

Press Kit

**Chet Baker:  
The Missing Years**

**A Memoir**

**By**

**Artt Frank**



**BooksEndependent**

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**Praise for**  
**Chet Baker: The Missing Years**  
**A Memoir by Artt Frank**

*"In depicting Chet's struggle to recover, Artt [Frank] reveals great compassion for a sensitive soul fighting for a life, and puts to rest the rumors and gossip that circulated about Chet's 'missing years.'"*

— **Dave Brubeck**, Legendary Jazz Pianist and Composer

*"Chet Baker's friend and drummer Artt Frank shows us sides of the great trumpeter that few people knew. In gripping detail, he tells of the well-known drama in Baker's life—the sudden fame, the struggle with drugs, the effects of a beating that almost ended his career. But Artt gives us new insights into Chet's warmth, his love of family, his steely determination and the early emergence of his astonishing talent. Frank's photographic memory for conversations rivals Truman Capote's. This is a book of revelations."*

— **Doug Ramsey**, Author of *Jazz Matters* and *Take Five: The Public and Private Lives of Paul Desmond*

*"About Chet a lot has been written, but alas, much of it is nonsense, repeating other nonsense. To get reliable information, we have to turn to the few people who actually knew him. Artt Frank not only knew Chet but kept in touch when it seemed like the world had forgotten him; a period he calls 'the missing years,' and rightfully so."*

— **Jeroen de Valk**, Author of *Chet Baker: His Life and Music*  
*"You will be hard-pressed to find a book as honest as Artt's concerning his interaction with Chet Baker. The detail is incredible ... the account portrays much about the day-to-day life of jazz musicians from that era. But this book is more than just a series of stories. Artt writes about all the people involved with total love and respect, especially about Chet, the person, who could've been a character in a Dos- toevsky novel or Greek tragedy, but happens to have been one of the all time great jazz artists. Anyone will be moved by this story."*

— **Dave Liebman**, Saxophonist and Flautist; 2010 NEA Jazz Masters Lifetime Achievement Award recipient



Books Independent

# Chet Baker: The Missing Years

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## A Memoir By Artt Frank



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\$19.95  
ISBN 978-0-9887687-4-1  
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## **Jazz Drummer's Memoir Captures Missing Years With Trumpeter Chet Baker**

*Independent publisher, [BooksEndeependent, LLC](#) today announced the release of “Chet Baker: The Missing Years, A Memoir by Artt Frank,” available in both trade paperback and Kindle Edition eBook. Foreword by Bobby Shew.*

LOS ANGELES, CA [February 19, 2014] – Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame bop drummer, composer, lyricist, and vocalist [Artt Frank](#), one of the few authentic bop musicians on the scene today, has written a poignant memoir of the west coast jazz scene of the late 1960s. Known for his friendship and musical collaboration with iconic trumpeter, Chet Baker, Frank provides jazz lovers with an intimate portrait of what are considered “the missing years” in Baker’s career – the period shortly after a brutal beating left the trumpeter unable to play.

As reviewed by premiere jazz journalist and critic, Doug Ramsey, this memoir “... shows us sides of the great trumpeter that few people knew. In gripping detail, he [Frank] tells of the well-known drama in Baker’s life—the sudden fame, the struggle with drugs, the effects of a beating that almost ended his career. But Artt gives us new insights into Chet’s warmth, his love of family, his steely determination and the early emergence of his astonishing talent... This is a book of revelations.”

In August of 2012, jazz great Dave Brubeck gave the following review: “Artt Frank, the author of “Chet Baker: The Missing Years” is a devout Christian who practices what he preaches. His personal memoir of his meeting and subsequent friendship with the jazz genius of the trumpet is an unvarnished, honest portrayal of Chet Baker. In depicting Chet’s struggle to recovery, Artt reveals great compassion for a sensitive soul fighting for a life, and puts to rest the rumors and gossip that circulated about Chet’s ‘missing years.’”

