



# Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans

*Louis Armstrong , Dan Morgenstern (Introduction)*

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"In all my whole career the Brick House was one of the toughest joints I ever played in. It was the honky-tonk where levee workers would congregate every Saturday night and trade with the gals who'd stroll up and down the floor and the bar. Those guys would drink and fight one another like circle saws. Bottles would come flying over the bandstand like crazy, and there was lots of just plain common shooting and cutting. But somehow all that jive didn't faze me at all, I was so happy to have some place to blow my horn." So says Louis Armstrong, a tough kid who just happened to be a musical genius, about one of the places where he performed and grew up. This raucous, rich tale of his early days in New Orleans concludes with his departure to Chicago at twenty-one to play with his boyhood idol King Oliver, and tells the story of a life that began, mythically, on July 4, 1900, in the city that sowed the seeds of jazz.

## Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans Details

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## **Puvan Atwal says**

So cool to hear his voice in your head while you read it. You like his music, you'll enjoy this quick short book. kinda ended abruptly,i had a very early edition. I assume there are better books for a complete understanding of Mr. Armstrong life, as this one ends in 1938. I think Mr Armstrong held back quite a bit, but enjoyed the read regardless

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## **Italo Perazzoli says**

Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans is the story of New Orleans and of the jazz.

Dippermouth was also a great writer, the proof is this autobiography.

This story is written in first person, it seems to be with him we will witness of his experiences and the difficulties of that times.

Undoubtedly Louis has had a difficult childhood surrounded by poverty ignorance, and the racial hatred between black and white and violence of any kind.

Surprisingly Louis was not devoured by the revenge the main deterrent was the Jazz.

This book is not about a self-celebration, we won't read his musical superiority to other musicians but the opposite.

The "voice" of this tale respects his poor origins, he won't forget his friends and acquaintance, this is a wonderful journey towards the apex, the American's dream.

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## **Marsha says**

Armstrong claims he was born in 1900 (although in the 1980s, a researcher discovered that his true birthdate was August 4, 1901). He lived on a little street called James Alley. Armstrong writes: "Only one block long, James Alley is located in the crowded section of New Orleans known as "Back o' Town." His family was poor and when his father abandoned the family, his mother Mayann left Louis in care of his grandmother Josephine. At the age of five, he returned to his mother.

A turn of events happens for Armstrong when he is eleven. He writes, "In those days we used to shoot off guns and pistols or anything loud so as to make as much noise as possible (to celebrate New Year's Eve). Guns, of course, were not allowed officially and we had to keep an eye on the police to see that we were not pulled in for toting one." However, after firing his stepfather's .38 pistol into the air for the New Year's Eve celebration, at the age of eleven, Louis Armstrong was arrested and sent to the Colored Waif's Home for Boys.

At the home, boys were allowed the choice to pick the vocational training that interested them at the Fisk School. Naturally Louis chose music. Six months went by and Louis was asked to join the school's brass band. Louis stayed at the home until he was fourteen years old. "I was released on the condition that I would live with my father and stepmother," Louis wrote. He stayed with them for a short while and then finally returned to living with his mother and sister Mama Lucy.

For money he worked a job hauling coal.

He would enjoy hanging out at Storyville, which was the red-light district. He would listen to bands playing in the brothels and dance halls. He saw a lot of fights and it was an exciting time until "the red-light district was closed by the Navy and the law." He especially liked listening to Joe "King" Oliver another other famous musicians.

He also liked to listen to music playing at funerals. Louis learned how to play the cornet with assistance from other musicians and also by practice. He writes, "Of course in those early days we did not know very much about trumpets. We all played cornets. Only the big orchestras in the theaters had trumpet players in their brass sections."

In his autobiography, Armstrong does describe the discrimination he encountered as he was a black man in the south. However, never does he sound angry. However, when he played his music, the white folks just loved his playing and he was happy to entertain them as he enjoyed playing music a great deal. As a young man, he played on the riverboats. Armstrong writes, "Things were hard in New Orleans in those days... in order to carry on at all we had to have the love of music in our bones."

In 1919, Armstrong replaced Joe Oliver in his band, when Oliver decided to move to Chicago.

Armstrong writes about his first wife, Daisy. They adopted a three year old boy, Clarence, whose mother died. Clarence was mentally disabled and Armstrong claims it may have been because he was dropped on his head. He writes about his love for Daisy, but also her irrational jealousy which caused him a lot of grief and unnecessary drama. Armstrong writes, "Daisy did not have any education. If a person is real ignorant and has no learning at all that person is always going to be jealous, evil and hateful. There are always two sides to every story, but an ignorant person just won't cope with either side. I have seen Daisy get furious when she saw me whispering to somebody. 'I know you are talking about me because you are looking at me,' she would say. Frightening, isn't it? However, it was because I understood Daisy so well that I was able to take four years of torture and bliss with her."

