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# memorable gifts:

## readers recall childhood treasures

by nina polien light  
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*Doll collector Betsy Don holds the 1920s boy doll she received for Chanukah when she was 14. It has remained a favorite.*

**THE** gifts we receive as children often stir the warmest memories. We asked readers to share stories about their favorite gifts received at Chanukah and on other occasions.

"We used to get the Sears catalogue, and my sister and I circled everything we wanted for Chanukah," recalls Debbie Hirsch of Solon.

The circling paid off when Hirsch was 12: She received a Levi's denim cowboy-style vest, red plaid shirt and Dingo boots. "Everybody had them, and I wanted them, too!" The outfit also

complemented her early-1980s feathered hairstyle.

Sandy Koufax, the famed Jewish pitcher who skipped a World Series game to observe Yom Kippur, figures into Rabbi Edward C. Bernstein's favorite gift memory.

When the spiritual leader of Congregation Shaarey Tikvah was 10, his two great-aunts lived in the same San Francisco condominium complex as Koufax's mother Evelyn. "Even though I was aware of my aunts' neighbor through the family grapevine, I was stunned to receive a package one day from one of my aunts con-



taining an autographed baseball from Sandy Koufax, personalized to me," he says. "It remains a prized possession."

Every Chanukah, Rabbi Sharon Marcus of Park Synagogue received a box of 64 Crayola crayons with a built-in sharpener. "I guess I wore them out regularly," she says. Her parents also gave her new pajamas and slippers, a Chanukah tradition she continues with her two daughters.

But, the rabbi maintains, Jewish summer camp was the best gift her parents bestowed on her. "It obviously had a great influence on my life, and many of my closest friends today are friends from my early years at camp."

Ruth Elliott of Moreland Hills cried when her father gave her a black, three-speed Phillips English racer bicycle for no special occasion at all. Then 12 years old, she rode through the streets of Cleveland Heights "gesturing a regal, Queen Elizabeth wave to my admiring neighborhood audience."

Elliott still thinks about her late father and his special gift. "Every once in a while when I am feeling particularly nostalgic, I go down to my basement to visit my racer, which – after 49 years and eight different homes – is still part of my life. It's a little less shiny now, and its tires are flat. When I go for a spin on



*Ruth Elliott rides a 10-speed now, but still keeps the three-speed English racer she got when she was 12.*

my current royal blue 10-speed bicycle, I am really 12 years old and on my Phillips racer."

Cindy Glazer Mittman of Cleveland Heights recalls a shopping trip to the Franklin Simon Department Store with her now-deceased mother, Mora Molly Glazer. When the 9-year-old admired both a stuffed puppy dog and a pair of pajamas, her mother said she had to make a choice. Mittman selected the toy.

"I was holding him close to my heart," she recalls. "All of a



*Honnie Busch wears the ring her dad gave her as a reward.*

sudden, in the car going home, my mother turns to me with a beautifully wrapped box with a huge pink ribbon. It was the pajamas."

Beachwood resident Honnie Busch's unlikely gift stemmed from her picky eating habits. "My father would cajole me to eat, (usually) to no avail. One day, he said he would give me a diamond ring if I would eat. That pro-

duced results. The ring is filigreed white gold with a pinhead diamond on it. I still have it and wear it on my little finger when I am going out."

Money was tight when Monica Silver and her two sisters were growing up, but they really wanted a Monopoly game for Chanukah. On the first night, the girls received a beautifully wrapped set of Monopoly real estate cards. This was followed by Chance and Community Chest cards, dice, game tokens and other Monopoly paraphernalia on subsequent nights.

"After eight long days of impatiently waiting and constantly whining, we finally received the actual game board," Silver recalls. "In a frenzy, we set everything up and played until my parents forced us to go to bed many, many hours later. When I tell my nieces and nephews about this special Chanukah present, they just roll their eyes. But I will never forget how my parents brilliantly illustrated the old adage, 'Good things come to those who wait.'"

The only daughter in a family of three sons, Evy Davis received many dolls as a child. But her favorite was the first Barbie she received for Chanukah when she was 4 or 5. The doll, who





*Play ball! Rabbi Edward C. Bernstein's aunts gave him a baseball, autographed and personalized for him by Sandy Koufax.*

resembled her uncle's girlfriend, had brown hair that flipped up like Marlo Thomas's. Despite the appearance of newer Barbies on the scene, the original still retained its attraction.

"Years later, when the tan, straight-haired Malibu Barbie hit the scene, my original was never tossed aside," she recalls. "Even when the other Barbies received haircuts and pierced ears, my first Barbie remained as her original self."

Antique doll collector Besty Don of Solon recalls a special gift she received on the last night of Chanukah when she was 14.

"My parents had bought me a 1920s boy doll, dressed in an embroidered cloth shirt, velvet shorts and silk leggings," she says. "With four other kids in the house getting gifts as well, it was the very last thing that I ever expected to receive. I was over-the-top excited and have this doll still."

The doll is in storage with 33 others, including Don's first French antique bisque doll, which she bought as a teenager with money she earned babysitting. But the boy doll, the only one in her collection, remains a favorite.

Sometimes, the most precious presents can't be wrapped.

"The best gift I received as a child was in the winter of 1963," says Rabbi Eric Bram of Suburban Temple-Kol Ami. "My father decided to stop drinking and joined Alcoholics Anonymous. I was 7 years old at the time. Though I didn't really understand it then, I did sense that something was very different in my family after he made the decision. I still have that gift, as my father's decision to face his disease continues to inspire me to believe in the possibility of redemption, in God's power to heal – to deliver us from darkness to light." ▲

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