*“A must-read for everyone from the casual jazz fan to the serious student of jazz history.”*

JB Dyas, PhD, VP, Education and Curriculum Development,  
Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz

### **Chet Baker: The Missing Years, A Memoir by Artt Frank**

Publication Date: February 15, 2014 - Amazon KDP – \$9.99  
Print Release Date: February 19, 2014 – Amazon.com - \$19.95  
Press Kit: [www.BooksEndeependent.com](http://www.BooksEndeependent.com)  
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– Jazz Masters Lifetime Achievement Award recipient

## **Praise for *Chet Baker: The Missing Years, A Memoir by Artt Frank* [cont'd]**

“A natural storyteller in the oral tradition, Artt’s gifts at dialog and narrative shine in this new book, except here the tale is true, and the material is from Artt’s exciting and heart-rending years with his jazz brother, Chet Baker. Artt knew Baker’s jazz life. He lived it with him, on and off the bandstand ... This book is a jazz history gift and a long-lost narrative prayer.”

- **Kevin Rabas**, Professor, Drummer, and Author of
  - *Bird’s Horn* and *Sonny Kenner’s Red Guitar*

“**Chet Baker: The Missing Years** is perhaps the most accurate account of Chet’s life and true spirit to date. Superbly written by Artt Frank ... the book gives fresh insight into the man behind the music. A must-read for everyone from the casual jazz fan to the serious student of jazz history.”

- **JB Dyas**, PhD, VP, Education and Curriculum
  - Development, Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz

“As Chet Baker’s Boswell, Artt Frank provides great insight into the life and music of an overlooked, tragic genius in jazz. A must read for fans of Chet Baker and jazz.”

- **Chuck Haddix**, Author of *Bird: The Life and Music of Charlie Parker* and
  - *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop--A History*

“**Chet Baker: The Missing Years** takes the reader back to a time and a place where jazz musicians, movie stars and rock stars rubbed shoulders in smoke-filled clubs along Sunset Boulevard, and where a fallen angel could rise up out of the street, and with the love of his loyal friend, dust off his wings, and learn to fly again.”

- **Tim Schaffner**, Publisher, Schaffner Press, and Drummer

“Stack some of your favorite LPs on the hi-fi and settle in to get to know Chet Baker the man as well as you know the musician. Artt Frank takes us along on the rocky road of Baker’s comeback from drug abuse and crippling injuries. Artt’s writing style is like his drumming—improvisational and very much in the moment, so you’ll feel as though you are there as Chet takes his tentative first steps toward playing again, and for his triumphant return to nightclub gigs.”

**Pat Callaghan**, news anchor and reporter  
for WCSH6 in Portland, ME

*"Chet Baker: The Missing Years: A Memoir by Artt Frank* is a stunning definition of great. Chet Baker was one of the greatest jazz musicians of all time and a legend. We are blessed today to have with us on this earth a live living member of his group. Artt tells it like it was, what it was like being a friend and a drummer for this great legend Chet Baker. Chet surrounded himself with some of the best musician's and one of those musicians was drumming great Artt Frank. When reading this book for the first time it is almost like you are being drawn into a time warp going back into time. Artt Frank takes you from the dark back alleys of drugs and despair to the shinning genius of Chet's playing smoke filled clubs and the streets. This book is truth and you know it is coming from a Godly man like drumming great Artt Frank.

I recommend this book for all. If you are a musician you will cherish it after reading it. Non-musicians will learn how great Chet Baker was and how great a friend drumming great Artt Frank was to Chet. The truth will set you free and Artt Frank has done this with his memoir. Amen... I give this book 10 stars..."

**Michael Armando**, *President & Musician*  
*MJA Records, a master jazz artist label*

"Artt Frank writes about Chet Baker the way one speaks of a brother: intimate, assured, supportive and real. He has captured the essence not only of Chet's struggles, but also his extraordinary talent. Music fans will glean invaluable tips, as well as inspiration in this story; biography fans will enjoy the quality of the storytelling and the details of a bygone era; and those looking for a demonstration of faith will find it in abundance."

**Scott Barker**, *Executive Editor –*  
*Tucson Lifestyle Magazine*

## Chapter 1

### Our First Meeting

I met Chet Baker in March of 1954 in a Boston jazz club called, “Storyville.” But the first time I *heard* Chet’s music was over the Armed Forces radio aboard the USS Des Moines in ’53 toward the end of the Korean War. Listening to Chet’s trumpet on that radio, I cried inside, unable to understand how a trumpeter could affect a drummer so much. Right then, I sincerely sent up a prayer that I would get home safely and get a chance to meet and play with Chet Baker.

