Joseph Wershba, Early Pioneer of Broadcast Journalism, One of "Murrow's Boys," Dies at Age 90

By Sanford Socolow


Morley Safer: "Honor, integrity, accept tance of responsibility and...a decorous demeanor that could seduce the most reluctant scoundrels."

Phil Scheffler (executive editor of 60 Minutes, now retired): "The most self-confident person I have ever known, certain of who he was and what he was."

Joe's professional life spanned the modern era of broadcast, from radio in the 1940s until his retirement as a stalwart producer on 60 Minutes in 1988. When Don Hewitt creator of the broadcast, convinced CBS to launch the program, Joe was one of six producers Hewitt recruited to create the tough segments which made the broadcast (and, incidentally, Mike Wallace) so famous.

Few remember that Joe, shortly after he started at CBS in 1944, was an on air reporter in Washington, doing a daily interview segment, "People in the News," on the same local TV broadcast "anchored" (the word hadn't been coined yet) by Walter Cronkite.

But he became famous — some on the other side of the political spectrum would say "infamous" — as one of the stalwarts on the Edward R. Murrow team, followed, of course, by a 20-year run at 60 Minutes from its inception and for the ensuing two decades, and a newspaper columnist for the old New York Post, his first love.

Edward R. Murrow, who stood against witch hunt and fear, 1956.

Edward R. Murrow, who stood against witch hunt and fear, 1956.

The Oldest Press Club in the United States

March 2012

Joseph Wershba, one of Murrow's boys, "the old professor," beloved and revered, one of the greats of American broadcast journalism. A pioneer in early television, a brave and relentless foe of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy during this nation's reign of terror, a founding producer and reporter for 60 Minutes from its inception and for the ensuing two decades, and a newspaper columnist for the old New York Post, his first love.

The Second Indochina War: What Could Have Been...

By Seymour Topping

Huang Hua, my closest and revered Chinese friend, died on November 24, 1989, at the age of 98, and was eulogized in Beijing's Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery by President Hu Jintao for his service as a distinguished diplomat, foreign minister and Vice Premier. His death evoked a painful memory of an historic episode in which I became involved at his behest. The episode was a forerunner of the Second Indochina War involving the United States. If what transpired then had taken a different turn, the Vietnam tragedy might have been averted.

My involvement began in Geneva on the morning of July 18, 1954 with a telephone call from Huang Hua summoning me to meet with him immediately. I was then with the Associated Press covering the Geneva Conference on Vietnam and Huang Hua was the deputy to Premier Zhou Enlai, head of the Chinese Communist delegation. At that juncture, the conference on the future of Vietnam was at stalemate with the fear prevalent that the French Indochina War might expand into a nuclear conflict involving the major powers. The great French fort at Dien Bien Phu was encircled by Ho Chi Minh's divisions and on the verge of collapse. President Eisenhower was contemplating relieving the French garrison with an air strike of 200 Navy planes. Off the Vietnamese coast American aircraft carriers armed with nuclear weapons had been put on alert. When I went to see Huang Hua in his hotel room I did not realize that a high stakes game was about to be played out that afternoon at the negotiating table involving the United States, Britain, France, the Soviet Union and China.

I first became friendly with...
On River Shannon

By Jack Darcy

NEW YORK

Early in 1971 when I was a contributing editor at the still young New York Magazine, I made editor Clay Felker an offer he couldn't refuse: devote an entire issue to the Irish-American community for St. Patrick's Day. I put together the issue — "Notes On The New Irish" — which featured pieces by Pete Hamill, Joe Flaherty, Dennis Duggan, Gail Sheehy and myself.

It was a good issue and sold well. After it appeared, the Irish Tourist Board made Dennis Duggan and me an offer we could not refuse. They would fly us and three other journalists to Ireland, put us up in Dublin, then provide us with an Emerald Line Cruiser that we would sail down the River Shannon. An Irish jungle.

Our recruiting station to sign up a crew was the Lion's Head tavern in the Village where Duggan and I regularly re-freshment. In short order, Nick Browne, an author and Village Voice writer, and freelance magazine photographer Billy Powers signed on. It was also very good fortune that poet Paul Schriffin, another Lion's Head regular, was putting in his papers after 25 years as a Merchant Mariner, ending his career as a full Master (Captain!). We made him an offer he couldn't refuse. Now we had a real Captain, a professional man of the sea who could steer a boat. On a Thursday night, Duggan, Billy, Powers, Schriffin and Darcy met at the Lion's Head for drinks. Amid applause and great envy, we got into a checker cab to JFK, and got on a plane to Dublin. Nick Browne was in Paris covering the Arc de Triomphe horserace — the French Kentucky Derby — and would meet us in Dublin.

