



We Hear the Dead

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It started out as a harmless prank. But soon enough, spiritualism was the fastest growing movement of the nineteenth century, and Maggie Fox was trapped in a life of deceit.

Meticulously researched by the author, *We Hear the Dead* reveals the secret of how the Fox sisters faked their rapping sounds and their motives for inventing the séance and founding spiritualism.

Maggie:

I began the deception when I was too young to know right from wrong. No one suspected us of any trick, because we were such young children. We were led on by my sister purposely and by my mother unintentionally. Only with the passing of time did I come to understand the consequences of my actions. As Doctor wrote to me: "Weary, weary is the life by cold deceit oppressed."

Kate:

My sister has used the word "deception." I object to her use of that word, for I do not believe that I have ever intentionally deceived anyone. Maggie has a different understanding of all the events that have happened since that night in Hydesville forty years ago. To her the spirits were always a game. For my sister Leah, they were a means to an end. For my mother, a miracle. And for me, they were my life's calling. I have no regrets.

We Hear the Dead Details

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From Reader Review We Hear the Dead for online ebook

Marva says

The neat thing about this book is that it's based on the true story of the Fox sisters, who more or less started the entire Spiritualist craze in the 1850s. But more than just showing this thin slice of the times, the book is a fully realized description of pre-Civil War life on the east coast of the US. This isn't a period heavily covered in fiction. The focus on mid-nineteenth century America is mostly toward the Civil War and the antebellum South.

In the first few chapters, I was worried. They seemed kind of repetitive, going through all of the Fox sisters various rapping techniques, but then Ms. Salerni gets rolling and turns the book into a can't-put-it-down page turner. High praise for "We Hear the Dead?" Yes, but I'm praising it in the context of what it is: a personal story of a young woman caught up in a lie that lasts for years, a lie she can't get out of even if it means losing the love of her life.

We want to yell at Maggie to grab her guy and head off to the arctic with him, but that "just was not done." We learn of the social mores that require Maggie to defer virtually every decision about her life to her overbearing older sister, Leah.

Her younger sister, Kate, isn't any help since she not only enjoys the deceptions the girls put over on a naive public, but begins to believe that the rapping she performs by cracking the joints of her toes is actually a message from the spirits.

Ms. Salerni is a teacher in "real life" so I'm not surprised the book is very well researched. Seriously, the book is educational in a highly entertaining way. Ms. Salerni asks: "How did the common view of females in the nineteenth century work in the favor of the Fox sisters?" and "Is it possible that good can be accomplished through deception?" and "How was it that people could be so easily fooled by what, in hindsight, seems an obvious fraud?" Yes, indeed, the subject matter of the book is a perfect vehicle for making kids think about such weighty matters. . .and have fun doing it.

My overall assessment of "We Hear the Dead" is that it's certainly worth reading. It seems to me this book should be a good seller for a wide variety of readers. Those that like historicals will find plenty of good detail to keep them interested, romance readers will shed a tear over poor Maggie's lovelife, folks interested in spiritualism will find a fascinating history of a pair of the original spirit rappers.

I certainly recommend the book to anybody who is interested in the subject matter, but also to the general reader looking for a darn good tale.

NOTE: Review based on a reading of the previous edition.

Al says

Original title: High Spirits: A Tale of Ghostly Rapping and Romance, now We Hear the Dead, is a novelistic treatment of a real incident from American history, the story of the Fox sisters, whose childish pranks of communicating with the departed were taken seriously first by family members, then neighbors, and then the

community, ultimately growing into a genuine phenomenon. The resulting movement, known as spiritualism, became quite the rage from the 1840s until after the Civil War. Traces of it are not unknown today.

By the time they reached young womanhood Maggie and Kate Fox had achieved near-celebrity status. The proceeds from their appearances financed their blue collar family and allowed them access to the highest circles of society in New York City, Philadelphia, and so forth. Maggie, in particular, developed a relationship with Elisha Kane, an adventurer and explorer whose exploits earned him his own corner in history and fiction.

For this reader, however, the history is not ultimately the point of the book. The story is a rewarding and entertaining study of two sisters, their family, and their acquaintances, as they grow and develop and mature (or fail to). The author has done a splendid and totally convincing job of filling out their lives and personalities and putting real flesh on the bare bones of history. The romantic relationship between Maggie Fox and Elisha Kane is especially well depicted, for example. Good historical fiction is capable of putting us not only in other minds but in other eras, and *High Spirits* does this beautifully. One can read all the history one wants of the position of women in Victorian society but this book can show us what it actually felt like.