Since I was about six years old, I’d been playing drums on anything I could find. By the time I was in my teens, I tried to imitate the beats of my favorite drummer, Gene Krupa, on the tabletop at home in Westbrook, Maine. Still, the only other musician who had affected me the way Chet did, was when I first heard Charlie “Bird” Parker and the new form of jazz – Be Bop. At 17, I hitchhiked to New York City from Westbrook, just to hear Bird in person at The Royal Roost. And maybe get the courage to ask him if I could sit in. I did, and he and Max Roach were kind enough to let me play.

Now, at 21, the war was over, I was honorably discharged and home working at the paper mill, like my father and most everybody in Westbrook, and still in love with jazz and drumming.

Chet Baker had just won both the Downbeat and Metronome jazz magazine polls for America’s number one new jazz trumpeter. That night in ’54 when I got to Boston, the Storyville club was jam-packed. My first impression of him was not only was he gifted, but also he was a very handsome young man as evidenced by all the beautiful young girls surrounding him. I waited until most of the girls and fans left, then made my way over to the bandstand to say hello. I wanted to make him think



we had met once before, so as I approached I extended my hand, and said, “Hi Chet, Art Frank. Remember me?”

He looked at me for what seemed an eternity, shook his head, and said, “No, no, I don’t remember you, man. Sorry.” He said it softly but directly. I learned right then and there that Chet was very quick, intent and painfully honest. He looked you in the eyes when he spoke. It seemed like he could pretty much read your thoughts on the spot. I got the feeling he’d tell you the truth even if it meant his losing a fan by doing so. Man, if Chet had been a gunfighter during the old Wild West days, he no doubt would have stared down Jesse James. That’s how intense he was. And conversely, he was quite approachable.

As I spoke, he studied me for another few seconds or so and asked when and where we were supposed to have met. Rather than continuing to lie, I confessed that I hadn’t really met him in person, but how terribly moved I’d been by his sound and the way he played when I’d first heard him on the radio aboard ship during the war. He smiled, obviously liking what I had said, and when he did, I couldn’t help notice that one of his upper front teeth was missing on the left side. I was about to ask him how he’d lost it when the bass player, Carson Smith came over and stopped my train of thought. Chet introduced us, and we shook hands briefly. Carson excused himself and walked off toward the bar area. Chet didn’t appear to be in any particular hurry to get rid of me, smiling and nodding at the beautiful young chicks as they walked by.

I went on to tell him about the prayer I’d made when I had first heard him play; that I’d be able to meet him one day, maybe even get the chance to play with him and his group. He studied me curiously and asked what instrument I played. I told him I was a drummer, and had sat in with Charlie Parker at the Royal Roost, and a lot of other great bop musicians along 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. Bop drummer Stan Levey had also given me a lot of inside tips on how to play. Chet seemed impressed and smiled warmly. As far as getting the chance to play with him one day, he said in his soft, melodic voice, “One never knows, man... one never knows.”

Carson and Russ were on their way outside and asked Chet if he wanted to go out for a breath of fresh air. He nodded, excused

himself and left me standing there. Much to my surprise though, he stopped, turned half way around and gestured for me to join him. I couldn't believe it. Here was Chet Baker inviting me to join him. Once outside the club, I lit up a cigarette and offered one to Chet. He just shook his head and told me he didn't smoke. He stood by watching the traffic whiz by. He had the interest and intensity of a little boy on some long ago Christmas morning watching his father operate a set of Lionel trains on a miniature set of tracks on a worn out linoleum covered floor.

After a minute or so, Russ and Carson told him they were going back inside the club, but Chet was too focused on watching all the cars go by and didn't respond. They left and I don't think Chet even realized I was standing there beside him until a minute or so later. He turned around and asked me where Russ and Carson had gone. When I told him what happened, his face lit up with a smile. He told me that whenever he watched a lot of cars speeding by, it brought to his mind one of the few things he would most like to do in life -- drive a race car at Le Mans and win. "What a thrill that would be, man," he said, a kind of daydream look in his eyes.

