



Murrow: His Life and Times

Ann M. Sperber

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Murrow is the biography of America's foremost broadcast journalist, Edward R. Murrow. At twenty-nine, he was the prototype of a species new to communications--an eyewitness to history with power to reach millions. His wartime radio reports from London rooftops brought the world into American homes for the first time. His legendary television documentary *See It Now* exposed us to the scandals and injustices within our own country. Friend of Presidents, conscience of the people, Murrow remained an enigma--idealistic, creative, self-destructive. In this portrait, based on twelve years of research, A. M. Sperber reveals the complexity and achievements of a man whose voice, intelligence, and honesty inspired a nation during its most profound and vulnerable times.

Murrow: His Life and Times Details

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Author : Ann M. Sperber

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Cws says

92M

Tom Franklin says

A.M. Sperber's biography of Edward R. Murrow is exhaustive. At almost 800 pages, Sperber's ten years of research details the events of Murrow's life from his days as the youngest son of a poor, hardscrabble family through his years in radio, television and, finally, as part of the Kennedy administration.

By Sperber's own admission -- and those of the people who knew Murrow -- he was a very private man whom many knew of but few really knew well. Murrow was guarded with his emotions, unless it was anger and/or frustration with the powers-that-be or social injustice.

Murrow was a workaholic, driven to put a human face on events and to educate his countrymen to the important issues of their day. The best sense of Murrow as a human being is limited to his words as a broadcaster and letter-writer. Through those, the reader gets an idea of the things that mattered the most to him.

Ronald says

Quite simply, the best biography I have read in years. Thoroughly researched and absolutely accessible. After all, when you invent your own job and then witness the creation of an entire industry because of your actions, as Edward R. Murrow did, that's the stuff of legend.

Vincent Lombardo says

This book is exhaustive and exhausting! There is a lot of detail, but the book is not cohesive and lacks a thesis. I slogged, skipped, and skimmed and did not enjoy it at all. I only gave it two stars because Sperber did an incredible amount of research!

Jerry says

The prologue to Murrow: His Life and Times begins with Murrow's famous 1958 speech at the Radio-Television News Directors Association. It's a speech that, if it was original at the time, has been the theme of journalism's insiders ever since. The same arguments still are made today, and it seems as though there are no solutions.

Amazing the difference between press rights then and now. Murrow and the other networks had to request permission to broadcast live reports from in the city during bombings. Because they had to borrow BBC radio facilities to transmit, and the BBC was run by the British government, the censors could easily enforce their bans.

We are told today that the Germans believe Londoners will rise up and demand a new government, one that will make peace with Germany. It's more likely that they'll rise up and murder a few German pilots who came down by parachute. The life of a parachutist would not be worth much in the East End of London tonight...

He was in the White House the day The Japanese bombed Hawaii. He stood on a rooftop in London as the bombs fell. He walked Buchenwald after it was freed but before it was emptied. He watched the Nazis and then the communists kill his friends in the intelligentsia. He was in Berlin when the wall went up. He was there when McCarthy fell. He ran the United States Information Agency as Kennedy ramps up the war in Vietnam.

He was a television pioneer who feared television, a friend to socialists but who feared communism, a government official who feared government. It takes a lot of pages to cover that kind of powerful personality, and Ann Sperber gives him over 700 in the hardback version. If you are interested in Murrow, or the history of television news, or the history of the United States, I think you will enjoy slogging through this tome.

Scott says

Aside from vague memories of seeing Murrow on television in the fifties, my knowledge of Murrow didn't extend beyond his broadcasting from London during the blitz and his later conflicts with Senator Joseph McCarthy. I now realize that those were just a couple of highlights in a long and very influential career in radio and television news as well as serving in the Kennedy administration.

Sperber clearly did a ton of research, and takes pains to be balanced – for instance, when witnesses or participants have conflicting memories of an event she'll give both versions. Nonetheless, you never have trouble recognizing when she really doesn't like specific people in the story – they bring out her snarky side.

All in all, a great biography of a key figure in the development of network news reporting.

Annette says

Unbelievably detailed account of Murrow and his heroic stand against McCarthy.

Richard says

A solid, well-researched book. I've been familiar with Edward R. Murrow for most of my life, but never really knew the details of his career. (He died when I was a toddler.) The book was fairly dense; in a good way during the more interesting parts, which for me was primarily the time in London during WWII, but also the period when Murrow took on Senator McCarthy. But at other points the amount of detail kind of slowed me down.

Kevin says

A fascinating look at an American legend. He was the voice of CBS radio. He was the face of CBS television. A correspondent superstar. From his pre-WWII coverage to his eventual acceptance of a post in the Kennedy administration he dealt with poor health and, bizarrely, shyness. He covered innumerable events, The Blitz, William Shirer, the McCarthy Era and his eventual fall at CBS were some of the most interesting and extensively covered areas of the book. He's the type of reporter, the type of person, who fought for those without power and fought for what he thought was right, something he seemed to identify better than most. He saw problems in the world and did what he could to bring those problems to the attention of American public, unfortunately, the American public was immersed in the quiz show craze.

Bob Young says

Not as good as Caro on Robert Moses or Caro on LBJ...but very good.

Zeph says

One of the best biographies ever written.

Karl Schaeffer says

Wow! I enjoyed the heck out of this book. It's not the easiest read. Painstakingly detailed. A great biography of Murrow as well as a great view of America in the 20th century. Especially engaging are the chapters covering pre-World War II and the early 50's- Korea and the McCarthy era. Murrow was the only guy to confront McCarthy when everyone else was running scared of him. Murrow defined journalism in the 20th century. He was not a talent. He was a journalist. We need more like him. He laid the ground rules for public service broadcasting and public TV/radio. I just recently finished a biography on Vince Lombardi. Both Murrow and Lombardi were public figures during the 40's, 50's and 60's. I'm thinking Murrow had a greater impact.

I especially love the following Murrow quote. Unfortunately, I'm thinking what Murrow warned against is coming true. We may have already lost "real... democracy" in our country.

"There can be no real... democracy unless the people understand the basic political, social and economic issues upon which their welfare depends...

If a deceived or confused public is betrayed into creating or allowing to be created an America in which it loses faith, democracy will not survive... If the people finally come to believe either that they cannot grasp or they cannot cope with America's problems, or that those who inform.. and those who act are inept or malign or both, then distrust, dissatisfaction, fear and laziness can combine to turn them to desperation to that "strong man" who can take them only to destruction...

There are many faint-hearted students of the American scene... The more the pattern of information contrives to be confused, distorted and manipulated, the more likely are these prophets to be right."

Rahadyan says

Murrow is one of my childhood heroes. I enjoyed reading this.
