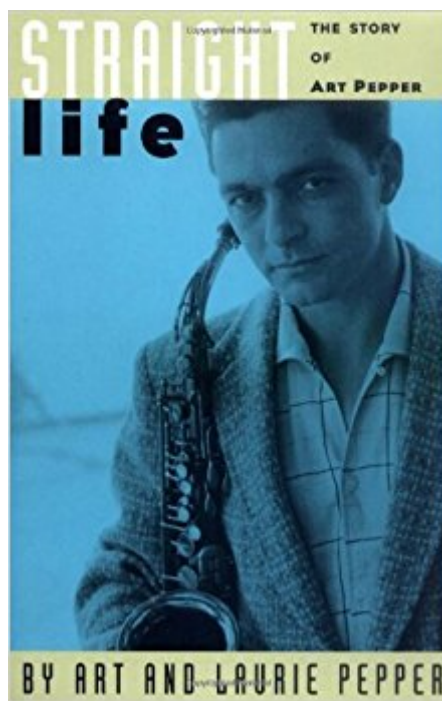


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# Straight Life: The Story Of Art Pepper



## Synopsis

Art Pepper (1925–1982) was called the greatest alto saxophonist of the post-Charlie Parker generation. But his autobiography, *Straight Life*, is much more than a jazz book; it is one of the most explosive, yet one of the most lyrical, of all autobiographies. This edition is updated with an extensive afterword by Laurie Pepper covering Art Pepper's last years, and a complete and up-to-date discography by Todd Selbert.

## Book Information

Paperback: 616 pages

Publisher: Da Capo Press; Updtd Da Capo PR ed. edition (March 22, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0306805588

ISBN-13: 978-0306805585

Product Dimensions: 5 x 1.4 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars – See all reviews (68 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

An apt title, as Art Pepper tells in his own words what he did, and how he felt about it. Pepper was one of the finest alto saxophonists of all time but also a tortured individual who found escape from the reality of living through heroin. This book is not a fluffy piece of a read and not for anyone looking for such. Pepper tells the raw truth about his drug use, prison time and even sexual activities (some of the latter criminal). One is struck by how much time he wasted in prison and being so stoned he was unable to function. If that time could only have been spent recording and playing how much more of a legacy he would have left us! If you wish to read a searing portrait of the life of a jazz musician and drug addict then read this book for there is probably no finer written example. I found it difficult to put down. Mesmerizing! Highly recommended.

Just an incredible book/life/story of a jazz genius who was hooked on heroin (and then later toward the end of his life on cocaine, etc.) Pepper pulls no punches in the telling. It's all here. While you appreciate the guy's honesty (and love him for it) you can't help but shake your head and feel so

damn sad and awful at the hell he put himself through with all the drugs he shot up/used/consumed... Why? Why did he have to go that route? I'm not judging here; we all have our weaknesses, but you can't help but feel shocked at the toll all the smack he shot up took on this guy (you have never met, but feel that you know and give a damn about the same way you would any friend.) I also recommend the video. There is a scene there in the third act, where Art is playing a tune called Our Song on his record player (with his wife Laurie sitting also nearby listening to this beautiful piece of music that he had written for her, for the love that he felt for his lady) and Art is saying: "That's it; that's the best that I can do. It took 51 years to be able to do that..." And I have to tell you it hit me pretty hard as I sat in front of my set watching/listening to this music that Art had created... Art Pepper, an original. I wish he were around. Yeah, I know, there's the music he left behind...it isn't enough. I miss the guy, even though I never met him. I have a feeling you'll feel the same way after reading Straight Life.

There's no insight into Art's music here on a technical level, but it's very revealing on an emotional level. Once he started using heroin, his life became a self-destructive cycle of endless quests for the next fix. This is more of a junkie-prison memoir than a story of jazz music, although heroin was tragically a common thread in the lives of many jazz musicians of his era. Unfortunately for Art, he spent more time in jail than most of his peers did for those illegal pleasures. His experience appears to belie the gateway theory on marijuana, since he was only a casual user of pot before he started on heroin, and it was no more significant to him than alcohol. He relates little interest in marijuana or alcohol once he started on heroin, though he popped plenty of pills and even sniffed glue in his efforts to calm the monkey on his back and relieve his need for smack. If anything, tobacco might have been the real gateway drug for Art, since his inability to kick that habit was the thing that eventually forced him to leave the Syanon rehab center. I strongly recommend this book to any fan of Art's who'd like to have some idea of what might have been going on in his head during his different recording periods, or anyone else who might appreciate a brutal, unflinching account of an addict's life.

This brutal portrait of jazz virtuoso Art Pepper reads like a Bosch painting of the infernal pits of Hell...from drug addiction to peeping tom to armed robbery ... and doin time in San Quentin Art Pepper's fall from grace and eventual comeback late in life is related in hard as nails prose...throw in some of the best accounts of Jazz biography with opinions and rants on Miles Davis, Coletrane, Louis Armstrong and others and you have a redemptive, brutal look into the tortured heart of a true

criminal/addict/musician...for Pepper was all three and considered each elemental in the struggle of his existence...

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