While I stood there listening to him, it occurred to me that I was talking to the nation's number one trumpet player, and he's telling me how he'd like to be a racecar driver. I told him he could probably do anything he set his mind to. Where I came from in Maine, racing cars against each other was what most of the young guys did every night and weekends for excitement. Hearing that brought another smile. He told me that most of the young cats in L.A. were doing the same thing. I guess it must have been pretty much the same way in every city and town across the country.

I asked him where he and his group were going after they left Boston. He said they would be doing back-to-back gigs in different cities before winding up doing a full month at "Birdland," the world-renowned jazz club in New York City. The first two weeks of that gig he would play opposite sets with Dizzy Gillespie's group, and the following two weeks, opposite sets with Miles Davis' group. He was real excited about the prospect of that. He was gracious and told me that if I could make it down during one of those weeks, I'd more than likely

get the chance to sit in with him. I was ecstatic when he said that, and told him I'd do my damndest to make it down on one of the nights he'd be sharing the stand with Miles Davis. He said he hoped so, and I believe he genuinely meant it.

I knew he had other things to do, and I didn't want to get off to a bad start by taking up any more of his time. He still had another set to play, and I had a hundred and five mile drive back to Westbrook, Maine. Also, I had to be at work at the paper mill by 6 a.m. the following morning. I worked the 'swing shift.' One week I'd work the 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. shift, the following week I'd work from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., the next week I'd work from 6 p.m. to midnight, and finally, I'd work the graveyard shift, from midnight to 6 a.m. I hated the swing shift because it was very difficult to make plans to do anything. I really didn't want to leave the club, but knew I had to. I shook Chet's hand and told him I hoped to see him again when he played Birdland, and left the club reluctant, but elated.

Almost as soon as I had driven out of Boston, a mixture of snow and rain started to fall softly, causing the roads to be a bit slippery, not the least unusual in early spring. But I didn't care. I was absolutely ecstatic because I had finally met and talked with my main inspiration in jazz, Chet Baker, and he'd been very warm toward me. I praised and thanked God for hearing my prayers about meeting Chet.

The snow continued to fall but it never really amounted to anything, at least until I hit Route 1 in Maine, where the road became even more slippery. I made it home just before 5:00am, about the time my father would be getting up. He had to get up at that time each morning to get the wood stove fire going so he could make his 'Eight O'Clock' brand coffee. He'd have to do this in the spring, summer, fall and winter because we only had one wood-burning stove in the house and that was in the kitchen. Whenever I'd get home late, as I did in this case, I'd come upstairs very quietly so I wouldn't awaken him. But lo and behold, there he was, already up, dressed and sitting at the table waiting for the coffee to finish perking.

It seemed that every winter morning in Maine was a particularly cold one, and this March morning was no different. My father busied himself putting pieces of wood into the stove

in order to have it warm for my mother and the other kids who'd soon be getting up. I swear, every other room in that apartment was freezing and the floors were as cold as glaciers. There was absolutely no insulation or storm windows, no central heating system nor even running hot water. In order to have hot water, we would have to fill a pan with water and heat it on the front of the stove.

This was a routine my father did each and every morning before he would sit down and enjoy his cup of coffee - after which, he'd put on his light weight frock coat, a railroad cap, leave the house and go out into the freezing cold. Not having a car, he'd walk the mile and a half through deep snow to get to work at the local paper mill. But God bless his heart, he was happy for me when I told him about the whole episode of meeting Chet. My dad played a C Melody sax, which is comparable to a soprano saxophone, but he never really got the opportunity to play in any of the nightclubs in nearby Portland. He was too busy working seven days of every week to support seven of us kids.

While we sat there talking, my mother woke up and joined us. Still being excited, I went over the whole story again, filling in each and every little detail, and later the same day, I relived it again with my three brothers and three sisters. I know it sounds crazy, but that's how important it was for me to have met Chet Baker.

My mother, having a 'steel trap' memory, recalled how I'd bought a record by Chet the year before, the day after my discharge, and wanted me to play it. I got the turntable from my room and played it for them. Hell, all I did for weeks and weeks was play *The Lamp is Low* on that Chet Baker record until I nearly wore the grooves out. There was something in Chet's music that got to me. I was so excited about the possibility of seeing Chet again that I wanted to share his music with everybody. I'd open the windows and play his record so the neighbors next door would be able to hear the sounds too. Some of them didn't mind. But there were a few others who always squawked. They were too square, but I played the records anyway!