In addition the story is masterfully written and edited. All in all this is a first-class novel.

Donna says

I felt like a little kid listening to an astounding story being told by some wizened person recounting a rather shadowy part of their lives. While initially the page count had me a little nervous (really, how much story is there to tell, I thought?), it quickly didn't become a problem as I swallowed down gulp after gulp after gulp of this engrossing story.

It's interesting because starting off the story, I had a feeling I wasn't going to care what happened to these girls, whether they fell to ruins or not. I mean, here they are, building up a prank into the dupe of the century all because they didn't want to get scolded or have their family turned out for what they did or suffer any of the repercussions of their actions at all. But as the story goes on, and you continue to get this behind-the-scenes look at these girls' lives, you can't help but ask yourself the same questions Maggie asks herself - Is she, at the end of the day, bringing much-needed comfort to the bereaved, even if it's a lie?

I didn't so much like the story from Kate's perspective. In fact I think the story would have been just fine without it but at the same time, it created this juxtaposition between the two girls - Maggie knew she was a fake; as Kate got older, she felt that she actually could commune with the dead. So is there a lie or isn't there? Or are we capable of convincing ourselves of what we want us to be?

I loved the voice of the story. It's definitely told in a rather antiquated prose type of language but it's not so littered with moth balls that it's unreadable. It only adds atmosphere to the story as a whole. It sets the tone for the mid-1800s and makes the reader feel all the more there in the story.

The love story aspect of the novel was unbearably heart-wrenching. I'll admit it. I cried at some points. It was such a tumultuous affair between Maggie and Elisha and so symbolic of life during that time that I couldn't help but feel as destroyed by Maggie's situation as she was. The harder part? This was real. I'm afraid any little tidbit about the ups and downs of this relationship would give away valuable plot secrets and this story

is just too good to do that so I'll leave it for you to read. Just know that it'll rip at your heart as you read it.

And then there's the historical aspect. While some points of the novel were dramatized to suit the story, for the most part the major points were true. These two girls did found a religion and like I said, watching the magic show from behind the curtain left me in this wide-eyed awe that these people, so many people from all across the board, and so influential, could believe that what these girls were doing was true. But how fake was it? Did Kate really have some kind of ability like she felt she did? How red in the face were the followers of this Spiritualist movement when it was debunked? And what does it mean for the rest of it still going on now? Have scheisters graduated to CGI-esque effects to pull off the dupe or is there something there to actually believe?

Not only is *We Hear the Dead* a great story, it makes you re-think all of the magical mystical out there. Just what's real and what isn't? What these girls did was at the same time abhorrent and amazing. And their story is hard to pull away from. I didn't want to put the book down. I just had to know what came next. And hopefully you'll feel the same way.

Boo says

for prompt 19 of 2015's ultimate reading challenge- based on a true story.

I honestly don't know what went wrong here, It should have been amazing. However the second half flagged dreadfully and in all honesty Kate seemed completely superfluous and Maggie was all over the place. Such a shame

For Fans of: famous hoaxes, badly written romance, victoriana
Whats Next: I honestly don't know.

Kennedy Stone says

This book had me stumped.

I waited and waited for it to get better, but every other chapter was the same thing. The concept became so repetitive that I really couldn't bare to read it anymore.

I get it. The rapping was fake and the town thought it wasn't. It was a brilliant ruse.

The writing was well done, but it was confusing at times and repetitive. I wouldn't recommend it unless you happen to be super into history and also maybe a teenager.

QNPoohBear says

In antebellum Upstate New York, Margaretta "Maggie" Fox and her younger sister Kate are inseparable, being the two youngest children of the family and much younger than their older siblings. Unhappy about a recent move to the country and upset with the intrusion of their less lively niece Lizzie into their home.

Hoping to scare Lizzie away, the sisters come up with the ultimate prank: pretend that ghosts are near. Cracking their joints, the pair of mischievous young girls start something they never ever dreamed of. Their mother, fervently believing that spirits are in the home, recruits the neighbors to come see. Soon nearly the whole community comes to hear the spirit rapping. The girls have a few tricks under their nightdresses but how long can they keep it up before they are exposed? Enter eldest sister Leah. Disappointed in her lot in life, Leah sees her sisters' pranks as a golden opportunity. Before they know it, Maggie and Kate are celebrated nationwide as renowned spiritualists, creating a new religion and attracting media attention. As Maggie enters adulthood, she attracts attention of a different kind. A handsome, charming doctor/scientist/explorer wants to court her. What are his intentions? What does this attention mean for the family, for the religion they inadvertently created?

