

★ **Outer Sunset****Mark Ernest Pothier**

University of Iowa Press (May 15, 2023)

Softcover \$17.00 (266pp)

978-1-60938-883-6

A retired English teacher learns to hope and love again while he helps his daughter face a devastating illness in *Outer Sunset*, Mark Ernest Pothier's graceful, wise, and tender novel.

Jim retired early from teaching; he seems to have retired from life too. Neither a carpenter nor a gardener and unsure about his writing skills, he spends his days on the back porch of a rotting house on the western edge of San Francisco, reading stacks of books and drinking too much. His wife left three years before; she travels Europe with her new love. His two children live nearby, but their visits are rare.

Jim's situation changes when his freelance videographer daughter, Dorothy, moves back home following a shattering cancer diagnosis. While caring for Dorothy, Jim connects, haltingly, with one of his daughter's older friends, as well as with a devout Ukrainian immigrant whom his son is dating. At a gradual pace, he surrenders the fear and distrust that have been holding him back. And Dorothy, who has always put others first, learns to vocalize her desires.

There are poignant, keen insights into the shifting father-daughter relationship; as a team, both face mortality and uncertainty. These themes are weighty, but the story glitters with subtle humor and surprising turns too. Rich details capture late-1990s San Francisco, with its homey restaurants, beatnik North Beach bookstores, neon signs and aquariums in Chinatown, steep stone stairways, and stunning Golden Gate vistas. In the *Outer Sunset* neighborhood where Jim lives, the rolling fog, surf-flattened sand, and fleeting sunlight on the dune grass mirror the characters' inner landscapes.

Beautiful and touching, *Outer Sunset* tells a stirring father-daughter tale about facing impending loss with faith, hope, forgiveness, and healing.

KRISTEN RABE (May / June 2023)

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