As luck would have it though, when it came time for Chet

and his quartet to begin his month at Birdland, I was working the top part of the swing shift, 6 a.m. to 12 pm - which meant that by the time it came around for Chet to be playing his two weeks opposite Miles Davis, I'd be working the 6 p.m. to midnight the first week and the midnight to 6 a.m. shift the second week. Unless I could find someone to swap shifts, I'd not only miss the chance to see Chet again, but also miss the chance to sit in and play with him and his group. To say that I was frantic would be an understatement. I called the other two guys who worked the swing shift, and asked each one if they'd be willing to swap their shifts with me for the last two weeks of the month, but unfortunately for me, they could not for each had made plans of their own. So that March night of 1954 in Boston turned out to be the last time I would see Chet for the next fourteen years.

## Chapter 2

### Reunion at Donte's

After my missed opportunity to see Chet again at Birdland, life pretty much went back to normal. I was still working the swing shift at the paper mill, played drums when I could. One night while making a phone call, a sexy voiced operator asked, 'Number please' and instead of giving her one, I just started talking to her. We became intrigued with each other and spent the next couple hours on the phone. The next Saturday, we met at a local dance hall and wound up dancing the night away. She was tall, blonde and very pretty. We fell in love and were married. A few months into the marriage, I felt the urge to play again, to go on the road, to see if I could make something of myself, something my dear dad never had the chance to do. My wife was strong, grounded and settled and I learned too late that I wasn't ready to settle down, wanting to travel and play drums, whenever and wherever I could. It was over quickly and we divorced. I had no regrets though because from our union God had blessed us with a beautiful daughter, Karen Marie.

And then, sometime later I happened to drop by Birdland. While I was there a young woman was asked to come up on stage. Well, she sang one of the most difficult tunes to sing; a very rangy song called *Midnight Sun*, and she knocked me out! I asked the bartender who she was and found out she was just 'sitting in.' I looked around the club for her later but she'd vanished. I left the club believing I would never see her again. And yet, a couple of years later, my sister Pauline told me she'd seen a pretty blonde girl on local television who was appearing in Portland, Maine with her group and would be there for a week. I was curious, so I went in that night to check her out. To my surprise, it was the same girl, Earla Porch, and she was

singing the exact same song. This time, when she came down off the stage, I immediately introduced myself to her, and the rest, as they say, is history. We fell in love and I moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Earla lived. Several months later we were married.

We both loved Chet Baker's music. Although I didn't hear much news about him, I played Chet's music every day. There was something about it that was spiritual. I did know that he was touring in Europe and someone told me Chet was on drugs. That flabbergasted me. Chet had never even smoked when we had met just a few years ago. I said, nah, but this friend said Chet was a drug addict. Hearing that kind of pissed me off. Still, I didn't care what people said about him, his music was like a magnet. I just had to listen to this guy play.

Earla and I didn't stay long in Cambridge, and moved back to Maine. I started my own group, *Art Frank and the Jazz Jets*. The group was all black; I was the only white. We were like brothers, very tight. We played a couple of gigs, and like most struggling jazz musicians, I had a job to make ends meet -- driving a yellow taxicab. However, the band broke up because we couldn't get much work. It was still the '50s, and I suppose civil rights hadn't made it to Portland yet. Our son, Arthur, II, was born in 1958 and by '59 I was fed up driving a cab, so Earla and I moved back to Cambridge. I played in clubs all around Boston, and in Newport. This time, I took a job as a janitor in Boston to feed my family. I still didn't hear much about Chet, unless it was a new record, which I always purchased.

During this time, I also did some acting. I played the lead in a production of the Terence Rattigan play, *Separate Tables*. Earla loved my acting and convinced me to give it shot out in Hollywood. She stayed in Cambridge at her mom's, along with our son. I knew a guy named Ray Sampson, who was from California and asked if I could ride back with him. This was in 1960. Another friend told me when I was out in L.A. to look up his uncle, John Feeney, known professionally as John Ford, the film director. I didn't believe him at first, but he assured me this was his uncle and he'd meet with me. His name was actually John Martin Feeney. I took him up on his suggestion.

