devotee of a questionable female guru named Madame Vilmorin, had simply gone out walking one night in the moonlight, dived into a tide pool in the shallow surf, cracked his head open and died.

Everyone else in Ruth’s immediate world wants to take the story as it is. After all, Jim is dead; what can be done about it now? But Ruth, suffering her son’s loss as

Carolyn See’s most recent novel is “Golden Days.” She teaches English at the University of California, Los Angeles.

EDWARD R. MURROW
An American Original.
By Joseph E. Persico.

By Joan Konner

If all the dragons, temptations and trials that a hero must face on his perilous path through life, none has become more challenging than the encounter with a biographer. So it is a relief to travel between the hard covers of a biography of a modern American hero and return from the journey with the hero and the ideals that inspired him, and us, still intact.

Edward R. Murrow is a man whose name has become a synonym for quality, courage and integrity in broadcast journalism and whose life was the enactment, and in some ways the fulfillment, of the broadcast journalist’s dream. If one is curious to find out what makes some people stand out above the rest, what makes a person a hero, the story is in “Edward R. Murrow: An American Original.” Murrow had talent, drive, intelligence, personality and vision. Add to those qualities the power of his good looks — that piercing gaze, those heavy, furrowed brows and that voice that seemed to resound from some inner sanctum. In sum, he added up to more than most of us.

In comprehensive detail, with dramatic, well-told anecdotes and insight and perceptiveness, Joseph E. Persico describes a man of extraordinary natural gifts, human failings and stunning accomplishments.

Here is one example. It is April 1945. Murrow is with Gen. George Patton’s Third Army, reporting for CBS Radio from Germany. He enters Buchenwald with the troops and is engulfed in a scene of unimaginable horror — living skeletons with dead eyes, corpses heaped like refuse, small mountains of children’s shoes — a scene for which no one who is civilized could be prepared.

Other correspondents filed their stories immediately. Murrow needed time, and so he challenged those twin tyrants of journalism — competition and daily deadlines. He said he needed time to “acquire detachment.” He might have said he needed time to think, a grossly underrated ingredient of good reporting.

Three days later he filed his report. It may have lagged behind the others in timing, but it soared above them in telling the story. Newspapers carried his text in full; The London Express gave it the front page. The British Broadcasting Company repeated the broadcast. Critics rated it a classic of radio reporting.

Mr. Persico quotes this script (and others) in full. After all these years, it is still exceptional — coiled, compact, staccato with one concrete image after another, taut with restrained rage, living testimony not only to a stern and heroic time but to a stern and heroic talent. Murrow alone felt that he did not do the story justice.

The power of his reporting was not the clue to his accomplishment. It was that he, in this and countless other situations, questioned the rules, challenged hypotheses and followed his instincts to explore beyond the boundaries of broadcast journalism and to increase public knowledge and understanding. From breaking ranks to petition Churchill for permission to broadcast outdoors (so that the life-threatening reality of the London blitz could be heard on radio and experienced

Continued on next page
What Made Him a Hero

Continued from preceding page

by the American audience) to supervising and anchor­
ing the famed television report on Joseph McCarthy, Murrow tested the possibilities of broadcast news and set the standard.

Mr. Persico, the author of "The Imperial Rockefeller," a biography of Nelson Rockefeller, takes us on a well-organized and readable trip through Murrow's public and personal life. He was born in North Carolina in 1908. His mother was an overprotective, hard-driving moralist, his father a hardworking subsistence farmer who moved the family to Washington State in 1914 and went to work for a lumber company. Murrow grew up in a home without telephones or indoor plumbing, worked as a lumberjack and became a star student at Washington State College. He came to New York City to work as an administrator of international education programs, and that led to a job at the young CBS network as "director of talks" in the public affairs division. He did so well that in 1937, at age 29, he was sent to London as head of European operations.

The timing was exquisite for Murrow, for the network for and for history. Europe's peace and civilization were collapsing under Hitler's ramp­age, and Murrow brought the story alive for American listeners through his own reporting and by recruiting a brilliant corps of correspondents (among them William Shirer, Eric Sevareid and Howard K. Smith). Until then, broadcast news had been a poor relation to print journalism. Murrow and his literate, articulate "boys" made it independent, respectable and important — what Murrow called "the biggest classroom in the world." He believed in journalism as education, a role too often unrecognized or, worse, ignored.

