

22.11.08

Home-spun Christmas

WITH

GORDON RAMSAY'S ITALIAN FEAST
JANE MACQUITTY'S 100 BEST WINTER WINES
BUNTING AND BAUBLES
PARLOUR GAMES AND PARTY FROCKS



MAGAZINE

PLUS TED TURNER, THE MAN IN FULL ★ JANICE TURNER MEETS ABBA'S BJÖRN

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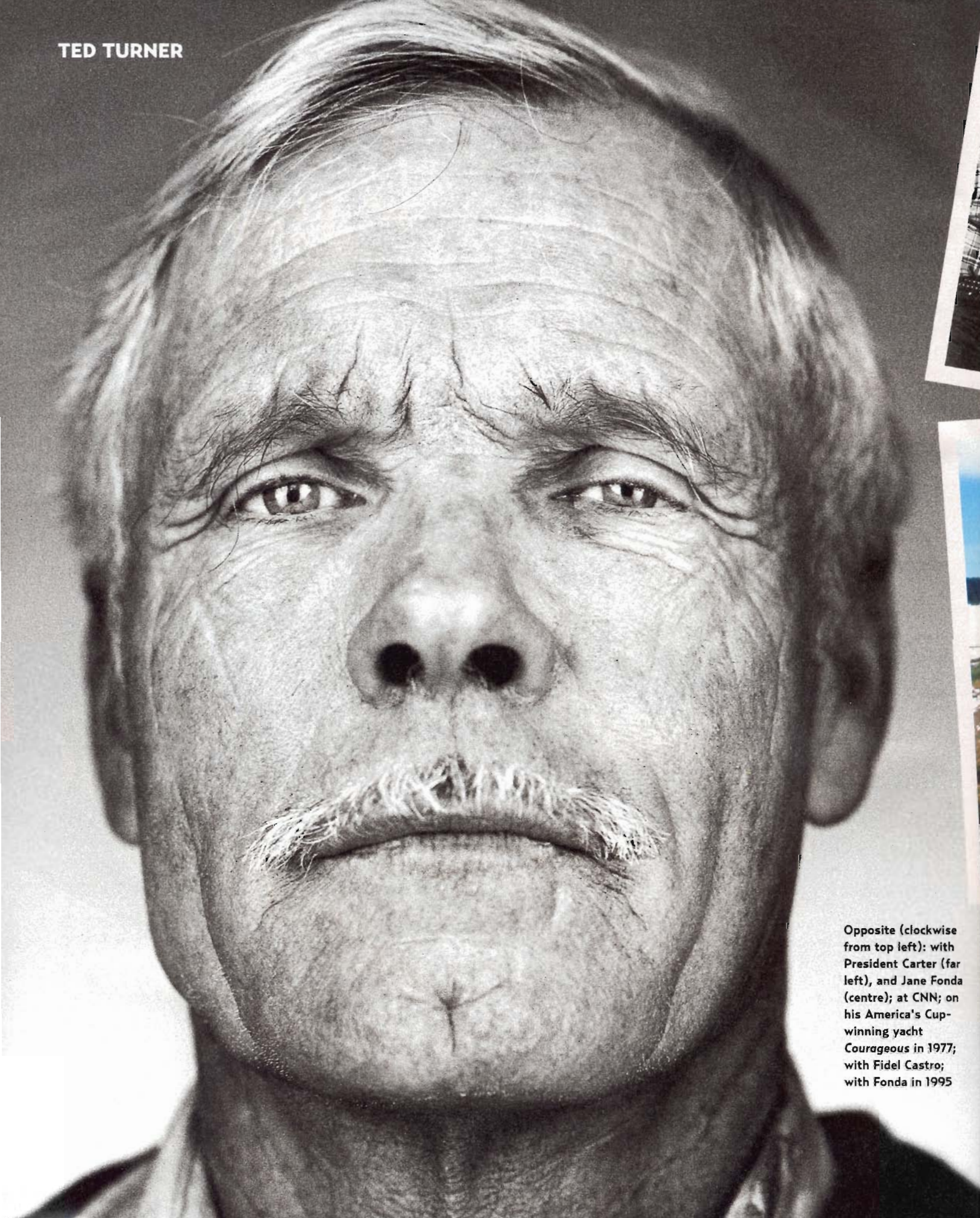


