



## “Mr. Mint” – The Ultimate Collector

For Alan Rosen, collecting isn't a hobby. It's a lifestyle.

Born in the Bronx born and bred in North Jersey, Rosen was always a collector. He began as a kid, shoveling snow for 25 cents per house in order to buy baseball cards. Even back then, he bought en masse. He'd wait and save up \$1.20 so he could purchase 24 nickel-packs at a time.

“I had thousands of cards, and the Yankees were always my favorite team,” Rosen said. “If you had a Mickey Mantle, that was worth 50 cards. That's how I grew up.”

Besides sports cards, he also amassed Lincoln head pennies, buying the rare years on shopping trips with his mother to Gimbels department store.

He was also a Howdy Doody fan. Rosen's father, a photographer for the New York Daily News, **knew** television actor Dennis O'Keefe, who used his connections to get young Alan into the Peanut Gallery of the puppet show. From then on, Howdy Doody toys had a special place on Rosen's shelves.

But his childhood collections went the way of so many treasures of the ages – his mom threw them out when he grew older.

After a stint in the Army, Rosen married and started his own family, and the collecting began again. “I went to my first baseball card show in 1978, and the first thing I went for was Mickey Mantle cards,” he recalled.

“People buy these things because they're recapturing their youth,” Rosen said. “But it also gives them a positive vibe in their lives. It takes the aggravation out of everyday life.”

Rosen moved from participant to organizer of major sports card shows at Madison Square Garden. When his children were old enough to accompany him to collectible conventions, Rosen started building Star Wars and Hess truck collections for his son and Swarovski crystal figures for his daughter. Searching for scarce pieces for their shelves, Rosen honed his hunting technique, placing distinctive ads in trade publications and traveling the country to track down the best examples.

A young protégé on the sports card circuit gave Rosen his nom de guerre, “Mr. Mint,” for his desire to find objects in as close to their original condition as possible. It's the name that has distinguished the North Jersey collector/dealer around the country and the world.

What also set him apart was the briefcase full of cash that he carried to each show. “I never went out without at least \$100,000,” he said. He never had security problems in his 30 years of business, “but I have left the briefcase in restaurants.”

“One time we were in Los Angeles and after a card show we went to a Dodgers game,” he said. He and his partners sat in \$15 stadium seats with \$975,000 stuffed in their pockets.

Rosen's reputation for paying top-dollar helped him build one of the greatest robot and space toy collections over the past seven years. “When you go into something and you're known for paying the highest prices, a lot of deals come your way,” he explained. Prominent dealers sought him out, and private owners saw his advertising campaigns.

Sometimes he purposely overpaid, which got the attention of other sellers. “I had a better chance of getting a collection than anybody else. I got offered things first – that's how I built the collection.”

He was also willing to travel a bit out of his way. “I would drive anywhere to get a collection. For one of my first big deals,

I drove to Iowa – 16 hours each way. I spent three days to buy 300 robots -- really just to get the five or six pieces I wanted.”

In Indianapolis there was an auction that included a Musical Drummer Robot being sold by a woman whose husband had worked for the company that distributed the toy. “She had one that had never been out of the box. I drove to Indianapolis to get that one.”

The anticipation of finding that scarce toy made the trips fly by. “When you’re driving for a regular job, it’s tedious. But not so for me. When I’m buying something I enjoy, like robots, it doesn’t seem like a long drive. Not many people want to put in the time or effort; not many people are that obsessed. When I’m collecting, I have to have everything.”

To ensure that the toys boxes are in excellent condition, Rosen has used the services of Anthony Restorations in Acton, Calif. Brian Anthony is renowned for his restoration of silent era film, book dust jackets, original comic art, and vintage toy boxes.

“Alan always tended to collect the high-end stuff,” Anthony said. “He has had a lot of rare pieces, and many that are graphically stunning.”

Sometimes the rare packaging was not in perfect condition. “Often it was just a matter of cleaning, or a minor amount of restoration.” Some were in worse shape but were one-of-a-kind examples. They may have been victims of a child’s tape or glue repairs, or the original owner’s signature and markings. Others may have had crushed corners or sides.

“The problem is, tears will continue to tear; mold will spread. So the best thing to do is stop it in its tracks.”

In restoration, “you want to get it down to what it originally was. You take away the add-ons: the tape, the glue. From there, you build it archivally and properly. You don’t want to over-restore it. You just want it to be as original as possible,” Anthony said.

“Very often, especially in cleaning and little fixes, it can improve the value considerably. If it’s one of a kind, it will improve the value a great deal.”

Rosen said he is keeping only one robot from his collection, a 1980s Space Man worth about \$100. “I just like the color – a bright yellow.” Brian Anthony’s wife, Kim, a painting and paper restorationist, created a miniature robot and box replica of the toy as a gift for Rosen, the consummate collector.