DUBLIN

At Dublin Airport we were welcomed graciously by a Tourist Board official. She led us out to a waiting motocar: a classic 1950 silver grey Daimler with long curving fenders that resembled waves breaking. The driver was an impressive fellow in a tailored grey chauffeur's uniform and...
Huang Hua in Beijing (then named Pe­
king) shortly after my arrival in China in 1965. I had been invited by the head of the Communist branch of Executive
Headquarters, the truce organization set
up by General George Marshall, Presi-
dent Truman's envoy, in the effort to bring
about a ceasefire in the civil war be­
tween Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-
shek. In 1936 Huang Hua has been the
translator for Edgar Snow, author of the
classic Red Star Over China, during the
American's interview with Mao in Yenan, the isolated Communist base in
Western China. Huang Hua's trust in me
was such that in November of 1946, he
arranged for me to fly to Yenan, then
blockaded by Chiang Kai-shek's troops, to
meet with Communist leader­
Huang Hua greeted warmly when
I entered his Geneva hotel room, but I
thought about the gorilla in the middle
of the room and what a wuss I was
being.

It was a humid August day and at one
point Levon suggested I kick off my
shoes and take a walk to his lake.

"Levon," I said, "Why are you doing
this interview in your underwear?"

His answer didn't rise to the same
level. It also didn't make any sense, con­
sidering we were sitting in a screened
porch in our underwear. His doctor had
told him it would be good for his health.

"Levon," I said, "Why are you doing
this interview in your underwear?"

He shrugged, "I don't know."

"But giving the matters much thought,
later, I decided that as so often is the
case, the subject's world view is just as
relevant as his actions. The man had
felt comfortable enough with me to do
an interview in his underwear. I had
established trust.

Joyce Wadler is at work on her
journalism memoir, "It Was Over When I
called," or why it is smarter to get
someone else to write it.
A Monk Swimming

Blessed with days of sunny, warm weather and into Killaloe, our destination, there were songs, poems, stories and Redbreast Irish whiskey and toasted Ireland's beloved sons in the mountains of County Cavan. It begins as a small trout stream then widens and descends, meanders south for 244 miles through seven counties, many lakes and locks, through villages and towns, before emptying into the Atlantic Ocean.

The river is largely shallow, peaceful, serene. Over the next five days we would swing north to Lough Ree and the ruined Rockingham estate, then south to Rooskey, onto Athlone, across Lough Derg into Portumna, then across Lough Ree and into Killaloe, our destination. Blessed with days of sunny, warm weather this rain soaked island had not seen in years, we cruised by open fields where farmers were saving the hay, by patches of fuchsia hedges with red blood blossoms, by rolling hillocks marked with yellow gorse, passing by green meadows with lumbering cows, grazing sheep, majestic horses and among them donkeys with sad faces and the sign of the cross on their backs. There was a timeless quality on the river.

On board all was not pastoral. For traveling with Dennis Duggan is to be a supporting player in his musical comedy view of life. On board he was dispensing laughter, spreading joy and high spirits. From day one, he kept in character, this time playing the feverish eyed, jaw chomping, growling role of Robert Newton as Long John Sil­ver. "Arrrr Captain, Master Jackie is interfering with himself in the bow. Give me run captain."

Or: "Arrr Captain, First Mate Browne, he bruised the port this morning. Captain. More grab for me captain." We all played our parts.

ROOSKEY

Downstream we docked in the village of Rooskey, wandered along its main street seeking food and drink. Barking dogs were about but no sign of people. Rooskey appeared to be completely asleep. Then an old woman appeared.

Browne said: "Good evening ma'am, could you tell us where everyone is?" "They're in church at services," she said. "You lads should be there too."

We walked on, then saw the big sign on the road out of town:

Continued on Page 6
Continued on Page 4

very blunt when offering advice to a would-be memoirist. First, he said, “I wrote about that which shamed me. And the next thing, I wrote about those things that make me absolutely furious and angry. And number three, write about that which you are passionate about that is positive.”

These formulations were not the memoir itself. Malachy was at pains to clarify, but they could be a valuable prelude to creating the actual work. “The first one, shame; you can write it, and put it aside. Once you get it out of your system, it clears the path.” One’s anger and one’s positive passions, he went on, turn into valuable material to work with. (And of course, one can turn to shame and work on that too, if you regard it as an important part of the story being told.)

Sir Harry summed it up this way, explaining why he perpetually selected his grand exposition titles “The American Century” and “They Made America.” that together had taken him 17 years to write. “I’m a Millenarian,” he explained, “one who believes the world is coming to an end. I believe it begins now.”

“I thought, I’m not going down that coal mine again. There’s one thing I know the New York I Yangshuo he never had to begin, and that was me. And nobody can say ‘Oh that’s not how it happened.”