Once in Hollywood, I met a number of producers and did

read for John Ford. He wanted me to do a picture that starred Richard Widmark, Ricardo Montalban and James Stewart called *Cheyenne Autumn*. Mr. Ford also sent me over to Batjac Productions founded by John Wayne. He thought I had a good look for movies. He asked if I could ride a horse, and I, of course, said yes! It had only been a few months in L.A. when I received a telegram from home, telling me my father was sick. He suffered from emphysema and it looked pretty bad. I put everything about acting on hold and hurried back to Maine. The good news was that my dad rallied and when he was out of danger, I went down to Cambridge to be with Earla and our son. Soon after, our daughter Rhonda was born in 1961. Then, in early 1963, Earla encouraged me to give it another shot in Hollywood, so the four of us moved out west.

I picked up where I left off. I called John Ford and he recommended I work in television, but that's not what I wanted. I actually didn't believe television would last!

Of course, I needed work, so I started painting houses and odd jobs like that. I kept playing drums, writing songs, but never published them. I would sit in at most of the well-known jazz clubs in L.A., like The IT club, Mr. Adams, and The Intermission clubs on Washington Blvd.; Redd Fox's place on LaCienega, Shelly's Manne Hole on Yucca in Hollywood, Donte's and Ellis Island in North Hollywood, The Lighthouse in Hermosa Beach, Marty's On The Hill on La Brea, Willie Davis's Center Field in Baldwin Hills, The Playboy Club on Sunset Blvd., and The Flying Fox and Memory Lane, both located on Santa Barbara Ave. (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.). It was still swingin' in L.A. then, before rock and roll took over the scene.

Then the telegram came again, and this time my Dad couldn't rally. He died on February 28, 1964. I couldn't go back to Maine. Not because everything was great in L.A., in fact we didn't have much money at the time. The reality was, like I told my mother, I couldn't bear to see my father in a coffin.

I continued playing here and there with different groups until the jazz club scene began drying up due to the heavy influx of rock 'n' roll music. A lot of great jazz musicians suddenly found



themselves out of work. There were still a few clubs open in New York City, but only the names were getting any work. It wasn't that much better in Los Angeles, even though I did get to play with a lot of great musicians. In '65 I decided to move back to Westbrook to be with my mother and other family members.

I had very little money left when we arrived in Westbrook. A friend of mine told me about this little cabin on the outskirts of Westbrook and the owner was only asking \$150.00 a month. I called the owner, who assured us that it would be as warm as toast in the winter, so without bothering to check it out, we paid the money and rented the place, sight unseen.

The cabin was situated about 300 yards off the main road, and the road leading to it was totally unpaved. When we got to the cabin and opened the door, there was only this one long room about 15 feet long with a full-length drape separating an adjoining room about 7 feet long which had a small bathroom with a tiny bathtub and sink. The place was completely without any type of insulation. There was a kitchen stove, which ran on oil. And man, didn't that ever smell during the long cold winter months.

We fashioned a bedroom for Earla and the two kids and I used the old couch for my bed. The one saving grace we had through those unbelievably long, cold winter months was a small portable record player I had brought with us from L.A. All it played was 45rpm records. And the only 45rpms I happened to have was a Pacific Jazz Chet Baker record, which I still have in my possession to this very day. The tunes on the record were, *The Lamp is Low*, *Maid in Mexico*, *Imagination*, and *Russ Job*. I played that record over and over and over, every day and night, and never got sick of it. Listening to those records made me dream. On one of those cold winter days, Earla was sitting by the stove, in her robe.

"I'm so sick of this place," she said.

"Summer's coming, I'll be able to get work," I told her. One of Chet's records was playing, as usual. I wanted to cheer Earla up, comfort her somehow, so I made her a promise.

"One day, I'll have Chet playing for us in our own living room." That promise gave me hope, it made me dream that there was still something else I could accomplish. If you have nothing

to hope for you may as well be dead.

After many months at that cabin, I was able to move my family back to Los Angeles. It was 1967, and by the time the summer of '68 rolled around, I'd been playing gigs with a lot of great musicians, such as jazz pianist, Phil Moore III, jazz organist extraordinaire, Richard "Groove" Holmes, vibraphonist great, Roy Ayers, tenor/soprano great, Curtis Amy, bassist giant, Herbie Lewis, guitarist Thornell Schwartz, perhaps the greatest octave jazz guitarist in history, Harry "Sweets" Edison, and King Pleasure at the famed Memory Lane on Santa Barbara Blvd; also, the absolutely fantastic tenor saxophonist, Harold Land, and many others.

