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My 8,000th comic, and I'm not ashamed

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Issue date: 8/3/05 **Section:** [Opinion](#)

Originally published: 8/3/05 at 12:00 AM EST **Last update:** 1/27/06 at 10:21 AM EST

I collect comics. I am a comics geek, and I admit that up front. My mother and grandfather introduced me to the concept of a comic book in 1988. In 1989, my mom bought me my first four comics. If it hasn't happened already, sometime in the next couple months I will buy my 8,000th comic.

My collection of contemporary comics — those I bought new at their time of publication — goes back to 1989. It began with Superman (2nd series) #31, and Batman #439. As of today, the 220th issue of Superman has just been released, and the 643rd issue of Batman is due out within the month. In the 16 years that I've been into comics, I've amassed nearly 8,000 individual issues, and well over that when one adds in duplicates. I've acquired comics published as far back as the 1960s, reprints of issues published in the late 1930s, ranging from superheroes to just about every other genre out there. I've bought comics from dozens of different publishers and hundreds of different writer/artist teams.

Despite this "diversity" in my collection, the first question I am always asked when my love of comics is discovered is "What's your most valuable comic?" (or some variation of that). Truthfully, those first-ever issues of Superman and Batman are my most valuable sentimentally. Money-wise, I couldn't say; every single comic I can think of that was published in the 1990s that may once have been "worth" a lot of money, I have seen and/or purchased for myself in bargain bins at 25 cents to \$1.

The speculator boom of the 1990s went bust, and in the years since, comics have had to evolve and adapt to

survive — which has generally resulted in much higher-quality products than 10 years ago. Though I once took part in the speculation, I no longer purchase any comics unless I intend to read them; and these days it seems that comics are barely worth the paper they are printed on, unless you enjoy the actual story contained within.

That is good news, though. Rather than stories built solely for shock value and to create instant collectors' items, stories in today's comics tend to be, on the whole, of much higher quality and driven by the stories themselves. This evolution of comics has resulted in — among other things — the rise of the “graphic novel,” as many comics now enjoy extended shelf life thanks to being reprinted in collected volumes and sold through bookstores rather than just comic specialty shops.

Despite the higher per-issue cost of comics (generally \$2.50 to \$3.99 each, and the primary discouragement in continuing to buy comics), I can't recall a time when buying and reading comics was more enjoyable.

If you're interested in comics — as single issues or graphic novels or collected volumes — check your local bookstore. To find a comics specialty shop, call 1-888-COMIC-BOOK and enter your zip. There are many comic book Web sites that also provide information, reviews and general news about comics, including Newsarama (www.newsarama.com) and a site that I contribute reviews to, ComiXtreme (www.comixtreme.com).

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