

Pokemon is celebrating its 25th anniversary

By Robert Belardi OPINION

When I was just a boy I remember receiving my first handheld system that I could call my own. I had Sega's Game Gear, but it was my father's.

The moment my Game Boy Color first sat in the palms of my hands, I thought it was the most incredible thing. A D-pad on the left side of the system, an A and a B button stationed diagonally to the right side. The stop and start buttons right on the bottom. It was a see-through mechanism tainted with the colour purple.

My father took me to a game store somewhere in Etobicoke. I walked in, in awe. There were games everywhere and all kinds of these cartridges in a glass casing right in front of the store clerk.

My dad said, "Pick a game Robbie, it's on me."

I was overwhelmed. What the heck do I pick? Do I choose the most coveted Nintendo game Super Mario? Do I choose Donkey Kong? Oh wait. My friends at school had this one and they said it was good. It was Pokémon.

I chose Pokémon Gold Version as my very first Game Boy Color game and my first video game I called my own. I can't fathom in my mind, but it has been 25 years since the game has been out and this week, fans and those from my generation alike, will have witnessed a quarter-century of a game that we simply knew as our childhood.

Originally named Pocket Monsters, Pokémon was released on February 27, 1996, in Japan according to Bulbapedia. Pocket Monsters Red and Green were the first. It's creator, Satoshi Tajiri, had a knack for capturing insects and tadpoles in his youth. He eventually created a game that resembled such a desire.

And when Pokémon came to North America a few years later as video games Blue, Red and Yellow, it came also as a trading card game, a television show and a movie series. Everyone wanted to be like the protagonist, Ash Ketchum. We all wanted to "catch 'em all."

I later got a Game Boy Advance SP one Christmas with Pokemon Ruby Version. I remember going to school and trading with other people at school with a cable that connected our Game Boys together. I later got Emerald Version of the game to now, Pokémon Sword on the Nintendo Switch.

Looking back at it now, this was one of the most inclusive video games. It was more than something you played by yourself. It was competitive with other people and it also helped Pokémon lovers become friends.

According to Bulbapedia, there are 122 Pokémon games in total that have been known and as of March 31, 2020, over 368 million game units have been sold. I'm sure there's more than that by now!

It has also become one of the largest esports competitions. Video Game Competitions (VGC) are held every year and Pokemon gamers all across the world compete in battles for money.

I still marvel today how far this game has come. If it's been 25 years, I'm sure Nintendo will find a way to keep it going for another 25.

I hope the children of today can experience the nervousness of choosing a starter and the exhilaration when you catch a legendary.

It's unforgettable. Just ask anyone and they won't tell you otherwise.