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Autor: Padgett Ron

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"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*.