

Gwen: Our first story takes us to Yankee Stadium for the inside story of baseball's most famous speech. For 17 seasons, Lou Gehrig earned his rank as one of baseball's greatest players. A phenomenal slugger and first baseman, he led the Yankees to seven World Series, knocking ball after ball out of the park. Then in 1939, the Iron Horse began to stumble. As much as he trained, he couldn't escape a relentless slump. That summer, the mystery was finally solved. Gehrig was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or A.L.S., now known by many as Lou Gehrig's disease. The incurable illness was paralyzing him, yet on July 4, 1939, without self-pity or fear, he courageously declared that life was well worth living.

Gehrig: Today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. [Cheers and applause]

Gwen: More than 60 years later, a baseball fan from Portland, Oregon, may have a ticket that takes us behind the scenes that famous day.

Ed Goldberg: I found the ticket in my mother's high school yearbook. I looked at this ticket, and I said, "this can't be what I'm seeing." My mother never, ever told me about this.

Gwen: I'm Gwen Wright, and I'm meeting Ed Goldberg to learn more about his mother's baseball ticket. I'm Gwen, nice to meet you.

Ed: Yeah, come on in.

Gwen: Thanks. So how did you find it, Ed?

Ed: This is my mother's high school yearbook. My mother died almost 30 years ago. I was looking through it because I was moving. It fell out face-up like this, and my first reaction was, wow, this was really old. \$1.10 to get into the ballgame. And then I turned it over, and I don't want to say my eyes bugged out, but I think my eyes bugged out. There was what appeared to be a Lou Gehrig autograph and the date July 4, 1939.

Gwen: It was a very significant day to Lou Gehrig's life. It was the day he made his very famous speech when he actually quit baseball. Let me see her picture in the yearbook. Oh, here it is. Was she a baseball fan?

Ed: Yes, she was a baseball fan. She told me that Lou Gehrig was a special favorite for her. She had a crush on him. He was a very handsome guy, he was a big star. She would cut high school to go watch Lou Gehrig play at Yankee Stadium.

Gwen: So tell me exactly what you'd like to know about the ticket, Ed. Ed recognizes his mother's handwriting on the date on the ticket, but did Lou Gehrig autograph it too? Could it really be true? Is the ticket authentic? Is it really the game of July 4, 1939? And did Lou Gehrig sign autographs that day? Well, I'll see what I can do.

Ed: Well, thank you very much, Gwen.

Gwen: If this is an autographed ticket from that day, it's significant. Lou Gehrig is one of the most beloved players in baseball history. While his flamboyant teammate, Babe Ruth, garnered most of the attention, Gehrig broke records with his awe-inspiring swing and unflinching determination. Enduring slumps and injuries, he played in 2,130 consecutive games, a record he held for more than 50 years. But more than just stats, Gehrig was admired for his humility, thoughtfulness, and decency.

Gehrig: I might've been given a bad break, but I've got an awful lot to live for.

Gwen: Baseball historians have long wondered if Gehrig knew on that July afternoon at Yankee Stadium just how catastrophic his diagnosis was. I want to learn more about what was going on behind the scenes that day. I'm meeting up with my colleague, Elyse Luray. Hi, Elyse.

Elyse: Hi.

Gwen: She used to run the sports memorabilia department at Christie's. I'll show you this ticket, which is handwritten dated July 4, 1939, and has a signature. What do you make of that?

Elyse: We should be careful when we look at signatures because there are a lot of fakes in the market. There's an FBI quote that says that fifty percent of signatures of sports memorabilia on the market are not real. So unless they're coming from an auction house or a very reputable dealer, you need to be really careful. These are two Gehrig signatures that I know are real. If we look at your piece and we compare these two, the "L"s look different, the "ou"s are completely different, and the "rig"s are kind of similar. But if I was going to give you my opinion, I would say although the signature is close, it's not Gehrig's signature.

Gwen: Ed's likely to be disappointed with that verdict. The good news is, is that this is a period ticket. Well, the date's not print, it's just handwritten. So how can I find out if this ticket was issued for that game?

Elyse: The first thing I would do was go to what's concrete on the ticket. So we know that it's game 34. And we know that this is a home game at Yankee Stadium because it's signed here by Jacob Ruppert, who was the owner at the time. So what I would do is, check out game 34 at Yankee Stadium. The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York has the world's largest archive devoted to the game. I'm hoping researcher Bill Francis can help me. I'm trying to find out the exact date of the 34th home game at Yankee Stadium in 1939. Do you know if it's the originally scheduled 34th game or the 34th game that was actually played? Because there is a difference due to rainouts.