It was a strange and sad summer in 1968. I'll never forget that awful June night when Robert Kennedy was shot by Sirhan Sirhan in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel on Wilshire Blvd. and the announcement of Kennedy's death the following day. I remember that night with deep sorrow, as I do the horrible assassinations of his brother, John, President of the United States, and Dr. Martin Luther King. The years between 1963 and 1970 were fraught with uncertainty. And, it was in those same years that I would reunite with Chet Baker and become his friend and drummer.

On a night sometime in late June or early July, I was on my way to a jazz club in North Hollywood to sit in with Groove Holmes. While driving along Lankershim Boulevard, I happened to look across the street to check out the marquee at Donte's, a small jazz club near Universal Pictures Studio. I nearly flipped out when I saw Chet Baker's name written across the front. Without thinking or worrying about traffic, I abruptly swung the car into a parking lot across the street from the club, very nearly hitting the fire hydrant in my excitement. I parked and ran across the street to the club. As I neared the entrance, I could hear the unmistakable tone that only Chet Baker could make, with one glaring exception: there wasn't any strength in it.

I walked inside just as he finished playing and lowered the horn to his knee. I walked over to the bar and got myself a beer, then made it over to a table directly in front of the small raised bandstand and sat down. I glanced around the room. Unlike the

last time I'd seen Chet in Boston at the jam-packed Storyville, this place was empty except for maybe four couples. I looked up to the stand and saw Chet seated in a chair with his eyes closed tightly and his left leg folded over his right, his head leaning forward, resting on the hand holding the trumpet. Somehow, he looked so small up there.

The rhythm section players were really happening. When the piano player finished his solo, the bassist took a chorus, and then Chet started to play. I couldn't believe my ears. His sound was weak, tentative and unsure, like he had nothing left. On top of that, he looked gaunt, thinner and not quite as agile as I remembered him, and that concerned me. I couldn't quite figure out what was wrong. He wasn't playing well and didn't seem like his old self. It was then I realized that what I'd been hearing about Chet being on drugs was true. Even if he was, I was just so thankful to God that I had run into him again and I knew it was no accident.

I stood up and waved to him but he really couldn't see me because of the lighting overhead on the stand. He ended his solo and brought the tune to an end. Chet came down off the stand and went over to a table a few feet away from me. He was immediately engaged in conversation with one of the couples. I was truly excited to see him again after so many years, and yet, I felt sadness in my heart seeing him the way he was now. He left the couple and made his way in a direct line toward my table, and walked right by me.

I called out his name and he stopped, looked back and came to my table with a curious look on his face. I knew he didn't recognize or remember me, so I decided to see if he'd remember the conversation we'd once had outside Storyville in '54. I asked if he remembered when he'd told me how if he hadn't been a trumpet player, he would have liked to have driven a car at Le Mans and win. He just stood there quietly reflecting, until smile broke out across his face, and said softly that he did recall the night, and asked how I was doing. I told him I was doing okay, but was more interested in knowing if he was going to be playing in the club again the following night.

"No, no. I won't be here tomorrow," he answered. "The owner was nice enough to give me a gig, but..." He stopped,

shrugged his shoulders. "Said I wasn't pulling in enough business, so he let me go."

I didn't understand why anyone in their right mind wouldn't want to have the likes of Chet Baker working their club regardless of how he played, or how much business he was doing. "What do you mean? You're Chet Baker! You could play in any club on earth."

"Well, I suppose at one time that was true." He stopped abruptly and with a hint of sadness in his eyes looked beyond me. "No... not anymore, man. Not anymore," he replied, his voice trailing off.

I stood there studying him trying to understand exactly why he was in the shape he was in. "Why? I don't get it?"

"Well, I haven't really been playing all that much for the last couple of years now, man. Just can't do it anymore." The weariness in his voice was heavy. "I sing more than I play."

When he said that, I felt a deep sadness. I truly wanted to reach out to him. This man's music had brought so much beauty into my life. So, I asked him what was going on. He reached up and placed his hand over his mouth, "No chops! Everything's gone! No upper teeth left." He opened his mouth and removed a cheap looking partial plate and held it in the palm of his hand, then brought his other hand up to the side of his upper left cheek and ran it down along side of his jaw.