This is an amazingly well researched and well-written first novel. I knew about the Spiritualist movement and I have heard of the Fox sisters and their creaking joints. I didn't know much more about them than they were frauds. This book takes us inside Maggie and Kate's heads and based on family letters and secondary source research, the author gives a more complete story to make the Fox sisters flesh and blood girls rather than a footnote in history. The plot moves along quickly enough so that I wanted to keep reading to see what would happen. Maggie's romance with Dr. Elisha Kent Kane was beautiful and heartbreaking. I had never heard of him before. I liked the way the relationship developed, yet like Leah, I kind of mistrusted Elisha because he wanted to make Maggie into something she wasn't all while proclaiming to love her intelligence and spirit. I loved the details about Elisha's harrowing adventures all over the globe. Knowing the scientific data, or being able to look it up, made the stories more appealing. The stories are what appealed to the population in the 19th century as well, much to Elisha's dismay.

Maggie is a sympathetic character. She's a little more timid than Kate and unsure of who she is. She spends her young adulthood lying to people or bringing them comfort, depending on who you ask. Maggie is aware that what they're doing is wrong but unable to find a way out. I empathized with her and rooted for her to find happiness away from her scheming sisters. Her voice doesn't always sound 19th century and there's a lot of name dropping of famous abolitionists, women's rights activists and other famous people to remind us of the time period. I was amazed how the Fox girls used spirit rapping to espouse the causes they believed in.

I did not care so much for Kate. She's a little minx and needed much more parental intervention. She needed to have been disciplined for scaring her niece and lying to her mother. Instead of acting like the head of the family Mr. Fox moves out. Kate is only 11 when she began the spirit rapping so she could be forgiven for her youth but in this novel anyway, she completely embraces the spiritualist movement and never repents what she has done. She is eager to soak up the attention and participate in a whirling social life beyond her expectations. There's hints this causes problems in her life but those problems are never fully addressed here. Kate is selfish and a bit manipulative. She believes she has special powers and sometimes it makes her too bratty to stand. To Kate's benefit, she's a loyal sister and loves Maggie like they're twins. Her decisions did not endear her to me at all.

Leah is a complicated character. She has had a rough life from a very young age. Married at 14, with hints that her mother was a lax chaperone, a mother probably by 16, abandoned by all the men in her life, I can see why she does what she does. However, I don't like how controlling she is or how she manipulates her sisters into doing what she wants. I hate how she enlists the aid of her besotted boarder Calvin to trick people. Comforting them with messages from their loves ones is one thing but deliberately deceiving them is not right.

Elisha is another complicated character. Like Maggie, I was drawn to his charm and his free thinking. His family is completely horrid and I really liked how he defied them but it also makes me question his

intentions towards Maggie. He says and does both wonderful, romantic things and then he also says and does things which show him as a man with many sides. He wants to love Maggie but he is a man of his time. He wants to find Franklin's expedition but his ego wants him to find fame and glory. I think I liked him despite his faults. He was a complicated man and I'd like to know more about him. I loved his Aunt Eliza, who was a big influence on him and would have loved to be friends with her.

This is a really interesting look at the beginnings of the spiritualist movement and the young women who started it all. I recommend this to those who are interested in 19th century history and are familiar with the spiritualist movement.

Aine says

I have to admit that I don't usually read historical fiction. It was set in the mid 1800's, and while lines like "It is expected that a wife give up her interests for her husband's" may be accurate to the time, it made me want to hurt the people who said them. And the poor girl couldn't even take a walk with her beau without a chaperon. I am so glad I didn't have to live in that time. Whenever I'm asked what time period I'd want to live in if not this one, I always choose a time in the future. There was also some interesting bits on the underground railroad which was historically accurate to the time period.

I really liked the main character, Maggie Fox. The description I read made it seem like Kate Fox would narrate more than she did. She only had a few chapters here and there. Can I hope for a companion that focuses more on her? The oldest Fox sister, Leah, didn't narrate at all. The beginning of the book really sucked me in. Spiritualism, mediumship, communicating with the dead... it's something that has fascinated me for a long time. Whether these girls were really communicating with the dead remains to be seen. But seeing as how they've been dead themselves for more than a century, it's not likely we'll ever know the truth. However, if it was a hoax, it was never proven.