Bill Francis: I think it's the 34th scheduled game because I have a ticket that is issued for the 34th home game at Yankee Stadium, and it's handwritten at the top, "July 4, 1939." Well, it's a great ticket, a significant game in baseball history. Let me grab a couple things behind here, and if you don't mind having a seat, I'll bring it right over to you. This is the Spalding's Official Baseball Guide for 1939, which should tell us what the Yankee schedule was that season. "Official American League Schedule, 1939." The chart is confusing. It lists home games at Yankee Stadium not by date, but by the opposition team.

Gwen: Bill brought a calendar to help us map out the season. Do I start with April?

Bill: Start with the earliest home games you can find.

Gwen: April, Washington, played at New York, April 29th and 30<sup>th</sup>. Okay. One, two, three... 32-33... And the 34th home game the Yankees played that season was against the Washington senators on July 4th. So this is very likely a ticket from that famous July 4, 1939, game.

Bill: I would agree.

Gwen: We almost certainly have the right game, but if Gehrig didn't sign the ticket, who did, and why? Ray Robinson wrote a book about Gehrig called *Iron Horse*. He was at that famous game 65 years ago. As a boy, Ray had been an ace collector of ball players' signatures. I have one of the books.

Ray Robinson: You see this tattered thing? I used to have special pages for certain players. I'd cut out their pictures from newspapers, paste them in here, oh, this is wonderful. And then get autographs on their pictures.

Gwen: Oh, there's Babe Ruth. You have his autograph.

Ray: There's The Babe, Lefty Gomez...

Gwen: You were there that July 4, 1939.

Ray: Yes, July 4, 1939. There were 60,000 or so people here, and I sat in the cheap seats, which is back that way, it's the bleachers out there in right field.



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Gwen: So describe what happened that day.

Ray: The Gehrig Appreciation Ceremony was held between the games of the double header, and they lined up around home plate. They wanted Lou to speak, and for a while it looked like he really didn't want to speak. He was rather reluctant. And the fans, the chant went up around the stands, and it was picked up around this big ballpark, "We want Lou! We want Lou!" And finally, Lou acquiesced, and he approached the microphone and gave his speech, which is now considered baseball's Gettysburg Address. And it was a great speech. It was a poignant, remarkable speech from a guy who may have known -- and we're not sure of this -- that he was dying.

Archive Footage: Gehrig: Today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. [Cheers and applause]

Gwen: As I told you, I have this ticket that I think is from that game, with a signature, although I don't think it's actually his..

Ray: This may have been signed at a later time. In later years, when Mickey Mantle was around, there were people in the clubhouse who used to sign things for them. But I can't believe that this was obtained the day of Gehrig's speech.

Gwen: I'm heading back to the hall of fame to meet with Gehrig biographer, Jonathan Eig. He uncovered a trove of letters between Gehrig and his doctors, including some from that tumultuous year. By July 4th, Eig says, it was clear to the Iron Horse that something was terribly wrong with his body.

Jonathan Eig: If he had looked himself in the mirror objectively, he would see that his shoulders had shrunk, that his calves were shrunk. You know, his body was really vanishing. The muscles in his hands would have been among the first affected. It would have made writing letters more difficult. It becomes more and more difficult to walk, just to do the routine things that he's so accustomed to doing.

Gwen: Well, the handwriting still looks quite fluid. At what point does he stop being able to write? The last one I've seen is July 16, 1939, less than two weeks after his famous speech when he calls himself the luckiest man. He writes to his doctor, Paul O'Leary, "Just a line to say hello, and also to report the splendid progress I am making. I have gained seven to nine pounds, bubbling over, find it hard to refrain from taking a workout." Splendid progress, was that really true?

Jonathan: No, no one makes splendid progress with A.L.S., unfortunately.

Gwen: Jonathan explains why historians have wondered just how much Gehrig knew about his prognosis.

Jonathan: For one thing, he was clinging to the promise of some new experimental treatments. Perhaps more significantly, Dr. Paul O'Leary of the Mayo Clinic had become a close personal friend. Under strong pressure from Lou's wife, Eleanor, O'Leary conspired to shield Gehrig from the painful truth. And Eleanor is encouraging Dr. O'Leary to continue to lift Gehrig's hopes. She's basically secretly writing to him and saying, you're getting letters from Lou asking for the truth, but he doesn't really want the truth. Eig believes that ironically, seeking to protect Eleanor, Lou participated in that cover-up. She needs to feel like she's protecting Lou, I think, and Lou may feel like he's trying to protect her too. Soon after the diagnosis, he writes to her, suggesting that maybe in a decade, he'll need a cane. It was the purest of white lies. Does he know yet that he's dying? I believe he does. He knows he's dying, and...