Not unsurprisingly, Sir Harry discovered that “the thing we’re trying to grapple with is the problem of reconciling with people — and with ourselves.” All three memoirists, to varying degrees, had taken the trouble to supplement their own subjective recollections through some cross-checking with recorded history, or with friends’ and families’ own recollections, or with both.

Today’s times do seem to be favoring the so-called “reported memoir” which is the kind of recollection that can be found in publishers’ catalogues — the sub-genre in which personal recollections are accompanied by some consultation of other, independent sources. (All three discussants, by the way, were withering in their dismissal of the James Frey debacle of 2006, when his so-called memoir “A Million Little Pieces” was revealed to be a series of lies, or at least a “true story in a fictionalized form.”)

Sir Harry: “If we can approach the truth or get to the truth, it will make life better — for everybody. It’s almost like we’ve had all my life, trying to find the truth in complicated stories.”

Malachy was as often, reflectively restrained. “I don’t have any ambition, rea­lly, literary or otherwise. I had dreams — of having a bed, and a book, and being able to read in bed. And I’ve found that. And I’ve found love.”

Mary, who is a poet of great precision as well as a memoirist, talked of her process of reconciling with people — and with the unchangeable past events — that she had written about with often horrifying impact; and she ended by quoting a friend and confidante, whose husband had told her to write: “Take no care for your dig­nity. Lucky for me, I didn’t have any to lose.”

The round-table discussion was captured on video and may be viewed on the web at www.vimeo.com/davidereschuk/Tereschuk’s column, THE MEDIA BEAT, www.tereschuk.com and www.huffingtonpost.com/david-tereschuk.
Remembering Joe

Continued from Page 1

Joe, shortly after marriage, was moved to Washington, and Shirley was to follow to some future date. Their marriage violated then CBS Corporate policy which did not allow for married couples to work in the same areas. But her boss, Ted Church, knew and one day he told Shirley he was to lay off three persons in a economic cutback. If she would quit (she was going to anyway when the time came to move to D.C.), Church told her, it would save the job of one staffer. She did. That story is told in the movie, in a compressed way, Shirley says, but it is the romantic subtext in the movie.

The stories Joe was attached to are too numerous to catalogue here. Notable, the story of Milo Radlovich an Air Force officer forced out of the service because his sister and father, NOT Milo, were suspected of suspicious behavior. This was the first arrow in the MurrowCntroversy and hardships of frontline troops.

Although it was thought Joe favored stories involving passionate, grumpy men and women, he also did sensitive, positive stories about office personalities. The roly-poly Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kolleck who unwittingly led Joe into an interview that would launch him on his writing career. Joe was one of the team which went to Korea with Murrow, at the height of the shooting war, to do a memorable documentary, “Christmas in Korea,” which dramatized as nothing before, the agonies and hardships of frontline troops.

Perhaps the most memorable project of all was the Murrow broadcast about the demagogic Senator from Wisconsin, Joe McCarthy, which was broadcast 20 years ago this month (March). In these pages, Joe wrote, in a profile of Murrow, “Murdor didn’t kill off McCarthy or McClyshman, he helped destroy America’s incredible slide toward a native form of fascism.” That sums up Joe’s modesty and patriotism.

Joe, shortly after marriage, was moved to Washington, and Shirley was to follow to some future date. Their marriage violated then CBS Corporate policy which did not allow for married couples to work in the same areas. But her boss, Ted Church, knew and one day he told Shirley he was to lay off three persons in an economic cutback. If she would quit (she was going to anyway when the time came to move to D.C.), Church told her, it would save the job of one staffer. She did. That story is told in the movie, in a compressed way, Shirley says, but it is the romantic subtext in the movie.

The stories Joe was attached to are too numerous to catalogue here. Notable, the story of Milo Radlovich an Air Force officer forced out of the service because his sister and father, NOT Milo, were suspected of suspicious behavior. This was the first arrow in the MurrowCountersmack, but whenever we hear it said that it’s not the destination but the journey that matters, we think about the time we spent on the River Shannon.

Dorothy Strelsin Foundation Grant

The Society of the Silurians wishes to express its gratitude to Dorothy Strelsin Foundation, a supporter of theater, this literary world and other aspects of human cultural life, for a grant of $2,000. The grant, issued at the end of 2011, was used to finance the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.

New Members

Andrew Mink
U.S. Correspondent, former Editor in Chief, Forbes, Hugh, (German-Swiss Today), Zürich, correspondent, German-Swiss newspapers and magazines

Jerry Kirshenbaum
Executive Vice President, Rubenstein Associates, 2011, was made possible through the efforts of one of our members, who prefers to remain anonymous. We thank that member and we thank the Foundation.