

My First Autographs

By Kevin Segall

I was nine years old in 1983 when I went with my dad to the first official Animation Art Festival held by ASIFA (the International Animated Film Society) in Los Angeles. I was a *huge* cartoon fan—and loved to draw my own cartoons—so this was a dream come true for me. The highlight of the event was a live reading of a *Rocky and Bullwinkle* script performed by the original voices: June Foray (Rocky) and Bill Scott (Bullwinkle), along with several other legendary cartoon voice artists.

It was at this event that I collected my first autographs—ones I treasure to this day. At a freebie table at the festival, I picked up a press release flyer advertising Hanna-Barbera's roster of cartoons for the 1977–78 season. Bravely, I went up after the reading to all the actors and politely asked for their autograph on the blank side of the flyer.

What a treat! There was Lucille Bliss (1916–2012), whom I knew as the voice of Smurfette on *The Smurfs*. She also performed the title character of the very first made-for-television cartoon, *Crusader Rabbit*. Then Corey Burton added his inscription. He was working as several voices on *Transformers* at the time and did an incredible Paul Frees imitation for the *Rocky and Bullwinkle* reading. Next Steven Schatzberg (1943–2008) signed it. I knew him as the voice of Tyg Tiger on Saturday morning's *Shirt Tales* cartoon. He later did the voice of Piglet for some Disney projects.

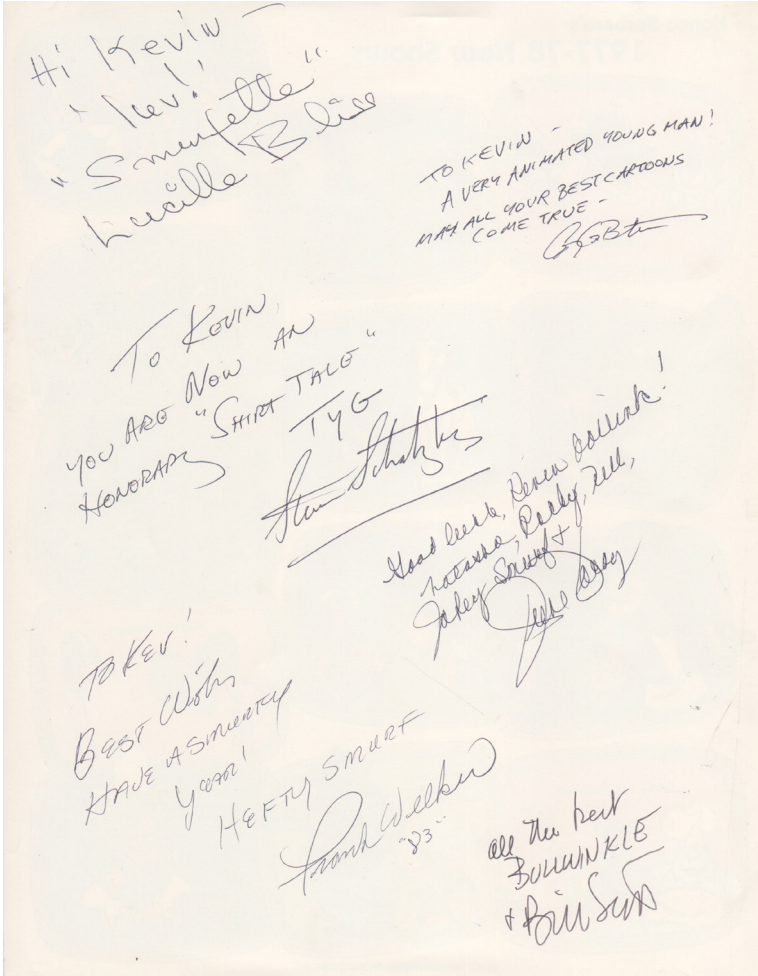
Another voice legend on stage who generously added his autograph was Frank Welker. Best known as Fred from *Scooby-Doo*, Welker was doing Hefty Smurf and Megatron from *Transformers* at the time. Of course Bullwinkle was performed by the great Bill Scott (1920–1985), not only a talented actor but also head writer and coproducer of *Rocky and Bullwinkle*.

But my favorite autograph of the day was June Foray (1917–2017), who performed the voices of Rocky the Flying Squirrel and Natasha Fatale. She also voiced Lucifer from Disney's *Cinderella*, Cindy Lou Who, Jokey Smurf, Granny from the Warner Bros. cartoons, and Talky Tina from the *The Twilight Zone*. I was lucky enough to get to know June a bit in her final years.

I picked up a few other treasures at the event. Academy Award-winning animator Chuck Jones (1912–2002) drew an incredible Bugs Bunny for me for a mere \$10 donation to ASIFA. Similar drawings now sell for a minimum of several hundred dollars. I wish I could go back in time and ask him to draw a few more characters for me! I met Grim Natwick (1890–1990), designer of Fleischer Studios' most popular character, Betty Boop, and a lead animator on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. He seemed ancient to me! I also met Frank Thomas (1912–2004), one of Disney's team of animators known as the Nine Old Men. He signed a publicity shot for me.

There and then I was bitten by the autograph bug, and I haven't slowed down since. I've expanded my collecting to Hollywood stars, authors, musicians, US presidents, and more. I'm still a big cartoon fan, too, and have gotten to know and work with a number of my cartoon heroes. And now I'm heading off to a meeting of my local chapter of the National Cartoonists Society. We meet about once a month, and it's a blast!

Kevin Segall is a past board member of the Manuscript Society and contributor to Manuscripts, as well as a member of ASIFA and the National Cartoonists Society. He can be reached at <https://KevinSegall.com>.



Kevin Segall started his collection off right with autographs from these animation stars. What was your first autograph? To share your story, contact News editor Pat Vaccaro at manuscriptsocietynews@gmail.com.