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TED TURNER



Opposite (clockwise from top left): with President Carter (far left), and Jane Fonda (centre); at CNN; on his America's Cup-winning yacht *Courageous* in 1977; with Fidel Castro; with Fonda in 1995



HURRICANE TED

He built a groundbreaking media empire, won the heart of Jane Fonda – then lost them both. Ted Turner looks back on his driven life, and forward to his next big project: world peace

INTERVIEW: DAMIAN WHITWORTH | PORTRAIT: MARTIN SCHOELLER

As media moguls go, they don't come much bigger, and they certainly don't come any brasher, than Ted Turner. The man who founded CNN and built an empire that transformed the television landscape once said that he wanted to be "the world's greatest sailor, businessman and lover, all at the same time". Today, at 70, he modestly says, "I had to settle for two out of the three. Number one businessman and number one sailor." All the evidence suggests that he didn't stint in his attempt to be the third.

Turner is no longer connected with the cable station that triumphed in the presidential election ratings. He has left the media business and has fewer billions than he did. But his retirement projects keep him busy. His two million acres make him the biggest private landowner in the United States, including numerous ranches that provide bison meat for his growing chain of restaurants. He is gradually releasing a \$1 billion donation to the United Nations, and through his various foundations has focused on goals that are no less ambitious than saving the planet.

By his own standards he has slowed down, allowing himself time to produce an autobiography, *Call Me Ted*. He is naturally disinclined to look back and did not consider writing about himself before because he was too busy being himself. Driven on relentlessly by personal demons and colossal energy, he created, bought and sold businesses, won international sailing races, romanced countless women and held forth with opinions that earned him nicknames such as the World's Greatest Maverick and the Mouth from the South. He is finally reflecting on all this, and for the first time giving his side of the story of his marriage to Jane Fonda.

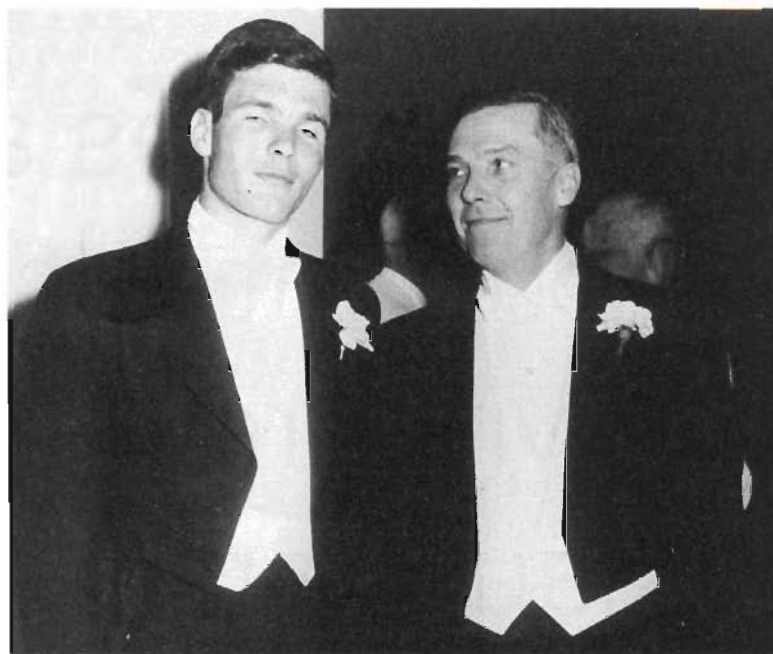
Meeting him in his Atlanta office, it is clear that he has lost none of his eccentricity. I am barely across the threshold before he is explaining that he fills his own water bottle from the tap because bottled water is a crime against the environment. He throws back his head and lustily glugs, either unaware, or unconcerned, that he is spilling half a litre of water down his jacket.