Ghosts, or spirits, began rapping on the walls of the home they lived in. They asked the ghosts questions while the ghosts rapped twice for yes and once for no. By creating the rapping, they passed along messages of the dead. It became a phenomenon and drew in interested people from all over. They accepted money to pass along love one's messages and created the religion known as spiritualism.

The novel traveled from the spiritualism movement into Maggie's romance with Elisha Kent Kane, a famous explorer. While this didn't interest me as much as the spirit rapping, it was well written, nicely told, and still very engaging. Maggie's teenage life definitely had its ups and downs. Living in high society while holding spirit circles and pulling away from it to gain approval of potential in-laws. I'm definitely very interested in learning more about these amazing ladies.

Whether you like historical fiction or not, this is definitely a wonderful read. I just finished it and kind of want to read it again.

Jason Frank says

We Hear the Dead started out so promising, and ended so annoyingly, that it may be one of the biggest disappointments that I've ever read. The book went swimmingly up until the point where the love interest

was introduced. Dr. Elisha Kent Kane was so damn boring. This book is literally about teenage girls who start a cult revolution. That is more than enough of a story without a love interest. According to the internet (a reliable source if I ever saw one) the story of *We Hear the Dead* is a mainly true, and the romance between Maggie (one of our main characters) and Kane was a real romance. Now, this may be an unpopular opinion, in fact I am quite sure that it is an unpopular opinion, but even if the romance was real, I wish the author would have left it out. Their romance left me feeling flat, and up until that point, the book was an interesting character study on greed, and an unwillingness to admit to falsehood. My recommendation? read up until Kane is introduced, then put the book down and leave it.

April says

We Hear The Dead by Dianne Salerni centers around the spiritualist movement and it's creators -- the Fox Sisters. What began as a not-so-innocent prank turned into a somewhat religious movement. The history of the Fox Sisters is fascinating, I suggest wikipedia-ing it. Seriously, ya'll, history is AWESOME. So sayeth the history nerd.

[Read the reset of my review here](#)

Katie says

When I started *We Hear The Dead* I had high hopes. I had read great reviews for it and I was very intrigued by the premise. Sadly, it wasn't as good as I had hoped or expected.

Maggie Fox and her younger sister, Kate, didn't mean to create a new religion with a harmless prank but they did. The spiritualist movement began with them and grew to be much more popular than anyone expected. Maggie and Kate made their living with these spirit circles. All that changed when Maggie met Elisha Kent Kane. He wasn't like the other suitors in many ways but in one way especially. He wanted Maggie to give it all up for him. Would she do it or would she choose her family over her love?

Like I said, the premise was great. Something unique and intriguing. I love history so of course it appealed to me. And at first I was really into it. The first part of the book was great but once Elisha entered the picture it got kind of boring. There was a lot of time spent sitting around waiting for him and it didn't seem necessary. Towards the end it picked up again but there were times when I didn't want to continue.

Another thing that bugged me was Maggie. She seemed very immature and she spent a lot of the time crying. She talked about feminism some but she herself waited around on Elisha forever. And he is a whole different matter. From the moment he met Maggie he wanted to change her and that is not love, in my opinion. The only character in the book that I really liked was Kate and she didn't even have that big of a part. I wanted to know more about her.

Overall, *We Hear The Dead* was a good book that could have been so much better. The spirit rapping part was great but it was overshadowed by Maggie and Elisha's relationship. The topic of the spiritualist movement was fantastic and if you enjoy history as much as I do then I recommend it for that alone. Otherwise, this might be one to check out from you library.

Sarah says

Interesting story of two sisters who do "spirit rapping" in the 1800s. What started as a prank turned into a livelihood for them. I didn't realize until the afterword that this was based on real events. As such, the ending was lackluster.

Cindy Hudson says

Maggie Fox and her sister, Kate, are just playing around when they pretend they can communicate with the dead. But soon their brother is digging up the basement and finding what may be a body, and people everywhere are coming to them seeking to communicate with their loved ones who have passed on. They can't tell the truth without getting into a lot of trouble, but they didn't realize just how much their fame would spread.

When Maggie falls in love with well-known explorer Elisha Kent Kane, she wants to give it all up to be with him. But she finds she can't just walk away when her family depends on her so much. Caught between the life she has and the life she wants, Maggie struggles to find a solution that will let her be true to herself without hurting those she loves.

