Tiffany's 9-year-old daughter, Brooke, showed her a card with "Ty" written on it in gold.

She asked, "What's this?"

Tiffany replied, "That's not an autograph. They probably just printed some like that one."

Ms. Winston didn't give the cards another thought until one evening after the holidays.

"I was on eBay chatting with other Beanie lovers and noticed them talking about the cards," she remembered.

It was at this time she realized what her daughter had shown her that day in the car was a very valuable autographed card.

The next morning, she asked Brooke about the cards, and she replied, "I think there may be some under the seat in the Explorer." She retrieved five of the 18 cards they had purchased. One was a blue Bronty card. Tiffany asked her about the gold one.

"I remember it," Brook replied, "but I don't know what happened to it. All I recall is Ty in gold. I can't remember the exact card. But I'll never forget that gold Ty."

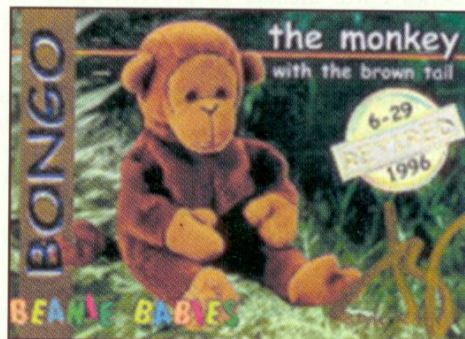
Tiffany said she thinks the card was thrown away when they cleaned out the Explorer while "getting ready for Santa Claus."

Autographed Card Stolen

In early December, Dustyn of Iowa put his autographed gold Bongo card up for auction on eBay with a reserve price he knew he would be willing to sell it for. The high bid was \$2,425, but because his reserve of \$5,000 had not been met, the card was not sold. After putting the card on auction for a second time to again not meet reserve, Dustyn placed it in his locked showcase at an Antiques Mall.

"I had it in my case for \$3,000 and went in two days ago and it was gone. It seems that someone stole it along with my gold Zip card," he said.

Though the gold autographed Bongo card was one of the first cards discovered, it is doubtful this card will ever surface again.



Autographed Cards Are Rare Treasures

How valuable these autographed cards will become is purely speculative, but they are already surpassing current prices for rare Beanie Babies. In January on eBay, an autographed Early card sold for \$800, a gold Lizzy birthday card sold for \$1,275, a silver retired Bronty card sold for \$1,500 and a gold Original 9 Patti cards sold for \$3,550.

"We have no idea just how many Royal Blue Peanuts or Spotless Spots there are in the world," explained Myrtle Cecil. "But we do know how many autographed cards there are, and they are fewer in number than any of the rare Beanies, Attic Treasures, Plush or Ty commemoratives."

In January, the Beanie Babies Collector's Cards Unofficial Club conducted a survey of more than 850 card collectors. The survey revealed almost four out of 10 collectors would rather own an autographed Peanut the royal blue elephant card than Peanut the royal blue elephant Beanie Baby. In fact, autographed cards may well become the ultimate gold mine of Beanie Baby collectibles as awareness of their scarcity grows. ♥

Jacqueline Greenwood is president and founder of the Beanie Babies Collector's Cards Unofficial Club (<http://www.beaniecardclub.com>). So far, 45 autographed cards have been reported to the Club. If you have an autographed card, please contact Jacqueline by E-mail at autographedcards@beaniecardclub.com.

Staff writers Claudia Dunne and Jackie La Berg contributed to this story.