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Walsh: Life and times of an MSU student in the late 1960s

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Larry Neitzert's debut novel "Maggie's Farm" is a thought-provoking, entertaining tale of life on and off campus at Michigan State University in the late 1960s.

It focuses on the tough decisions facing Robert Hartman, a student returning to the East Lansing campus after a disastrous term where he managed to flunk all of his classes.

He's trying to get back to school again, but must meet strict new requirements to continue. Hartman, who comes from a small Michigan farming community, has real motivation. He's up to the challenge, even if it means less drinking, dope-smoking and partying.

Robert has another major reason to continue his studies - if he doesn't, he'll lose his student deferment and become draft eligible, with Vietnam a likely destination.

He's got an interesting group of friends, including Harry, a roommate who's the leader of the local draft resistance and Woody, a hard-drinking Vietnam veteran.

Tommy McKnight, a childhood friend, is killed while on duty in Vietnam; McKnight's sister Jenny, who's also attending the university, is devastated by the loss.

Most of the book is devoted to an assortment of interesting insights into the challenges facing Robert; his life changes dramatically when he becomes involved in an intense emotional relationship.

The intriguing debut novel flows smoothly, but contains a few surprises, and the memorable conclusion is likely to linger long after the last page is turned.

Neitzert, a Morrice resident who received his bachelor's and master's degrees from MSU, deftly deals with many of the important issues of the time period, with worried students pondering a multitude of life choices.

He utilizes campus and national events; parties and bars scenes are provide a vibrant backdrop that showcases Robert's emotional growth and maturation.

An adjunct instructor in social studies at Owosso's Baker College since 2006, Neitzert taught in Morrice and spent 18 years as a teacher and coach in the Webberville Public Schools. He's published poetry and written a series of travel articles about Vietnam and Bulgaria.

The attractively designed, self-published book (Xlibris) is available as a paperback for \$19.95 or as a hardback for \$29.99.

Larry Neitzert will be signing copies of his books at 6 p.m. Thursday at Everybody Reads, 2019 Michigan Ave. Lansing.

Ray Walsh is the owner of East Lansing's Curious Book Shop.