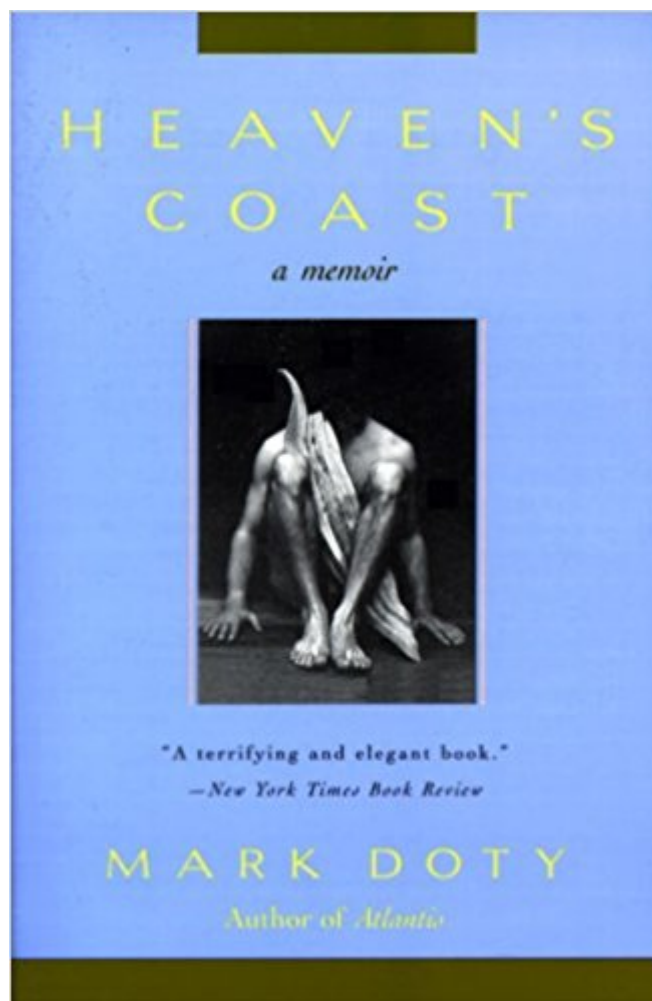


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# Heaven's Coast: A Memoir



## Synopsis

The year is 1989 and Mark Doty's life has reached a state of enviable equilibrium. His reputation as a poet of formidable talent is growing, he enjoys his work as a college professor and, perhaps most importantly, he is deeply in love with his partner of many years, Wally Roberts. The harmonious existence these two men share is shattered, however, when they learn that Wally has tested positive for the HIV virus. From diagnosis to the initial signs of deterioration to the heartbreaking hour when Wally is released from his body's ruined vessel, *Heaven's Coast* is an intimate chronicle of love, its hardships, and its innumerable gifts. We witness Doty's passage through the deepest phase of grief -- letting his lover go while keeping him firmly alive in memory and heart -- and, eventually beyond, to the slow reawakening of the possibilities of pleasure. Part memoir, part journal, part elegy for a life of rare communication and beauty, *Heaven's Coast* evinces the same stunning honesty, resplendent descriptive power and rapt attention to the physical landscape that has won Doty's poetry such attention and acclaim.

## Book Information

Paperback: 305 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial; Reprint edition (April 14, 1996)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060928050

ISBN-13: 978-0060928056

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 46 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #245,902 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > LGBT > Gay](#) #39 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Regional U.S. > New England](#) #1342 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors](#)

## Customer Reviews

In this luminous study of illness and loss, the acclaimed poet (author of *My Alexandria* and *Atlantis*) recounts how his lover of eight years, Wally Roberts, learned from a Vermont social worker in May 1989 that he was HIV-positive (while Doty tested negative). In chapters that range impressionistically over the years that followed, Doty presents a kind of AIDS journal, tracing the gradual onset of the disease to which Roberts succumbed in 1993 and the painful healing process that engulfs Doty to this day. During this period, Doty also lost a close male friend to AIDS and a

