



Let Their Spirits Dance by Stella Pope Duarte

Booklist Review: Thirty years after the death of Jesse Ramirez in Vietnam, his mother is convinced that the last words her son spoke to her in the airport have come true. He promised her that she would hear his voice again, and she--believing she has done just that--feels she must make a pilgrimage to the Vietnam War Memorial. The story of the family's journey in a ragtag caravan, consisting of the extended family and Jesse's old friends, is narrated by Jesse's sister Teresa. She remembers the joy of family life when Jesse was still alive and the sadness and pain that ripped them apart after his death. When their journey attracts the attention of a TV reporter, the resulting publicity brings them good news about Jesse's time in Vietnam, and the family is finally able to make peace with his death. Partly a political novel and partly a family story, Duarte's tale seems barely able to contain the welter of emotion that tumbles from its pages. Deeply felt and often moving, this is an impressive first novel. *(Reviewed April 15, 2002) -- Joanne Wilkinson*

Library Journal Review: Duarte's first novel is an inspirational road book full of energetic Latinos exorcising their cultural, political, and personal demons. A fortyish schoolteacher, Teresa is failing at her marriage and is haunted by the memory of her beloved brother, Jesse, who was killed in the Vietnam War 29 years ago. One night, Teresa's mother hears Jesse's voice, which tells her to go to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. Then—surprise, surprise—she finds out that the government owes her \$90,000 because it had mistakenly delivered her son's body to the wrong address. Despite poor health, Mrs. Ramirez rounds up Teresa, her other children, and friends and heads to the nation's capital by auto caravan. The press picks up on their junket and follows them through American towns large and small. As they near the memorial, the mother takes sick—but not before meeting Jesse's Vietnamese wife, his son (raised in America), and his grandchild. Duarte's considerable talents shine in the entertaining travel sections, but red-flagged plot devices and an excess of cultural and historical ap-
position about Chicano history undermine the narrative's complexity and aesthetic enjoyment. Recommended for collections of Latino literature.—Harold Augenbraum, Mercantile Lib. of New York *(Reviewed May 15, 2002)*
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