

OCTOBER 13, 2011

by Joyce Reib

In a town park in rural northeastern Pennsylvania, magazine editor David Ascher meets free spirit Apryl Greene.

“Your publisher is paying me well to shoot you,” she tells him.

Thus begins Walter M. Brasch’s 17th book, *Before the First Snow*, a sweeping look at the ’60s and the impact it had upon subsequent generations.

Apryl, as David was quick to learn after a momentary bout of acute hypertension, was a freelance photographer, working primarily for labor unions and social service agencies, but who took occasional assignments from publishers and others in the corporate world.

For almost a year, the two—Apryl the pacifist, David the cynical journalist, both of them social activists on their own terms— would be intertwined in a love story that overlays a mystery of who are trying to seize Apryl’s land, 40 acres along the Susquehanna River, upon which she is trying to build a school for peace and the arts at a time the nation was rushing to war.

The book’s structure is interesting and unique. The odd numbered chapters focus upon the plot, presenting the story from May 1990 to Jan. 15, 1991, the day before the Persian Gulf War. In these chapters we meet unusual and memorable characters who are a part of David’s life, who become a part of Apryl’s, as the two of them race against a deadline to uncover why Apryl’s land, deeded to her by her father, an escapee from Nazi Germany, is so important that business and government would form a collusion of lies and deceit.

The even number chapters mix history and character development. They focus upon Apryl’s life from 1964, when she was the photographer for a migrant workers march for better working conditions, to the Summer of Love, the Chicago police riots, Woodstock, the Kent State massacre, and the growing awareness to preserve the planet by preserving the environment. Within 14 separate vignettes, we see her as a struggling student who was denied housing by a bigoted professor-landlord, as a mother, as a drug-addled child-woman, as a street musician, anti-war activist, and as an employee of a defense plant. In some chapters she is the main character; in others, she has but a fleeting cameo. Brasch deftly peels layer upon layer to reveal who she is, but deliberately leaves the readers believing as they learn more of her background, they are learning less about a complicated personality who defies stereotypes and judgments.

Each odd-numbered chapter ties to the next odd-numbered chapter. Each even numbered-chapter ties to the next even-numbered chapter. Skillfully weaving his story, with its plots and subplots, Brasch also ties each chapter to the next one, a remarkable feat of literary construction. Brasch mixes a heavy and welcome dose of humor and sarcasm, while underlying it with an emotional ferociousness.

As we see Apryl age from her late teens into her 40s, we also see a part of America. Two questions remain central to Brasch’s epic study—modestly, he calls it “just one slice of life”—as a nation left the idealism of the ’60s and absorbed the culture of egocentric greed that dominated the emerging “Me Generation,” why did the many fall into this lifestyle—and why didn’t Apryl.

*Before the First Snow* is provocative and edgy, sparing no institution, including the media, but it is also first-rate entertainment and a literary masterpiece that magnificently captures a three-decade period in American history, and asks the readers to reflect upon their own lives and values.

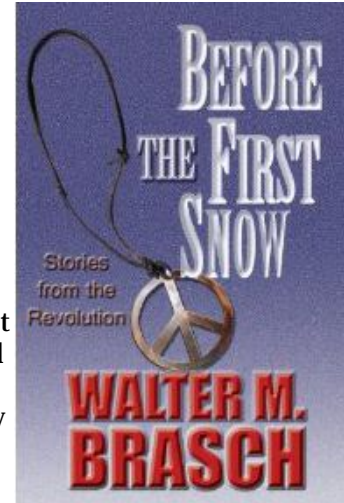
Brasch, who lives in the central Susquehanna Valley, is an award-winning syndicated columnist and former newspaper and magazine reporter and editor. He is also professor emeritus of mass communications at Bloomsburg University.



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*by Walter M. Brasch*

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In Massachusetts, a nuclear reactor is weeks from going to full power. In Pennsylvania, a musician and a magazine editor are working against deadlines to uncover a conspiracy that flows to the plans of a proposed nuclear waste site 300 miles away in Pennsylvania. Jobs in economically depressed regions are what government and the industry have promised. On the eve of the Persian Gulf War, with Iraq having invaded Kuwait and now holding 10 percent of the oil in the world, they are playing to the fears of Americans by pushing for clean nuclear energy. What they haven't said is that real estate deception, government bungling, and manufacturing defects threaten the health and safety of the people. In this novel, award-winning journalist Walter M. Brasch slowly and meticulously builds a scenario of greed, corruption, and intrigue, set against the backdrop of social protest. In so doing, he weaves a compelling story of history and contemporary American values between 1964 and 1991, every bit as powerful and timely today as they were more than two decades earlier.



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For too long much of society lived as second class citizens. "Before the First Snow: Stories from the Revolution" is a compilation of stories that was born out of the 1960s and the revolutions that called for equality among race, gender, and sexuality, staring down the United States government entering a war viewed as utterly pointless and without value. A time of social turbulence, "Before the First Snow" is an intriguing piece of history from the personal stories that put it all together.