female friend to a car accident. After the diagnosis, the two men adopted two dogs, bought a cabin in the Vermont woods and, when Roberts began his gradual physical deterioration, moved to Provincetown, Mass., where there was a strong gay and lesbian support network. Mourning Roberts's loss, Doty finds powerful sustenance in poetry, letters from friends (excerpted here) and his own meditations on the New England landscape. Doty's love for Wally and the inner strength that sustains him lend this memoir a vitality that is sure to appeal to readers outside the AIDS community. Author tour. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In retrospect, 1993 should have been a red-letter year for Doty: his fourth collection of poems, *My Alexandria* (LJ 4/15/93), won the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Award, and a nomination for the National Book Award. But that year he also lost his lover to AIDS, a painful story he recounts here. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read this beautiful tribute and memoir in tandem with *Living in the Light of Death* by Larry Rosenberg as part of a course on contemplative caregiving. As a volunteer in hospice, I am privileged to be of service to people and their families during their final days and Heaven's Coast provided insights on how that time can be for a family. Mark Doty describes some of the helpful and unhelpful behaviors that his partner's hospice team demonstrated and I learned a lot from his sharing of that experience. Mark is such a talented writer - I literally stopped and re-read sentences over and over again because they were so powerful. Talking about his grief and contemplating life without his beloved partner Wally, Mark writes: "The future is an absence, a dark space up ahead like the socket of a pulled tooth. I can't quite stay away from it; hard as I may try." Describing a friend who is also close to dying: "Is there a luminous threshold where the self becomes irreducible, stripped to the point where all that's left to see is pure soul, the essence of character? Here, in unfailing self-ness, is no room or energy for anything inessential, for anything less than what counts." Everything Mark chronicled, from Wally and their relationship, to their dogs Arden and Beau, to Cape Cod, to their eclectic group of friends, all came alive for me through this story. While there are many sad moments, overall this is a story of love and light and I feel richer for having read it.

Until you have waited for the funeral home to collect the remains of your spouse, until you have

cleaned up and cared for them and they slip through your fingers and until you are able to touch and scatter their ashes without falling completely to pieces, then you don't completely know love. Mark Doty knows love, and he knows loss. He spoke to my soul with words so fluid as one reviewer described his prose, that reading this book felt like silk or a warm breeze against my cheek. Reading it, I felt these were my words if I had his gift for writing. After losing my partner of 25 years, not from AIDS, but complications of successful cancer treatment, I spend nearly three years reading every book I could find on grief. The gay themed books I read seemed to be looking for a replacement or quick sex as soon as they were at page 15. I felt bereft of finding any book that could speak to me of my particular loss, even though I did read some really good books about grief. When a friend suggested this book, I downloaded it immediately. If I hadn't, I would have missed out on one of the finest collections of prose, poetry and dignity that I have ever read. This book is about 2 gay men coming to a leave taking, but it could be helpful to anyone who has lost someone they are particularly close to. I would say this to the one really negative review I read. Do you not read these reviews? Do you read the blurbs? No one said this book was "about" AIDS, but how MORE could it be about AIDS when it documents his partner's journey into release with all pertinent medical and spiritual experience from both sides of the sick bed? This book is not only a tribute to Wally Roberts from Mark Doty; it is a gift to anyone who has ever experienced the most profound loss one can have in life...the loss of a soulmate. Please read and absorb this absolute gem.

I have this book in hard cover and love it. I bought this paper back version to share with a friend who is grieving the loss of his partner and hope it will help him to heal. Most books written about the AIDS epidemic are quite sad and as such by now tend to be formulaic records of survivors' experiences. Heaven's Coast goes beyond that by providing a way for everyone to relate to the connectedness and timelessness of all life and perhaps by extension even to the universe itself. It's prose written by an award winning poet.

Mark Doty's memoir, Heaven's Coast, is one of the most poetic books I've read in a long time. Ripe with the most vivid imagery, Doty's talent as a poet shines through in his prose. In this book, Doty recounts the life and death of his lover Wally who succumbed to AIDS-related illness in the early 1990s. As Doty deals with this, he's also faced with the deaths of friends from AIDS and a very close friend who dies in a car accident. While all this sounds tragic, it's Doty's hopeful message that shines through. Parts of the story literally had me close to tears, but the articulation of hope and peace beyond grief - and survival through it - left me hopeful. As an "AIDS" memoir, this is an

important book to read for the younger generations of gays that didn't necessarily have to watch their loved ones struggle and die with this disease. It's important to remember a time when medicine wasn't as good as it is now, and to know what this plague has meant to the gay community. That being said, I think anyone who has ever lost a loved one can relate to the struggle through grief Doty so poetically describes. I can't say enough good things about this book.

I have always felt that sorrow and loss are like a wallet you want to know is securely stored in your back pocket-- out of sight but with a little pat you are aware it is still there-- secure. This book finds the beauty in that image-- the beauty in the loss through which you gain a deeper understanding.

I consider this one of my most memorable reads - a treasure to be read slowly and thoughtfully, and again. I will purchase the hard copy to keep, and anticipate reading his poetry with pleasure. Thank you Mark Doty for that reading experience that is rare and priceless: an intimacy with the writer, a comfort and transportation into that, for want of a better word 'zone' that we all need. Thoroughly recommended.

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