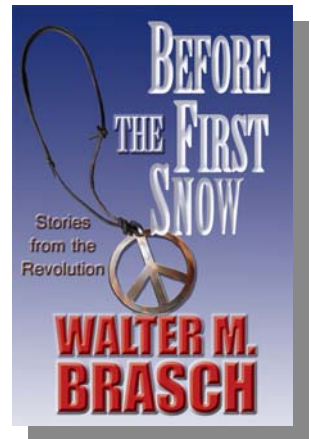


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BRIEF SYNOPSIS

“There is in every true woman’s heart a spark of heavenly fire . . . which kindles up, and beams and blazes in the dark hour of adversity.”

—Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book*

Birmingham. Delano. Chicago. Kent State.
War. The Environment. Worker Exploitation.
Hippies. Yuppies. Cops and politicians.

People were marching. People were protesting.

The news media reported, discussed, editorialized, lampooned, misreported, and cynically dismissed the new social movements forged from alienation. And then the 1960s dissolved into the 1970s, evolved into the "Me generation," began a slow descent into the "Happy Days" mentality of the 1950s, and then jerked into the reality by the fear of cultures and events the people didn't understand.

Mixing humor and pathos, award-winning journalist Walter M. Brasch weaves an intricate psychological and social issues mystery of insight into the people and culture that is America. The places are urban Boston, suburban northern and rural California, and rural northeastern Pennsylvania. The time is January 1964 to Jan. 15, 1991, the day before the U.S. went to war in the Persian Gulf.

Major Social Issues: energy, environment, anti-war movement, First Amendment issues, government intrusion upon individual rights and government "cooperation" with corporations, labor/unions/worker rights, the alternative and mainstream media, all with a focus of music, photography, and journalism as powerful ways to record the history of a nation.

The principal characters are:

Apryl Greene (aka Rachel Greenberg), a flower child of the '60s, a musician and photographer primarily for labor unions and social issues causes, who had worked for civil rights and for peace, who experienced college and the communes, who once held an establishment job. Now, two decades after the revolution, all she wants is to build a school for peace and the arts, but powerful forces have already begun a process to legally seize her land. As we unthread some of this intrigue, we learn that Apryl's land is part of an undisclosed tract that government and a large industry needs in

order to complete its purchase of land to build the nation's largest nuclear waste disposal facility. But, there are problems with that plant, and with both the ownership and the regulators. Apryl is faced not only by trying to build a school for peace in a nation rushing to war, but also a compelling need to stop the proliferation of nuclear energy in a society that is torn by its dependence upon oil and the need for an alternative. As the novel progresses, the mystery accelerates, leading to an explosive conclusion based upon existing legislation and practices.

David Ascher, executive editor of *Century*, a 375,000-circulation social issues magazine. He's cynical, liberal, and burdened with the responsibilities of editorship. While it appears we are looking at Apryl through David's narrative, we are really seeing the nature of American media and, more important, David and how he has changed.

Sam Weissmann, editor-in-chief/publisher of *Century*. He was a newspaper reporter more than 20 years. Had the New York *Herald Tribune* not have been merged and then destroyed in 1967 by management incompetence and an industry that had already begun a descent into placing profit above courage and the fight for truth, he would still have been the national correspondent for what once was one of the nation's most respected newspapers. However, the death of the *Herald-Tribune* would ironically lead to the birth of *Century*, which would become one of the major voices of social justice and the New Left.

Before the First Snow is 29 separate but inter-related short stories, each building upon the previous one. The odd-numbered chapters, literary fiction with a humor base, carry the plot as Apryl Greene tries to build her school for peace, while David tries to balance the business-management demands of a magazine with the demands of social justice. The even-numbered chapters, more non-fiction than literary fiction, are vignettes and news stories David Ascher had written for newspapers and magazines during the previous 25 years. Some of these articles focus upon major news events; some are personality profiles. Individually, these seem to be separate, but they are the thread that holds the story together, for each is an insight into the life of Apryl Greene, who sometimes is a major character, sometimes a tangential passerby.

Before the First Snow is an insight not just of a few moments in history but of lessons of contemporary American culture and values, lessons about people, attitudes, issues, and governments, all of which have become even more relevant since 9/11. The fusion of history, contemporary society, and character make this a powerful insight into the collective consciousness of a people.

“The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil but because of those who look on and do nothing.” —Albert Einstein