He is tall, still lean, but walks stiffly. One moment his pale blues twinkle impishly, the next they are as cold as stones on a Montana riverbed as he scrutinises someone who has been granted an hour of his precious time. An Oscar statuette for *Gone with the Wind* – his favourite film – which was produced by MGM, a company he once briefly owned, sits on the coffee table. A replica of the America's Cup, which he won, stands on a plinth. The walls are lined with photographs of him with presidents and world leaders. He introduces an attractive blonde woman in her forties called Elizabeth, who has a definite look of Jane Fonda, and says she is going to sit with us. She whispers something to him. "What?" he says. "I can't hear you. I'm not zipped up? That's what happens when you are 70 years old. Thanks, honey."

Turner is famously impatient, almost psychotically driven. But there is something boyish and charming, almost naive about his enthusiasm for his projects. He struggles to sit still, leaping up repeatedly to hunt down photographs and mementoes. The photographer asks for 15 minutes for pictures. Turner snaps: "No. Five," and walks away after four. He wears slip-on shoes so he doesn't waste time tying laces. His drive and restlessness can be traced to his childhood. There are two huge characters in his autobiography: Turner himself and his father. Ed Turner told his son to set his ambitions so high they could not be realised during a lifetime.

At the age of 4, Ted was sent to boarding school. He hated it and believes the experience led to the insecurities that have plagued him since. "My greatest fear growing up was that I would be in the position of the Count of Monte Cristo, that I would be put in a dungeon in the dark, in solitary confinement." When he was 9, the family moved from Ohio to Georgia, where Ed Turner built a billboard

With his father on the day of his wedding to first wife, Judy Nye



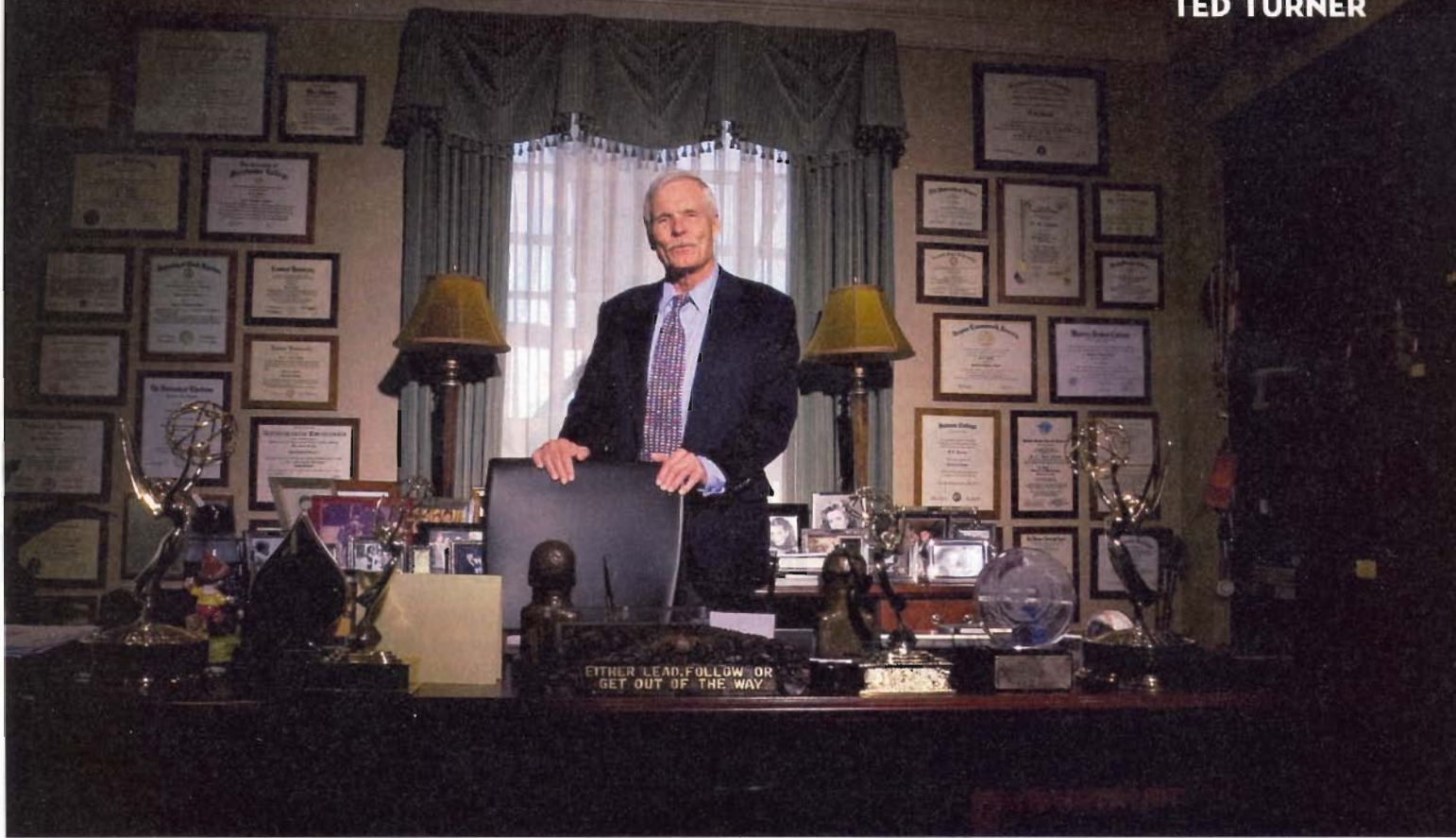
'MY FATHER MADE ME THE BEST MAN HE COULD. IT WAS TOUGH, BUT I LOVED HIM'