By 1922, Armstrong moved to Chicago to join Joe "King" Oliver, who invited Armstrong to join his jazz band. He got his own apartment with his own private bath (his first). Armstrong's book ends here, stating "I had hit the big time. I was up North with the greats. I was playing with my idol, the King, Joe Oliver. My boyhood dream had come true at last."

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## Mark says

An amazing read. This is Louis Armstrong's (aka Satchmo) memoirs about his childhood in New Orleans 1900 to 1920 until he went to Chicago. The story is an incredible view into the old New Orleans music scene and how one gifted child rose through it. First, Satchmo's description of New Orleans is a wild delight. He writes of street musicians, honky tonks, juke joints, bordellos and the characters that populated them. Those characters are a colorful bunch. They are the hustlers, madams, pimps, working girls of the New Orleans underworld and Satchmo makes them come alive. This may seem like an unwholesome crowd, but a young Jazz musician had only so many places to play his music and these establishments were the ones that hired and paid young Louis and his band to play. They come across as flawed, but human and certainly a very colorful bunch.

The story includes Satchmo's earliest musical efforts, his arrest for some gun play and time in a juvenile home which had an orchestra and where the orchestra director noticed the promising new inmate and gave him his break. The juvenile home orchestra in those days would often be allowed out to play funerals, church events and even family parties for wealthy southern white families and so Satchmo began to get noticed. The description of life in New Orleans for a very poor young black musician is also an interesting insight. Louis describes how he would gather throw away food from the restaurant quarter to bring home for meals and how he drove a coal cart with a horse to make a living and then played long nights in the bordellos and honky tonks late into the night. There the pimps and working girls would toss the young trumpet player some money in exchange for his ability to keep them in good cheer or to keep the customers drinking and paying. The story ends with Satchmo's call up and move to Chicago to play with King Oliver's band and begin his rise to Jazz legend. Still, it's the story of his roots in New Orleans which makes for an incredibly interesting and lively read and a great time piece into a different world and its characters, long gone, but not to be forgotten. At 200 pages, the book is a quick and easy read. It's such an entertaining story, I'm surprised it hasn't been made into a movie.

In any case, even 5 stars don't do it justice. If there was a sixth star for extra awesomeness, I would give it to this book.

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## Lisa Burris says

In this autobiography, jazz icon Louis Armstrong recounts his youth growing up in 19 teens and '20s New Orleans. Armstrong recounts his colorful, albeit dirt poor, upbringing in the Louisiana city. More than the average celebrity autobiography, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* offers a candid, raunchy, rollicking look at the people and places in NOLA history that have now come to embody the storied city. All the greats are here in these pages: Kid Ory, King Oliver, Pete Lala. If you're looking for fascinating stories about the founders of Jazz from someone who knew them, and played with them, then this is the book for you. Armstrong has endless tales of Storyville in its heyday. If you want to know how New Orleans looked, smelled, and sounded at the dawn of the Jazz Age, it's all here, and it's told as if Louis Armstrong were sitting with you at a honkytonk and talking to you over a beer.

I cannot recommend *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* enough, especially to Jazz aficionados and history buffs. The book left me wanting to hear more and more, especially since it ends with Armstrong's leaving to begin his "big time" music career with Kid Ory in Chicago. I'm sure that Armstrong had many more stories to tell in his relatively long life.

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## Byron Stripling says

Who doesn't love Louis Armstrong and anything he writes or says?

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## Ken says

A wonderful memoir of the first two decades of Armstrong's life in New Orleans, ending just as he moved up to Chicago to join his boyhood idol, King Oliver. With a great humility Louis tells his story, including growing up dirt poor and being introduced to the cornet while in a waifs home for boys after his arrest, while still in short pants, for firing a pistol in the air. This generous memoir is pungently populated with an assortment of colorful characters -- from fellow musicians to pimps and hookers and other assorted hustlers - - even as it makes clear the loving influence of his mother and older sister. A story only Satchmo himself could tell.

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## Teresa says

Armstrong uses the word 'cute' a lot to describe something, so I don't think he'd mind me using the word 'cute' to describe this book. It's written in a conversational style, as if he's talking to his reader; he even goes on tangents before always coming back to his original thought. He also uses some slang (some of which he explains) which adds to its 'period' feel.

