

Fakers Gonna Fake

By Reg P. Wydeven
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When I was in high school, our school band took a trip to New York City. We saw 'Cats' on Broadway, visited museums and got exposed to all kinds of culture. We happened to be in town during the latest tour stop of the New Kids on the Block. Apparently I had a passing resemblance to Joey McIntyre because a tweenage girl asked me for my autograph while on a walking tour.

My buddies laughed and mocked me for being confused for a boy band member. A few blocks later, however, I was again stopped by a gaggle of girls and asked for an autograph. Again I vehemently denied that I was Joey McIntyre.

When I was stopped a third time, though, I graciously agreed to sign whatever they wanted. One girl handed me a NKOTB poster and I signed it, "All My Love, Reggie." When I was done signing their things, they scurried away squealing. I had to admit, I felt pretty cool.

I thought that by playing along, I would make these girls' day. They would have a cool story to tell their friends on Monday morning at school (despite the fact that it wasn't necessarily true). And no harm was done. Unless, of course, they tried to sell my autograph. Especially in California.

Last month, California Assemblywoman Ling Ling Chang introduced a new bill that requires certificates of authenticity for all signed memorabilia sold in the State. Chang explained that California has protections in place for signed sports memorabilia by requiring certificates of authenticity, these protections are limited to sports and do not cover other memorabilia.

But Chang is not alone in her battle against forged signatures. To quote Star Wars' Yoda, her ally is the Force. And a powerful ally it is. Mark Hamill, who portrayed Luke Skywalker in the Star Wars films, including 'The Force Awakens,' the saga's latest chapter currently smashing box office records, has publicly and repeatedly condemned forged autographs.

In a Tweet late last year, Hamill said he was "so sorry there's so many fans spending their hard-earned money for fraudulent signatures." In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Hamill explained the magnitude of the problem by saying, "The public is being swindled on a daily basis and the numbers are huge." He elaborated, stating that fans are "stalked by these dealers that have shopping carts with 50 posters and stacks of photographs." Hamill felt compelled to take action, claiming, "I just can't keep quiet when I see people I love being hurt."

Hearing of his public campaign, Chang reached out to Hamill to join the fight against the evil Empire of fake autographs. "I got on the phone with him and it was very touching to see how passionate he was," she commented. "What he said to me is that his fans are like family and that he did not want to see kids being victimized as he's seen in the past. It's such an honor to have him on board with us." Hamill has publically supported Chang's bill, AB 1570.

If passed, in addition to requiring certificates of authenticity, the bill will also provide victims of forged memorabilia with civil recourse, including ten times the amount of actual damages.

Because our trip to New York was in 1990, I'm pretty sure the statute of limitations has run by now.

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