Gwen: For his book, Eig interviewed doctors who had known Gehrig's neurologist, his main physician. They described him as a by-the-book professional. The doctors who practiced with him, who have studied with him, said there's no way that he would have let a patient leave his office without completely understanding what A.L.S. meant. Gehrig's speech of July 4th is not suggesting he believes everything will be all right. He's facing the truth. It's an amazing moment. It's Gehrig's finest moment. It's more powerful than anything he ever did on the ball field. And it's a message that continues to inspire us because he's saying that life is what we should celebrate, with all its bumps, with all its bruises.

Gwen: Hi, I'm Gwen Wright. I'm meeting with James Spence, a professional autograph authenticator. Everyone from the FBI to auction houses calls on him to root out forgeries. I have a ticket here from a Yankees game with a signature that says Lou Gehrig.

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James Spence: Oh, okay. Well, why don't we check it out?

Gwen: Jimmy has over 1,500 Gehrig autographs, including a wide range of forgeries, from the innocent to the criminal.

James: There's outright forgeries, which have been very, very popular ever since this hobby became an industry in the late 1970s.

Gwen: Well, can you show me one of the really gifted forgers?

James: This is created by someone in the Midwest. And if you notice, the recurring theme here is that he likes to use the name Tony or Tom in his greeting and salutation in his example.

Gwen: Oh, so he got the "t" down.

James: That's a very distinctive way of forming the "t." yes, and they fool quite a few people and they sell for big dollars.

Gwen: But Jimmy says that forgeries aren't always malicious. There is a couple of examples here of stamped signatures. They created a rubber stamp for him when his illness, the A.L.S., prevented him from signing. Sometimes wives would sign for the ballplayers, or they would even have secretaries, or nurses, in the case of Babe Ruth. Well, who else would sign for someone like Gehrig?

James: In the Yankee organization, there was a clubhouse manager by the name of Pete Sheehy. Quite honestly, back then nobody knew the difference, no one cared. It's just become a problem today when people are trying to attach a dollar figure to this type of merchandise.

Gwen: Well, let's come back to this one. What do you think might be the circumstances for this signature?

James: Well, I have a magnification device. Let me take a look at it a little bit more closely. The "L" leans in, very pronounced "r," high "h," very oval in the "g," and there's a distinct separation between the "i" and the "g." I probably get a couple of these in a week, where...

Gwen: What Jimmy told me next revealed the true meaning of Ed Goldberg's ticket. So Ed, I'm pleased to tell you that you do have a ticket from the famous July 4, 1939, game at Yankee Stadium.

Ed: That's great.

Gwen: Unfortunately, this is not Lou Gehrig's signature.

Ed: Really. Whose signature is it?

Gwen: This is the style and autograph of Eleanor Twitchell Gehrig.

Ed: Fascinating.

Gwen: She would sign his signature very similar to his, but she would lean over a little bit more with the "L." the stem, or staff, of the "h" would be almost twice the size of his.

Ed: Well, what can you tell me about the possible circumstances? Do you think she signed this after that game?

Gwen: More than likely, someone went home with the ticket, wrote down the date, and decided that they'd mail it in. And she accommodated the request, like she did for so many other people.

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**history** Episode 10, 2006: Lou Gehrig Autograph,  
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detectives

Ed: Oh, my goodness.

Archive Footage: Gehrig: I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. [Cheers and applause]

Ed: I tell people that I would have to be on the verge of starvation to sell this, because it's not what it's worth, it's what it's worth to me that really counts. So now I'll just keep it forever.

Gwen: Lou Gehrig traveled with the Yankees through the '39 season. When the new owner did not offer him work with the team, Gehrig opened a new chapter in his life, accepting a job as one of New York's parole commissioners, sizing up and often counseling kids in jail. By the spring of 1941, a simple trip to the office had become too much. On June 2nd, with his wife by his bedside, he died. Lou Gehrig was laid to rest in Kensico Cemetery, in Valhalla, New York. Forty-three years later, having never remarried, his beloved Eleanor was buried beside him.

ENDS