"Got permanent nerve damage to my mouth and jaw, too," he said. "I'm not the same player I used to be, man. Don't know if I ever will be either." He paused thoughtfully. "If I can't be... I'll probably just..." He let the thought die on his tongue.

I hadn't had any idea as to the seriousness and depth of what he was telling me, but I could certainly see the look of fear and anguish on his face. He was sincerely concerned and also truly scared about the prospects of never being able to play again.

"What? What'd'ya mean, Chet?" I asked.

"It's a long story, man," he replied softly.

I could sense he was tired and probably couldn't wait to get home and into bed, but I didn't want to let him go. "I've got time, Chet," I said with genuine interest.

"Maybe some other time, man," he said solemnly. Before I could ask him another question, the club owner called out and

said he was locking up the place. Chet excused himself, walked to the bandstand, got his horn, said goodnight to the owner, and left the club. I was right behind him.

Once outside, I figured he'd give me the proverbial, polite, 'nice to have seen you again bit,' and leave me standing there. But he didn't, so I took the initiative, and asked him another question.

"You married, Chet?"

"Yeah, I sure am," he answered with beaming pride. "And I've got three wonderful kids, two boys and a girl, and my beautiful wife, Carol."

I told him I was married, and also had three kids, two girls and a boy, just the opposite of what he had.

"I was thinking, if you're not doing anything special tomorrow night, I'd love to have you and your wife come over to my little house in Culver City to have dinner with me and my family."

He regarded me with curious suspicion. The look in his eyes told me he was trying to figure out what I was up to. Why was I inviting him and his wife to my house for dinner? I could sense right then and there that he was on his guard and didn't trust anybody.

"Well... I appreciate the offer and all, man. But I really don't know that much about you. And, my wife and I keep pretty much to ourselves. We don't go out very much, you know?"

It didn't take much for me to figure out that this was his way of gently letting me know that his answer was NO.

"So I guess I'm just going to have to pass, man," he said quietly and extended his hand. We shook hands, and he continued. "Maybe we can get together again sometime."

He proceeded to explain to me how he had met hundreds of different people and could hardly remember any one of them. I told him I understood, and reached for my pack of cigarettes and offered him one. He took one and I held my cigarette lighter under his until it was lit. He took a long drag and blew the smoke out slowly. He took another drag and asked how long I'd been in Los Angeles with my family, and what my plans were.

As we stood there talking, I got the feeling that he was beginning to warm up to me and I felt really good about that.

Then, out of the blue, he changed his mind and told me that he had decided to take me up on my offer. He would bring Carol to my house for dinner the next night. Delighted, I told him I'd set up everything with my wife and give him a call to let him know the time. I asked for his telephone number.

"I don't have a phone, man. The phone company shut off my service two weeks ago."

I couldn't believe it. I was shocked that a man of such worldwide fame and musical acclaim didn't even have a working telephone. I felt bad for him but tried hard not to show it. I wrote 'Drummer, Art Frank' and my phone number down on the back of one of my painting business cards and asked him to call me the next day. He smiled and promised he would. We stood there for another few minutes talking, then went our separate ways.



## About the Author

Artt Frank, bop drummer/composer, and author, is one of the few authentic bop musicians on the scene today. Born in the small paper mill town of Westbrook, Maine on March 9, 1933, Artt is best known for his long-term association with Chet Baker, with whom he collaborated for over 20 years. Artt has also been worked with an impressive list of jazz luminaries over the past sixty years including the great Charlie Parker, Tadd Dameron, Dexter Gordon, Sonny Stitt, Miles Davis, Bud Powell, Jimmy Heath, Al Cohn, Ted Curson, and many others, including one memorable night with the great singer, Billie Holiday

In 2004, Artt completed his book “Essentials for the Be Bop Drummer” with Pete Swan and published by Tim Schaffner, publisher (and drummer!) of Schaffner Press, Inc.

Artt Frank was inducted into the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame in November, 2010.

He currently lives in Green Valley, Arizona with his wife, Lisa Frank.

To learn more about the author, visit: [www.ArttFrank.com](http://www.ArttFrank.com)