advertising company. A strict disciplinarian, he would thrash his son, and on one occasion tried to make Ted thrash him (to demonstrate that handing out thrashings hurt him more than it did Ted). "I knew he loved me," says Turner. "He was trying to make me the best man that he possibly could. It was tough, but I always loved him."

He describes Jimmy Brown, who was black and a sort of old family retainer, as his "second father. I grew up loving black people in a time and a place, the South in the Fifties, when there was segregation." Later, Brown fulfilled a similar role in the lives of Turner's own children. Ed Turner was a heavy drinker, smoker and philanderer, and his marriage to Turner's mother, Florence, ended while their son was at college. They had struggled to cope with his sister Mary Jean's autoimmune disease, which eventually led to her death, an event so painful that Turner has blocked out all memory of it.

He was suspended from Brown University for having a woman in his room, then left because his father stopped paying the fees in disgust over his son studying classics. He entered the family business, but working for a father who was now addicted to prescription pills and suffering depressive mood swings caused Turner to lose weight and develop nervous twitches. He vigorously opposed his father's sudden decision to sell large chunks of the business, asking why he was breaking his rule about never quitting. A few days later, his father shot himself. Despite their fraught relationship, Turner says, "I had lost my best friend." His father, who set such high standards for himself, had told friends that he was a failure.

The autobiography has contributions from family members, friends and colleagues, and "even my ex-wife got a chance to pipe up". Jane Fonda writes: "For Ted, there's a fear of abandonment that is deeper than with anyone I've ever known. As a result, he needs constant >>



'[TED] CAN'T SIT STILL. IF HE SITS STILL THE DEMONS CATCH UP. HE HAS TO KEEP MOVING'

<< companionship and keeping up with him can be exhausting. He can't sit still, because if you sit still the demons catch up with you. He has to keep moving." Turner agrees that he fears being left alone. "You are a collection of all your experiences," he says.

In the Eighties, he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and put on lithium, but later another doctor changed that diagnosis and took him off the medication. "At least I know what I have now. I don't have depression, thank God. A moderate case of anxiety. Primarily going back to my childhood, but exacerbated by losing my fortune, losing my job and breaking up with my wife all at the same time. And I lost a grandchild, too." His granddaughter, Maddox, died of a rare enzyme deficiency in 2001. "That's enough to put anyone in hospital. I didn't go to hospital. I toughed it out and I rallied, and I'm capable of leading a productive life. I see a psychiatrist every month, mainly now just to kick things around." He has a trademark tic of punctuating almost every sentence with a curious "haw" sound.

