



The Dance Boots

Linda LeGarde Grover

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In this stirring collection of linked stories, Linda LeGarde Grover portrays an Ojibwe community struggling to follow traditional ways of life in the face of a relentlessly changing world. In the title story an aunt recounts the harsh legacy of Indian boarding schools that tried to break the indigenous culture. In doing so she passes on to her niece the Ojibwe tradition of honoring elders through their stories. In “Refugees Living and Dying in the West End of Duluth,” this same niece comes of age in the 1970s against the backdrop of her forcibly dispersed family. A cycle of boarding schools, alcoholism, and violence haunts these stories even as the characters find beauty and solace in their large extended families. With its attention to the Ojibwe language, customs, and history, this unique collection of riveting stories illuminates the very nature of storytelling. *The Dance Boots* narrates a century’s evolution of Native Americans making choices and compromises, often dictated by a white majority, as they try to balance survival, tribal traditions, and obligations to future generations.

The Dance Boots Details

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Sunny says

Each of these stories reveals more of complexity than many full length novels. Linda Legarde Grover populates the fictional Mozhay Point Indian Reservation with the intergenerational stories of an Ojibwe family and their community. Some folks might have a hard time tracking what is happening when but I encourage those folks to make some small notes and stick with it. I highly recommend this book.

Deb M. says

The author has created a collection of riveting stories. Paying close attention to the customs, history and the Ojibwa language. This book has a permanent place on my bookshelf! Thank you Linda.

Linda Belote says

This is VERY good. It reminds me a lot of Down from Basswood by Lynn Laitala, one of my all time favorites. The stories about contemporary Minnesota Ojibway are beautifully told, the people believably drawn. I was quietly, deeply captivated. It won the Flannery O'Connor award.

Elissa Hoole says

Beautifully crafted images of the family tree spreading throughout the generations, scarred by poverty and policy but surviving and strong--there is such strength in each of the stories in The Dance Boots.

Brenda says

These 8 short stories are somewhat related with them centering around Maggie. If I read it again, which I probably will, I would make a character chart to remember how all these characters are related. The stories take place in different years/eras and are centered around different characters, but Maggie is the constant. Many of these stories involve Indian boarding school (some briefly, some as the setting). This is fiction, but inspired by some actual events (author stated in a lecture).

Jessica says

This collection of linked short stories is barely 150 pages but the author wastes no words and at the end I had a picture of four generations in an Ojibwe family from northern Minnesota. Comparisons to Louise Erdrich are inevitable but Linda LeGarde Grover's style, while equally poetic, is less epic verse and more sonnet:

brief and powerful. History, politics, family dynamics, and community loyalty are themes throughout these eight stories. Highly recommended.

Bernie says

Well written, left me with a sad heart.

Terry says

A powerful book! As a member of my book club observed: "Fiction is truer than fact." With vivid, evocative language, the author draws us into the "vast experiment in the breaking of a culture through the education of its young" that was perpetrated by the federal government against the native peoples. It is a stark, yet complex, reality that is eloquently summarized in a phrase: "the hopes broken and revived in the survival of an extended family."

Ruth says

What a beautiful little book. The linked short stories didn't feel like magical realism, just realism, and it was only at the end that I became conscious of the layers of symbolism. The stories are about an Ojibwe family in the 20th century, surviving the pressures of enforced boarding school and urbanization, and retaining their identity. This is a good book to read if you admire your grandmother for grace under pressure; you will relate to this.

Marie Zhuikov says

I need to disclaim that the author lived in my neighborhood growing up. Even without that, I would find her book powerful and provoking. It's not a plot-driven enjoyable read – instead, each story paints a picture of a moment in time for the Native American characters as they struggle to survive in a world where their culture is not valued and their children are sent to boarding school. One scene was especially evocative. A group of girls are learning how to darn socks in their boarding school. The way Linda (the author) describes the peace of the room and the subtle politics and struggle going on among the girls and their instructors really got to me.

Ruth Kevghas says

I loved it! I love how the author is able to use the past, present and future thought process to convey the depth of Native thinking. Thank you.

Catherine says

I love the central organizing principle of this book - a fictional reservation in northern Minnesota, literary kin to the universe Louise Erdrich has created. From that center spin a hundred different stories exploring the meaning of family, friendship, obligation, responsibility, and support in the twentieth century. Many of the stories link back to the fictional boarding school to which many of the book's characters were sent, and the effects of that period in this community's history is explored in all its complexity and ability to break your heart. There's so much here - so many observations about aging, colonialism, resiliency, and war - and I know this is a book I'll return to again and again.

Mardith Louisell says

"The Dance Boots" is fascinating and moving. A portrait of life among the (mainly) Ojibwe tribes in Duluth and on the reservations near Duluth and in Minneapolis from the 1900s to 1970s or so, it introduces (or reintroduces) one to the world of the northern Minnesota Ojibwe in their sorrows and joys. To give an example, LeGarde Grover sets a story in a bowling alley, but instead of writing about the people who bowl fighting, falling in love, etc. (though it is also about that), she writes about the three boys/men who set up the bowling balls and includes wonderful descriptions of setting up in the context of their lives and loves. Growing up, I bowled in Duluth, and though I saw pinsetters, I didn't think about who was in the back setting up. In that example and others, often involving work, she skillfully redirects you to focus not just on love relationships but on the whole of what makes up a life, how one gets by in a, mainly, hostile world. The specter of the Indian boarding school experience influences everything, not as the overt story but as a constant background specter, somewhat like Magda Szabo's "The Door," in which the Hungarian regime and its effects are constant but not foregrounded. I had more of a sense of the horror of the boarding school experience than from many other accounts. I think it's because of a certain sparseness, not in the writing style (which is not sparse – it's faithful to speech patterns and narrated by several different people, all of whom are related), but in the way the author deals with trauma. That sparseness and lack of sentimentality distill the events down to an essence. "Dance Boots" isn't about suffering or happiness. Under LeGarde Grover's even hand, it's about life, actions and effects occurring in a matter-of-fact way without the internal or external psychologizing so common in books today. Not that she doesn't write lyrically when it's called for, but her content is the day-to-day and the details that bring the relationship with oneself and one's family alive – the food, bread, card games, horses, rooming houses, car trips on frozen terrain, a railroad handcar as an escape vehicle.

Teresa says

I loved it...I'll admit I almost didn't finish it because I got so involved with one character, in the story he's a child and the next thing I read...talks about his funeral. I said, "No!" I put the book down and came back to it later, realizing much time had passed, etc. and read on. An amazing glimpse into the lives of Ojibwe families...so much I don't understand!

Verena says

The Dance Boots by Linda Legarde Grover is a collection of eight stories inspired by family recollections

and interviews with several generations of Ojibwe people in northeast Minnesota.

The strengths and sorrows of generations of Ojibwe women and the frustrations and futility facing Ojibwe men are portrayed with sensitivity and rich detail. The white characters' interactions with the Ojibwe show a combination of evil, ignorance, and good intentions.

Various characters voice their school and work experiences in stories that take place from the 1920's through the 20th century, but the writing is not chronological. It echoes the way tales would be told and repeated through many generations. The narrators' identities are a puzzle at times, but the reader is rewarded with an appreciation of the depths of a culture that refuses to be obliterated by the dominant white race.