Based on the true story of the Fox sisters and the beginning of the Spiritualist movement in the mid 1850s, *We Hear the Dead* by Dianne K. Salerni is a fascinating look at how something can start out as a lark and then spiral out of control. The Fox sisters' story is the 1800s version of a video going viral and taking on a life of its own.

This is great historical fiction, but mother-daughter book clubs can add a modern touch to their conversations as well. Issues to discuss include differences in technology and communications between then and now, and how that would affect someone making claims similar to those of the Fox sisters today. Other topics include deceiving the outside world to meet the expectations of those in your family, social constraints on women of the times, expectations of social classes, and more.

Salerni includes a list at the back of the book for further reading, and it could be fun for members of a group to find out more about the real life Maggie Fox and Elisha Kent Kane to present at a meeting. As I didn't know about Maggie before reading *We Hear the Dead*, I didn't know how her story would turn out. Salerni does a great job of weaving fictional details into the framework of actual events to keep the pace moving and keep the reader interested until the very end. *We Hear the Dead* would be a great book for groups with girls aged 14 and older.

Dark Faerie Tales says

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales

Quick & Dirty: A combination of religion, history, and romance that is quite captivating, using a difficult time period to make the reader see right and wrong in a whole new way through absorbing events and characters.

Opening Sentence: I began the deception when I was too young to know right from wrong.

The Review:

What really makes *We Hear the Dead* so intriguing is that it's based on a true story. The events and characters are on the verge of unbelievable, preposterous even, but in all reality, desperate times lead to desperate measures, and the pre-Civil War era of this story is more desperate than most. Dianne K. Salerni really proves herself to be able to write a novel that depicts quite accurately so many elements from history but then builds on that to make everything seem real and applicable to an audience. The author has done her job when the reader can both relate to the characters and feel strongly for the well-being of the characters.

The novel is written heavily from Maggie's perspective, although we do randomly get kicked over to Kate's mind for a chapter here or there. It is understandable why the author did this, because Kate's perspective is an important one, given firstly that she is the one who really started the stories and the rapping, and secondly that she claims that she does possess a second sight and is not always deceptive, but that she really feels and sees the things that she communicates. However, the way the book is written really shows us that it is Maggie's story to tell. It seems that either the two should be more equal tellers of the story, or that the story should be Maggie's alone to tell, using some other method to convey Kate's perspective. There is just a loss of balance in the narrative, maybe it seems a slight fall to convenience for the author in what she has chosen to do.

That being said, all three of the Fox sisters, Leah, Maggie, and Kate, are highly compelling characters, and it stands to reason that the dynamic among them, also to include their mother, is almost as engaging as the romance between Maggie and Elisha Kent Kane. Anyone with sisters can relate to this dynamic, however, in order to be successful in the business they start, their personalities have to be powerful and magnetic, which indeed they are. When they combine forces, they are indeed a formidable opponent, however, as Maggie starts to regret the pull the other two have on her and tries to pull back, chaos does eventually ensue, and the relationships can never quite be mended. Seeing this story from Maggie's perspective is so enlightening, as we can really see that she is a kind-hearted person who believes deep down that she is helping people much more than she is harming them, even though she outright knows that she has no special abilities to summon spirits. It is hard to judge her critically as she accomplishes many things through this business, and the fact that she is able to remain mostly respectable, independent as a woman, and successful at what she does is quite remarkable.

Kate is an entirely different case in point because she actually believes she can feel the other world and its pull. It seems that most of the time she is just playing the part, but sometimes she steps up to a higher cause. Since her own sisters never quite believe her, the reader is unsure whether to trust her second sight either. We never develop a relationship with her as intimate as the one we have with Maggie, so it is hard to feel as much sympathy or understanding for her. Throughout the novel, she seems to rely more on the excitement and risk-taking involved than just the money she is earning or even the people she is helping. She is very creative and although she may or may not receive intuition from the spirits, it was still her idea originally to dramatize everything with the rappings, and eventually the movement of objects, and even spirit writing. She also seems quite consumed by guilt, as much as she tries to hide it, inherent in her drinking and her inability to focus on a steady relationship.