After his father's death, he halted the sale of parts of the business and aggressively expanded it, fending off rivals "like Horatius at the bridge". He recites a chunk of Macaulay's poem and, for good measure, a lot of *Richard II*. "I was looking for battle and I found it. I wanted to get to the top." He bought radio and TV stations, and early on saw the potential of getting into cable and satellite television. To say he was

a hands-on proprietor is an understatement. When he owned the Atlanta Braves baseball team, he briefly made himself the manager, until the baseball authorities stepped in after one game. When one of his stations made a film about Gettysburg, he had a cameo as a Confederate general. During the war in Afghanistan in 2001, CNN executives politely declined his offer to become a correspondent.

Dick Parsons, the former CEO of Time Warner, says that "there's supposed to be a little box in everybody's head, and when an idea forms, before it comes out, it goes in that box and gets checked for political correctness and appropriateness and timeliness. But Ted doesn't have one." In 1979, toughing out a freak storm that killed 15 people, Turner's boat won the Fastnet race. His comment that the British should be thankful for such weather because it helped defeat the Armada, and without it "you'd all be speaking Spanish" was denounced as insensitive. "That was a good line to come up with, huh?" he says now. But wasn't the timing inappropriate? "It wasn't that bad," he smirks. He called abortion opponents "bozos" and Christianity "a religion for losers", a comment he now admits was "unfortunate. I apologised innumerable times."

Turner founded the rolling news channel Cable News Network in 1980, pledging, "We won't be signing off until the world ends." In 1991, after the world watched the first Gulf War unfold live on CNN, *Time* magazine named Turner Man of the Year in recognition of the way he had changed the media landscape. He calls CNN his proudest achievement. His work ethic was phenomenal. He often slept in the office. His first marriage, to Judy, lasted four years. They had two children. His second marriage, to Janie, ended in divorce after more than 20 difficult years. Even when his children were young, if he wasn't working he was often away pursuing his sailing dream,

culminating in winning the America's Cup in 1977. His obsession with work and sailing sounds selfish. It wasn't even easy to share his success. When he

In his Atlanta office, from where he can see the CNN building

noticed the value of his stock had risen so he was worth \$1 billion. "I couldn't tell anybody, because a billion back in those days was a lot of money. We didn't have enough for the payroll. If I told my executives, they would all want a raise. When I got home, I said, 'Honey, I'm a billionaire.' She said, 'I don't give a damn, I'm working with the kids on their homework.' Really, it was a non-event."

Does he regret being away so much when his kids were growing up? "Yes. I say that repeatedly [in the book]." He gets a little defensive. "I did spend some time with them and it was quality time. If it had been that bad, if I had neglected them completely, they would have got angry and got in trouble and drugs and alcohol." When his kids graduated, they were given two weeks to get their stuff out of his house. "I wanted to make them strong so they could get by on their own." Isn't focusing on developing a competitive instinct tough on a child? "It is. Good for them. Just like exercise is good for them. Sitting around playing video games and watching TV is bad for 'em." Hang on, didn't you start up the 24/7 Cartoon Network? "I made my kids get outside a lot, too."

It didn't help his domestic life, he admits, that he had been taught by his father that men are naturally polygamous, "like roosters in a hen yard", and that throughout his marriages he was unfaithful. "I think if you can have a happy, monogamous relationship then that's probably the best road to happiness." He had that "for periods of time. It just didn't last." His "most intense and fulfilling" relationship was with Jane Fonda. They were married for ten years. When Turner read she was divorcing, he thought, "Jane Fonda is someone I'd like to go out with," and called her. They had



With his current girlfriend, novelist Elizabeth Dewberry

only met once before. Somewhat taken aback, Fonda said she wouldn't be ready to date for six months. Six months later, he called again.

On their first date he waded straight in by saying that some of his best friends were Communists, including Fidel Castro and Gorbachev. This was an attempt to show that he didn't hold it against "Hanoi Jane" that she opposed the Vietnam War. He pointed out that they had a lot in common because they both had a parent who had killed themselves. Despite these unsophisticated opening gambits, the relationship eventually took off. It came to an end, he says, because their schedules kept them apart and they ended up not communicating, most notably when she told him she had become a born-again Christian.

