I've never gotten the whole autograph thing and still have no interest in them. I'd much rather have my picture taken with a fighter than get his autograph. But years ago, I found an exception to this rule.

On the first day of fifth grade, a kid named Andy Hyde – a super nice guy who was liked by all – approached me and said, "Frank, I have something for you, but I forgot it and left it home. I promise to bring it for you tomorrow." I kept trying to get out of him what it was. But he wouldn't tell me, going so far as to warn, "Frank, even if you beat me up, I'm not telling you."

Before school the next day, I was locking my bike to the bike rack when Andy ran over to me. "Frank, I remembered it," he yelled. I couldn't see anything but his book bag. From inside, Andy pulled a note pad. He opened it, retrieving a piece of white paper.

"Frank, when I was with my parents at Philadelphia International Airport over the summer to go see my uncle in San Diego, you'll never guess who I saw. Muhammad Ali!" he said. "He was coming home from his last fight (against Jimmy Ellis; Ali lived in Cherry Hill, N.J., at the time, near where I grew up). As soon as I saw him I thought of you. I asked my father to go up with me to get his autograph."

I remember Andy telling me Ali was really big and very nice. He said his father had told him he was only to ask for one autograph. With that, Andy handed the paper signed by Ali to me. "Here Frank, I want you to have it because I know how much you love Muhammad Ali," he said.

I was stunned and didn't know what to say. Remember, it's 1971 and I'm in fifth grade. And it was well-known among my classmates that I was the biggest Ali fan on the planet.

"Andy, how do I know Muhammad Ali really signed this?" I asked. "If this is a trick I will beat you up everyday when I see you." I said this knowing Andy was not a kid who would play a trick on someone. And, I remember thinking, if this is real and he's giving me the only Ali autograph he was able to get, I should be thankful another kid didn't get it.

"Andy, I can't thank you enough and I'll never forget this," I finally told him. But being the jerk I can sometimes be, I couldn't let it go. "Andy," I continued, "I do believe Muhammad Ali signed this for you. I'm going to save this for the rest of my life because one day I'll see Ali's signature and compare it. I wouldn't want to be you if it isn't really his autograph."

Fast forward to May 22, 1979, at the Resorts International Hotel and Casino, the first gambling establishment in Atlantic City, N.J. That evening the amateurs from Joe Frazier's gym (the team I was a member of) fought against Muhammad Ali's amateur team. (Unfortunately for me, I was pulled from the card because trainers George Benton and Val Colbert thought that with only 15 fights, I lacked the experience to fight Lindell Holmes, who was then ranked among the top three middleweights in the country.)

After ten fights, it was tied at five apiece. For the rubber match, Marvis Frazier fought Tony Tubbs, which was perfect - Joe's son fighting Ali's clone. Marvis was sensational and Tubbs couldn't do much with him; Marvis won a clear and convincing decision in a spirited fight. Before they fought, though, there was an intermission. Ali and Frazier went back to the other teams dressing room and took pictures and signed autographs for the fighters.

I thought back to the Ali autograph Andy Hyde had given me, and said to myself that I gotta get Ali's autograph and compare the two, just to make sure. So I found a drink coaster and asked Ali to sign it. As much as it meant to be around Muhammad Ali for only the second time in my life, all I cared about or wanted to see was how he wrote his name. Nothing else mattered.

So he signed the coaster. The second he dotted the "i" in Ali, I realized Andy had gotten the real thing. At that moment, I knew if I did nothing else in life I had to let Andy know that I believed him.

I grew up in a waspy New Jersey town called Haddonfield. On the night before Thanksgiving each year, guys who graduated from Haddonfield Memorial High hung out at a bar, Haddon West, to catch up with each other. (I used to make a point of going each Thanksgiving Eve, but I haven't in a while.) As fate would have it, on Thanksgiving Eve, 1987, Andy Hyde and I ended up at Haddon West.

"Andy, do you have any idea how long I've been wanting to talk to you since Tatem School?" I asked when I ran into him that night. As a reply, he asked if I still had Ali's autograph. I told him the story.

As I relayed the details, Andy had this big smile on his face. "I'm not surprised you boxed, Frank," he said. "Not the way you loved it as a kid. I wasn't sure if you really believed it was real when I handed it to you then, but I was glad I gave it to you."

"Andy, it's as real as it gets, just like you. Keep your money in your pocket. I'm taking care of you tonight," I said, and for the next three hours I just about ignored the two friends I'd come to the bar with.

One of those friends, Tom Winton, told Andy that, "Lotierzo hasn't changed a bit. He still bores you with boxing, just like he did in fourth grade. If you need a noose to hang yourself so you don't have to listen to him, let me know."

I then proceeded to cross-examine Andy about everything that went down at the airport that day with Ali. I haven't seen Andy since. I just know he's probably successful and has a great outlook on life, just as he always had. Today, that autograph is underneath a framed "Life" magazine cover of Ali and Frazier - "Backstage with Ali & Frazier" - from the March 5, 1971 issue. It remains my most cherished boxing piece of memorabilia to this day.

For the rest of my life, Andy Hyde will always have a special place in my heart. For a kid to be that unselfish and caring in the fifth grade tells you everything about the man he was destined to become as an adult.

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