It would seem unlikely that the story could have more to it than the Fox sisters successfully starting their own enterprise as a new religious concept, however, when Elisha Kent Kane, another dominant and influential personality enters the picture, our heroine has to start acting like an adult and making her own decisions. Interestingly enough, those telling her to stand up for herself and make her own decisions are still

telling her what to do. Ultimately, Maggie's own decisions matter little in the outcome of the story, and poetically, fate still plays the largest role. It almost becomes difficult for the reader to accept this is based on a true story at this point, because we want so much to believe that Maggie can somewhat control her own destiny despite the odds against her.

Overall, this book is worth every minute of reading. All of the elements that I personally value in a novel were there, and Salerni was successful in providing an entertaining and readable outlet for the story of the Fox sisters that contained several aspects of entertainment, not just one. I was pleased with the overall balance of the different elements of romance, risk and danger, family relationships, individual character dilemmas and societal concepts that were addressed.

Notable Scene:

I could not control the flush that came to my cheeks nor force down the smile that curved my lips when I came to his final paragraph. I glanced guiltily at Leah, who was scrutinizing me with her stern gaze, but she had no comment to make.

In my reply, I addressed his question, defending myself from the criticism that he had so ably wrapped in silky words. "While I cannot pretend to lofty deeds which will expand the sphere of the globe and the knowledge of mankind all at once, I affirm a smaller, more personal goal in my actions. It is the meek and humble who come to me, broken with grief, racked by guilt, unable to escape the icy grip of despair, and it is to these poor souls I address my efforts." Honey laced with tonic, indeed!

FTC Advisory: Sourcebooks Fire provided me with a copy of *We Hear the Dead*. No goody bags, sponsorships, "material connections," or bribes were exchanged for my review.

Shannon says

Absolutely dull and boring read.

PrintedAdventures says

[Kate having actual powers. Or why she turns into an alcoholic. (hide spoiler)]

Sarah Mac says

DNF. I just don't care. The narrative voice is so bland & there's no real sense of time or place.

I've read a little about the Fox history & there's no reason it should make such a lackluster novel. This is one of those books which should not have been written and/or promoted as YA simply because the historical personages are YAs themselves when events begin. There's just no urgency, no personality or flair, & Maggie's splooge about her boring life & fugly house smack of unnecessary pandering to emo tweens, not to mention the blatant infodumps that scream "I'm a regurgitated index card!"

Looks like I'll stick to nonfiction re: Fox family antics. I'd rather read primary sources -- letters, articles, newspaper accounts -- bookended by competent scholarly prose than slog through boring faux-narrative to pan for historical tidbits.

Adena says

Goodness... it took me a long time to read this book, but I refused to give it up. I didn't know about the Fox sisters prior to *We Hear the Dead*. I found them fascinating, which is partially why I continued reading the book. Unfortunately, it was just a slow story for me.

Christina (Confessions of a Book Addict) says

Before I started this book, I didn't know much about spiritualism. I actually had to look it up. According to the dictionary, "Spiritualism- noun- a system of belief or religious practice based on supposed communication with the spirits of the dead, esp. through mediums." It's crazy to think this all started in 19th century America with two young girls, Maggie and Kate Fox. They didn't intend to create this "religion," they actually wanted to spook their annoying niece. It obviously developed into something more. Maggie often feels bad with how this all came about and how she feels she is deceiving the public, but Kate, on the other hand, knows she has a "gift" and doesn't feel remorse at all.

So, you are probably wondering how they deceived first their family, their neighborhood, and then the world? They engaged in spirit rapping. For example, people would ask the spirits a question and one rap would be "no" and two raps would be "yes." The Fox sisters used everything from cracking their joints to various "high-tech" contraptions to convey the spirit's message. Maggie and Kate, with the help of their meddling older sister, Leah, springboard into fame and gain a lot of attention, as well as money from their spirit rapping. Famous people call on their household to sit for a spirit circle, such as the president's wife. This is a huge change for a once poor family. All is status quo until Maggie meets Philadelphia's Dr. Elisha Kent Kane. Their romance blossoms and he encourages her to leave spiritualism and her family behind. Essentially, he tries to groom her to be his wife, but how can a famous explorer be associated with someone engaging in spiritualism? Will the rich and famous Dr. Kane convince Maggie to leave spiritualism and her family behind? Dianne Salerni's debut novel, *We Hear the Dead*, is one that is well-researched and very engaging. I was engrossed in Maggie and Kate's story from the beginning.