"I had not an inkling. I thought this was surely something we would discuss because it's going to alter our entire lives together. I had been a fundamentalist Christian in high school, so I knew what it entailed. Hard for someone who didn't believe in it to live with somebody who did." He is not anti-Christian and still has some faith. "I have had so many friends that have had cancer, and when I think about it I pray for them a little bit. I don't spend a whole lot of time on it because God is busy and he's getting a lot of messages, I am sure. I don't want to clog up the lines too much."

When I mention that, in the book, Fonda refers to his infidelity towards the end of their relationship, he just says, "Right. And we had a lot of great times together, too, we really did. Ten years: that's a long time." When he went to his ranch in Montana after the relationship ended and saw that her closet was empty, "I sat down on the floor... and cried. I loved Jane very much and still love her to this day." Part of him still laments the end of the relationship. "Absolutely. Of course. [It was] like the relationship coming to an end with CNN. It hasn't completely come to an end because I still watch it. They can't keep me from doing that. And as far as Jane is concerned, I talked to her on the phone yesterday. She's being interviewed about the book and hasn't had a chance to read it."

In the book, she says that he was reluctant to open up during their counselling and that, "The things that allow certain people to become super-achievers are the exact opposite qualities that allow them to have successful relationships." She seems to be saying that it is not possible for someone like him to commit fully both to work and a relationship. "I'd say that's probably true," he says. "You only have so much energy. But you know she hasn't really had a long-term relationship since then." In an interview with CBS's *60 Minutes*, Fonda said, "If Ted really needed me I would be there in a blue minute." As her eyes welled up, she added, "I'm not getting emotional because I wish I was still living with him. But he touches me deeply, deeply... the contradictions that make up Ted Turner."

While Turner is having his picture taken, Elizabeth shows me around his office. I am fishing for the nature of their relationship when she points out a photograph of Turner with Fonda and says, "I love that picture." When he comes back in the room I ask if he is in a relationship now. "I'm dating," he says, then points at Elizabeth. "I'm in a relationship with her." Afterwards, I go for a bison burger with Elizabeth in Ted's Montana Grill downstairs. She is Elizabeth Dewberry, the author of four novels and delightful company. Later, I discover she left her husband, Robert Olen Butler, a Pulitzer prize-winning author, for Turner. In his own interview with *60 Minutes*, Turner said what he chivalrously didn't say when Dewberry was in the room: that he has "some" girlfriends. They take it in turns to travel with him, so he is never alone.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

- 1938** Ted Turner born in Cincinnati, Ohio.
- 1959** Sister Mary Jean dies.
- 1960** Marries Judy Nye. They have two children.
- 1963** Father, Ed Turner, commits suicide. Turner inherits a billboard company and begins to build a media empire.
- 1964** Marriage to Judy ends in divorce.
- 1965** Marries Janie Smith. They have three children.
- 1970** Buys Atlanta TV station Channel 17. Six years later, turns it into Turner Broadcasting System.
- 1976** Buys Atlanta Braves baseball team.
- 1977** Captains yacht *Courageous* to victory in America's Cup.
- 1980** CNN launched.
- 1986** Buys MGM/UA but later sells the studio, keeping the film library. Later launches Turner Network Television and Cartoon Network as vehicles for the archive.
- 1988** Divorced from Janie.
- 1990** Launches Turner Foundation, in aid of the environment.
- 1991** Marries Jane Fonda. *Time* names him Man of the Year.
- 1995** Braves win World Series.
- 1996** Time Warner buys Turner Broadcasting System and its subsidiary companies. Turner made vice-president. Pledges \$1 billion to UN.
- 2000** Marriage to Jane Fonda ends. AOL buys Time Warner.
- 2002** First Ted's Montana Grill opens in Ohio.
- 2006** Leaves Time Warner. Founds Turner Renewable Energy.
- 2007** Nuclear Threat Initiative launched.

