

Book festival Northern Arizona

***Let Their Spirits Dance*, by Stella Pope Duarte Reviewed by Jean Hockman**

“...in 1968, truth was suspended in midair, and the passion vine forced blooms into the cold, gray days of November. Each blossom lived one day. All that beauty for just one day.”

With these first words, Stella Pope Duarte drew me into her novel, *Let Their Spirits Dance*, the story of la familia Ramirez and their 30-year journey toward reconciliation with each other and acceptance of the death of their brother and son, Jesse, in Vietnam.



Ms. Duarte’s narrator is Teresa, the eldest sister. She is haunted by the secret Jesse told her as he was leaving for ‘Nam: he said he wasn’t coming back. Teresa’s mother, at age 79, remembers that when Jesse left he told her she would hear his voice again. She is convinced that she should go to the Vietnam Wall and touch his name.

Teresa and her siblings get their frail mother there, in a highly publicized cross-country caravan. The nation roots for her, and I found myself rooting, too. This is a humorous, poignant story, at its best when Ms. Duarte describes the background of family life in the barrio, the attempts of the generations to understand each other and themselves, and the lives and faith of the elders.

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April 11-13, 2003

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