

# BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

## *What's true price for the keepsakes of Minnie's life?*

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Posted Monday, September 19, 2016*

Minnie Minoso's driver's license and lifetime Major League Baseball pass sold for \$600.

But his 2002 Illinois "MMinoso" vanity plate sold for just \$130.

The Cuban Comet's 1959 White Sox American League pennant ring – a gift from Bill Veeck even though Minoso played for Cleveland in '59 – was auctioned for \$12,000.

Yet his 1957 Gold Glove award with the Sox, first of his illustrious career, netted just \$5,000.

What is the value of a man's life, memories, passions?

In the sports memorabilia world, conveyed through formal auctions, value is totally subjective, according to whims or cold calculation of a re-sale market.

Sox legend Minoso's life was literally put on display the other weekend in a fourth-level suite reception room at U.S. Cellular Field. A year and half after his sudden death at 89 on March 1, 2015, widow Sharon Minoso and son Charlie Minoso decided to engage Hunt Auctions to disperse Minnie's huge collection of keepsakes in the first such sale of a player's collection ever at The Cell.

Beyond the monetary value, or lack thereof, of dozens of items auctioned, the event held for both live and on-line bidders provided a peek into one of Chicago's most beloved ballplayers' personality. Minoso literally saved everything, from chotchkies to sleek-looking awards. His family simply could not hang onto the collection, divided between their North Side home and The Cell, where the Sox hung onto items for their Hall of Fame-worthy alum and longtime goodwill ambassador.

You don't know whether to brand this a happy ending. At least the family decided the fate of part of his estate.



**Minnie Minoso's 1959 Sox pennant ring (left) and 1957 Gold Glove Award were among the highlights of his collection.**

The stories abound of how Minoso contemporary Ernie Banks, who died shortly before him, lost many of his awards and great baseball artifacts in an acrimonious divorce from second wife Eloyce. Part II of the sad Banks saga is how Mr. Cub went from auction to auction trying to get his personal history back. That is all part of the depressing side of Banks' personal life that seemed to bubble to the surface before and after his death.

“Sharon and Charlie just realized they had so many things,” said Christine O’Reilly-Riordan, the longtime vice president of community relations/executive director of White Sox Charities. O’Reilly-Riordan, close with Minoso through all his team ambassador years, was the team official supervising the auction.



**Sox official Christine O'Reilly-Riordan, who was close to Minoso and his family, oversaw the auction.**

“Good for them, they had a lot of personal mementoes,” she said. While on a trip with Minnie, Sharon Minoso attended a Hunt Auction. “She made a mental note and thought that was cool,” O’Reilly-Riordan said.

The Minoso collection had plenty of company at the event. Hunt Auctions had made contact with the family of the late Jerome Holtzman, former dean of Chicago baseball writers and MLB Historian. Some of Holtzman’s personal papers and historic baseball documents already had been acquired by Dr. David Fletcher, president of the Chicago Baseball Museum. But the Holtzman family wanted to disperse most of the rest of the collections down to his old manual typewriters.

O’Reilly-Riordan and the Sox added some 50 items from team archives to round out the auction. A portion of the proceeds went to White Sox Charities.

“When the Holtzman family heard a portion of the proceeds were going to White Sox Charities, they wanted to provide some items as well,” O’Reilly-Riordan said.

You can be sure she was warm-blooded when it came to memories of Minnie that would part ways at this event.

“When I came up here the first time everything was on display, it was difficult to walk through,” O’Reilly-Riordan said. “So sentimental, so many memories. It was a little bit hard to walk through. But it was just like Minnie, to share something of himself.”

The surprising event of the auction was Minoso’s 1960 Gold Glove Award not selling on his return to the Sox from the two-year exile in Cleveland. The high bid was \$11,500, failing to reach the “reserve,” or base price of the award.

A custom watch Minoso wore sold for \$5,000. The Comet acquired a Banks bat used in the early 1960s, which cost \$4,000. A 1992 letter from President George H.W. Bush went for \$850. Everyday items Minoso saved typically netted in the low-hundreds range.



**Sox outfield retired number placards were all sold during the auction.**

Most valuable Holtzman items were 1926-27 Yankees World Series press pins for \$2,000 each. His old Sun-Times typewriter sold for \$275.

From the Sox collection, the value of material from Hall of Fame or Hall of Fame-calibre players was far greater than others.

Ken Griffey, Jr. and Jim Thome Sox jerseys sold for \$3,000 each. But a 2006 Paul Konerko jersey netted \$2,200. Thome's game-used helmet attracted \$2,000 for a final bid. A Frank Thomas game-used bat got \$300, but a Maggs Ordonez war club just \$75.

The Sox also dispersed the circled team retired numbers that used be festooned on the outfield walls. But it pays to be a more contemporary Hall of Famer. Inducted in 2014, Thomas' 35 drew a \$750 high on-line. In contrast, 1964 inductee Luke Appling's No. 4 cost just \$175. Minoza's No. 9 was \$200. Billy Pierce's No. 19 drew just \$125.

Minoza at least was in good company in the auction world. Dave Hunt said his firm handled similar sell-offs for Ted Williams' items at Fenway Park and Robin Roberts' artifacts in Philadelphia.

No matter how big the name, how easily they entered the Hall of Fame or were kept out, the farewell to what a ballplayer leaves behind after his death is sad, as O'Reilly-Riordan said.

But not for sale are the memories that athlete evoked. They're priceless and stay with the beholder, never up for auction.