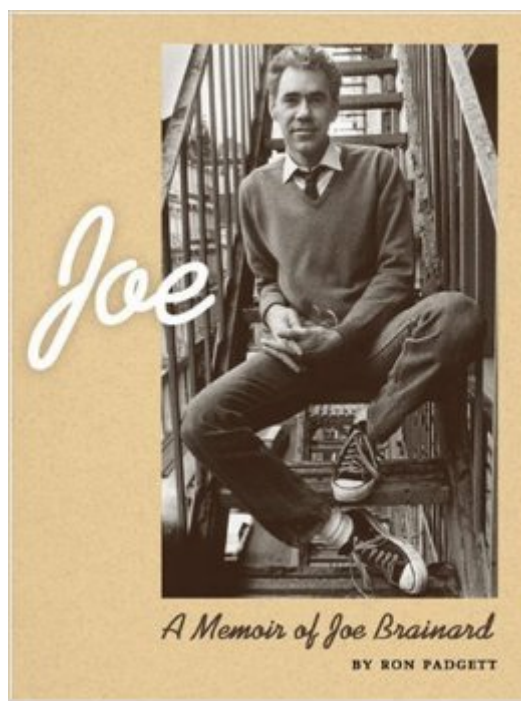


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Joe: A Memoir Of Joe Brainard



Synopsis

When someone we love dies, most of us do something to keep them from completely vanishing. We summon up memories of them, we talk about them, we visit their graves, we treasure photographs of them, we dream about them, and we cry, and for those brief moments they are in some way with us. But when my friend Joe Brainard died, I knew I was going to have to do something beyond all these. So begins Ron Padgett's warm, conversational memoir—the unlikely and true story of two childhood friends, one straight and one gay, who grew up in 1950s Oklahoma, surprised their families by moving to New York City in search of art and poetry, and became a part of the dynamic community of artists and writers whose work continues to shape American culture. Much of this intimate memoir is told in Joe's own direct and unforgettable voice. Dozens of letters, journal entries, poems, photographs, and artworks create a stirring portrait of the times—one that illuminates not only Joe Brainard's life and art, but the influence that his kindness and insight had on the lives of his contemporaries, including Alex Katz, Andy Warhol, Frank O'Hara, Joe LeSueur, Anne Waldman, John Ashbery, Kenward Elmslie, and countless other friends, lovers, and admirers. As Ron Padgett generously shares his memories, he allows us all to get to know Joe Brainard, a truly great person who just happened to be a brilliant artist and poet. Above all, Joe is a gentle reminder that love, life, and art matter every second. Poet Ron Padgett, the son of an Oklahoma bootlegger, grew up in Tulsa where he met Joe Brainard at the age of 6. His recent books include the memoir, *Oklahoma Tough: My Father, King of the Tulsa Bootleggers* and the collection of poems *You Never Know*.

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Customer Reviews

Poet Ron Padgett is also an interesting biographer and knows how to tell a good story. In JOE he does a fine job in recounting the basic facts of Joe Brainard's life, and his arrangements and paragraphs are written with a poet's eye to detail and piquancy. Everyone loves Brainard's art and his writing, and the difficulty insofar as I can see it is that the book loses a little something after Joe meets Kenward Elmslie and his career moves into high gear. As Padgett admits, his closeness to Joe began to unravel slightly at this juncture. (The two had been high school pals in Oklahoma and had moved to New York together, with the poets Dick Gallup and Ted Berrigan, from Tulsa very early in the 1960s.) Once Joe stops worrying about money, a little of the tension disappears from the story. Until then it has the high drama of a Dickens tale, even down to the story of Joe reduced to begging in the Boston streets and being too embarrassed actually to ask people for money. After his success, he goes to Vermont every summer, he can afford tables at the finest restaurants, he meets Jackie Onassis and Willem De Kooning, the whole nine yards of NY social success and eventually he stops painting. His death from AIDS is briefly discussed. I have the feeling that Padgett did not want to make this into an AIDS story, and wanted instead to celebrate his gay friend's life and work, but as he admits many aspects of Joe's sexuality were occluded from himself and from Pat (Padgett's wife). Whenever Joe gets close to a woman he has fantasies about taking the next step into having sex with her, but this seems to have occurred seldom if at all.

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