He's a generous man, very grateful to his musical forebears and those who gave him his first breaks. And while he doesn't gloss over the poverty and roughness of his neighborhood and its way-of-life, and the prejudice he encounters throughout that life, he never fails to point out and praise those who were gracious, helpful, and his friends -- though perhaps he couldn't have been more descriptive anyway: the book was published in 1954 after all.

This book is most fascinating, I think, as a glimpse into a city and culture that has both changed and stayed the same. It seems that what Armstrong most loved and missed about New Orleans when he was away from it (the food, the people, the music in the streets, the food, the fun, his neighborhood, oh, and the food!), are the same things N.O. exiles miss today.

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## Emilio says

Historia fascinante, de principio a fin. La autobiografía del aclamado músico Luois Armstrong, llamado por sus amigos "Satchmo" (boca de bolsa), que cuenta como transcurrió su vida en la New Orleans de principios de siglo, entre drogas, burdeles y pandillas, y como gracias a su madre Mayann , a un maestro de escuela, y a un fortuito encuentro con una trompeta, tuvo la suerte de convertirse en el gran artista que conocemos.

Esta historia me recordó —inevitablemente— el mundo de los Tom Sawyer y Huckleberry Finn de Mark Twain, llena de felicidad y de un sinfín de anécdotas que hacen la lectura fácil y divertida.

Recomendada, de principio a fin.

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## **Terry says**

What shines out from each page of this book is the essential optimism and loving-heart of Louis Armstrong. I guess I should have known this from his music, but it's words that affect me more strongly. Told simply and without affect this story of Louis Armstrong's childhood and young manhood is actually Dickensian, but in his words, it's a song of love and hope.

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## **Paul says**

I didn't want this book to end. High energy writing that's clear and full of sauce (though several times the modesty of the times allowed Armstrong to equivocate when I wanted DETAILS!), this early history brought New Orleans vividly to life for me. Satchmo's focus on the players he loved and the characters he ran with, suffused with warmth and good humor throughout, whet my appetite for some serious listening. Hear that solo on "Basin Street Blues"? Having read the book, I can now recognize the same man in the sound of that horn.

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## **Mary says**

A fairly light reminiscence by a man who was apparently unfailingly cheerful. Or perhaps that was the only face he was able to present to the world when this book was written in the 1950s.

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## **Matti Karjalainen says**

Louis Armstrong (1901-1971) on epäilemättä eräs maailman merkittävimmistä ja tunnetuimmista jazzmuusikoista. Lyhyehkössä ja nopealukuisessa "Elämäni New Orleansissa" (Otava, 1961) -teoksessa hän muistelee värikästä nuoruuttaan ja uransa varhaisvaiheita kotikaupungissaan, jonka hän jätti lopulta 1920-luvun alussa liittyäkseen Chicagossa maineikkaan Joe "King" Oliverin johtamaan jazzyhtyeeseen.

Armstrong kertoilee vaiheistaan viihdyttävään ja jutustelemaan tapaan. Nuoruus oli köyhä ja Louis sai nuoresta pitäen tehdä monenlaisia töitä tuodakseen rahaa perheensä pöytään, etenkin kun isä oi jättänyt perheensä jo varhaisessa vaiheessa. Louisin elämä ei ollut aina niillä kuuluisilla ruusuilla tanssimista, mutta toisaalta synkimmälläkin pilvellä saattoi olla kultareunus: esimerkiksi lastenkodissa vietetyllä ajalla oli merkittävä vaikutus musiikilliseen heräämiseen.

Nuoruusvuosien tarinoissa vilahtelevat jazzin varhaisten suurnimien lisäksi pikkugangsterit, prostituoidut, parittajat, poliisit, uhkapelurit, mustasukkaiset aviomiehet ja monet muut värikkäät hahmot. Rakkaus hyvään musiikkiin ja ruokaan tulee tutuksi.

Viihdyttävää luettavaa kaikille musiikkielämäkertojen ystäville!

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**Phil Overeem says**

Essential. About halfway through, I had to stop and figure out who Louis' authorial voice reminded me of, and it came to me pretty quickly: Huck Finn. That says a lot. The same joy, generosity, ingenuity, humor, and respect you hear in his playing is in his words in great abundance. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to learn to cook cubie yon!

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**Mrs. Gallagher says**

I didn't know much about Louis Armstrong (except that I love his song, "What a Wonderful World." I find his raspy voice and incredible horn playing refreshingly unique. I was excited when one of my students loaned me this book.

I loved learning about Louis' early years in New Orleans and how an employee at a home for children fostered his interest and talent in playing the cornet. It was fun to learn about how his career took off. I especially liked reading about how he played in the marching bands for New Orleans funerals... such a different world! If you're a fan of jazz music, you'll enjoy reading about Louis and the other talented musicians of his time.

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