Not incidentally, one of Murrow's boys was a woman, Marvin Breckinridge. In another example of breaking the rules, he hired her, instructing her to speak in a low voice. She became his correspondent in the Netherlands, the first woman to hold such a position at CBS. Do not take from this that Murrow viewed women as equals. He was a man's man, one of the boys, hard­drinking, hard-living, sustained by a corps of devoted women — his wife, whose acting talent he refused to acknowledge lest it divert her from him, his secretary and at least one woman with whom he had a long-term extramarital affair.

After 1945, Murrow returned to America as a star newscaster-commentator, and then in the 1950's began a reluctant transition to television. The centerpiece of his television accomplishments was the weekly documentary series "See It Now." Hard-hitting and thorough, it won awards and fame, sometimes for the enemies it made, including exploiters of migrant labor and some powerful people in Washington. Unlike to-

day's celebrity anchors ("celebrity" and "star" were descriptions he despised), who are "created" by the mere fact of their appearance on the screen, Murrow brought his own individual force of character to the medium. He took on challenging subjects out of an ingrained belief in the American ideals of justice and fairness and a journalist's commitment to an informed public, on which a healthy democracy relies.

Inevitably, his aggressive reporting brought him into conflict with the management of the growing business enterprise that CBS had become. Though Murrow was an invaluable asset to the company, CBS's founder and board chairman, William Paley, and its president, Frank Stanton, retreated from the trouble Murrow was causing with sponsors. Murrow, in turn, chafed as the network's center of gravity moved, in his view, from substance to entertainment. In a celebrated 1958 speech, with prescience he urged the major networks to "get up off our fat surpluses and recognize that television ... is being used to distract, delude, amuse and insulate us."

Eventually CBS began to reduce Murrow's on-air time and authority. But before the point of firing or resignation was reached, a graceful way out appeared in the form of an offer to head the United States Information Agency in the Kennedy Administration. Murrow served there until lung cancer — the result of a four-pack-a-day smoking habit — struck him down. He died on April 27, 1965, at the age of 57.

Mr. Persico is an able reporter and a fine storytell­er whose taste, tact and skill have produced an appro­priate biography, less sprawling and anecdotal than A. M. Sperber's and with more perspective than Alex­ander Kendrick's, which was published soon after Murrow's death. We should be grateful to this book for reminding us that television once had, and on occasion still has — when someone is willing to put up a fight — the surprising and the exceptional.

Never Settle for the First Response

When Joseph E. Persico went exploring for the human face behind the heroic image of Ed­ward R. Murrow, he mimicked his subject's style as a reporter. He talked with ordinary people who had watched Murrow in his unguarded moments, those who had known him as a lover, who had drunk too much with him, who had helped him in his college days as a campus politician.

Most of them had their own off-told stories about Murrow, but Mr. Persico found that he could extract much more personal and revealing mate­rial if he borrowed one of his subject's favorite interview techniques.

"When [Murrow] spoke with politi­cians or celebrities, he listened to their first answer to his question and then stared at them expectantly, waiting for them to go deeper," Mr. Persico said in a telephone interview from his home in Albany. "Inevitably, they did. He would throw away the first response and use the much more interesting ma­terial in the unrehearsed version."

To understand Murrow's character, Mr. Per­sico tracked down his first college girlfriend. She had become pregnant, dropped out of school and moved to another state. Murrow arranged for an abortion and held her in his arms all night after­ward, but he never saw her again after that.

As Mr. Persico came to see him, Murrow suf­fered from an internal conflict between his prole­tarian roots (his father was an engineer on a loko­motive) and his taste for the patrician life.

The author had discovered the same kind of ten­sion, only in reverse, in Nelson Rocke­feller, the subject of a previous book. "Rockefeller was to the manor born, but as a politician he acquired some proletarian touches," he said.

Mr. Persico's next book will re­quire all the investigative skills he has developed in pursuing Murrow. He is writing a biography of William J. Ca­sey, the former Director of Cen­tral Intelligence.

ALBERT SCARDINO