First, I would like to say how unbelievable it is that these two girls fooled so many people. Incredible! You can learn more about Maggie and Kate Fox by reading this article from Salerni's website. It's truly remarkable. As I was reading this novel, it was very clear to me how much research and effort Salerni put into it. *We Hear the Dead* is filled with so much information and little anecdotes from the time period. She did a brilliant job portraying spiritualism and the 19th century. What is so inconceivable to me is the fact that you can "google" these two girls and their stories come up as well Dr. Kane's. Personally, I love historical fiction so I found it fascinating, especially when parts of the story incorporated some local experiences from Philadelphia. It was a lesson in history that, for once, I didn't mind learning!

The characters, especially Maggie and Dr. Kane, were compelling. Salerni writes most of the chapters from Maggie's point of view, but every so often there would be a chapter from Kate's, which was a nice touch. I enjoyed the character of Kate. She had more spunk to her and more grit. In fact, I wish that there were more on Kate in the novel. Interestingly, she claims to have the "second sight" and predicted many things, such as someone's untimely death.

Conversely, Maggie played by the rules a lot. She often edited herself, because what she wanted to say wasn't ladylike, which I found to be frustrating. At times I was proud of her gumption and then other times I wanted to slap her a la Moonstruck and yell, "SNAP OUT OF IT!" She's an emotional character and readers often found her in bed for days after dealing with an "excitable" event. This happened mostly when dealing with her sweet-talking beau, Dr. Elisha Kane.

Dr. Kane is from a well-off Philadelphia family. He is known as an adventurous Arctic explorer and many consider him a hero. However, I can't help but think of him as a mama's boy. I wanted so desperately to like him and to believe him when it came to Maggie, but he was ultimately ruled by his family as many from that time period were. I was hoping Maggie would needlepoint a pillow that said the famous adage, "Actions speak louder than words" and then hit Kane over the head with it, but that's my personal fantasy. Maggie never gave up on him; this was her "Mr. Big" if you will. I don't want to give too much away, but once you read this book, you'll know what I'm talking about. I feel Kane lost out on many things in his life in order to keep his family happy and his reputation stable. I can't help but wonder if in the end it was all worth it? Yes, he received many awards and medals during his time, but as of late, he has earned a stamp with his picture on it. So have The Simpsons. Just sayin'.

Dianne Salerni is a local author and a teacher (WOOT!). I was lucky enough to meet her at a book signing and she was so friendly and nice. Fortunately, I grabbed an extra signed copy for one lucky reader. As you know, I love supporting local authors! I also found out through Dianne's website that *We Hear the Dead* as been optioned for a film. I know that this novel would translate to the big screen perfectly. Fans of historical fiction will love *We Hear the Dead* and I can't wait to see what Dianne Salerni has up her sleeve next. Perhaps another local mystery?

Abbey says

I really enjoyed this--I was surprised by how quickly I was sucked into it and how enraptured I became. It didn't take long and the historical accuracies and footnotes were definite bonuses. I think this might be an author to keep an eye on.

Sarah says

I very much enjoyed this excellent, well-written and meticulously researched novel! The story was gripping, Maggie's voice engaging and the characters were all really varied and realistic.

This is the point where I would normally say "and now for my complaints" but I can't fault much about this book. I did think the plot dragged a little bit during the last third or so of the book, when Elisha was away exploring the Arctic for years on end and Maggie was stuck home pining - BUT as this was based on real events/people I suppose it couldn't deviate too far from the facts. Still, perhaps a *little* less time could've been spent on Maggie's boredom and loneliness.

Anyway, everything else about this book was great. The writing met my exacting standards, not a tense or clause out of place, but more importantly it struck the right balance between being historically correct without being alienating to the reader. Maggie and Kate were easy to like and relate to EVEN THOUGH many of their attitudes, thoughts, expressions etc were those of 19th-century girls. They seemed like Real People, not cardboard cutouts from history pages that someone had clumsily attempted to inject a bit of life and personality back into. This is not an easy thing to get right, but D.K.S. here got it spot on first try and I award her a gold star of excellence.

I also really loved the diverse and well-drawn secondary characters in this book, especially Leah, Calvin and Elisha - who I couldn't help liking despite his many mistakes and weaknesses. So charming and funny! (view spoiler)

Oh, but now that I think about it I do have one other thing to complain about, and that is the COVER which I think does not suit the book at all. It gives the distinct impression that Kate & Maggie ended up on stage in flamboyant circus tutus giving spirit readings to huge crowds. I kept expecting that to happen.