TED TURNER

<< Four days after he finalised his marriage split with Fonda on January 3, 2000, Turner's business life began to unravel. In 1995, he had sold his companies to Time Warner, while retaining a lot of control and holding 10 per cent of the merged company. Five years later, in the largest ever US corporate merger, AOL and Time Warner were combined. Turner signed up to the deal in haste and is still repenting. The internet bubble burst, wiping \$7 billion off Turner's \$10 billion personal wealth. Soon afterwards he was forced out by Time Warner CEO Jerry Levin. In Turner's book, Levin writes, "I have everlasting regret that we don't talk." Turner

'IT HURTS LIKE HELL TO BE AWAY FROM CNN, BUT I'VE LEARNT TO LIVE WITH IT'

is scathing. "He shouldn't have fired me. He would have seen me more." Levin left AOL Time Warner soon afterwards. "From my understanding he's living in LA, he's gotten married again and he's running a spa for burnt-out executives. I'm not angry with him," says Turner, the put-down all the more devastating for its subtlety.

Don't feel sorry for Ted Turner. He still has a billion or two to rub together. But the loss of his baby is still painful. He has a view of the CNN building, which is a few blocks from his HQ, from both his personal office and his apartment upstairs. "I figured if they needed me they could call me and I would just be a couple of minutes away if there was a crisis." The fondness of his hope that they would ever call is touching. "It hurts like hell to be away from Turner Broadcasting and CNN. I've learnt to live with it. But I hardly look out of the window. When I'm in the office, I'm usually working." He has CNN on the TV most of the time and has only switched it off during this interview "to save electricity". He doesn't like the way some CNN presenters now express their own opinions.

In the late Eighties, Turner, who was then pretty conservative, met Castro and Gorbachev and was converted to the idea that, "It is important to meet people who think differently from you. I went from a man of war to a man of peace." Busts of Gandhi and Martin Luther King replaced the one of Alexander the Great on his desk. Over the past decade he has been paying \$1 billion to the United Nations in instalments, through his United Nations Foundation. He and his five children are the trustees of the Turner Foundation, which supports environmental causes. His Nuclear Threat Initiative lobbies to reduce the number of warheads. "I'm trying to broker world peace. I don't think we are quite there. We don't want to blow the world up. You can fight a dandy war with conventional weapons. Much more exciting than a missile coming in and you can't see it. I don't like war personally and think it's time to put it behind us."

He thinks that the chance of the human race still existing in 50 years "might be less than 50-50". One of his other pet concerns is stabilising population growth. But, wait a minute, how many children does he have? "I have five, but my youngest is 40. Forty years ago, the world population was three billion. It's doubled in the past 40 years." In the course of railing against population growth in Africa, he starts gurning, like a schoolboy mocking a severely retarded person: "Dum, dum, dur, dur, dum, dur." I don't know where to look, fearing he may have gone completely mad or is about to say something hideously inappropriate. Everyone in the room is palpably relieved when he reveals this is an impression of Robert Mugabe. Trying to save the world is the sort of impossible goal his

father would have approved of. But doesn't aiming so high lead to disappointment? "I don't feel dissatisfied because I'm doing my best. I'm dissatisfied with the progress of the human race."

He spends a lot of time touring his ranches in the American West and South America. He has been at the forefront of reintroducing bison, and with almost 50,000, he owns ten per cent of the world population. He says they are more sustainable than cattle and produce a leaner meat. They turn a profit, too. His Ted's Montana Grill chain has 57 outlets. There's no doubt he's mellowed. He has even buried the hatchet with Rupert Murdoch, chairman and chief executive of News Corporation, parent company of *The Times*. He once challenged his rival to a boxing match, but says recently they met for a bison burger at his New York restaurant and "had a great time". He has had some health problems, and "of course, I feel a sense of mortality, [but] I'm not afraid." He hopes he will "catch a fish so big I'm shocked into a stroke - that would be fine."

The clock is running down on our scheduled hour. "In one sentence what would you say about the book? Would you say it's a must-read for someone with a college education?" he demands. "Or a must-read for anybody?" I mutter something vaguely positive and that clearly doesn't satisfy. His secretary calls out, "Your 11 o'clock is on the way up." A handshake and he is back behind his desk preparing for his next meeting. He may have paused briefly to glance back, but the restless Ted Turner never stops looking forward. ■

Call Me Ted by Ted Turner is published by Sphere and is available from BooksFirst priced £18 (RRP £20), free p&dp, on 0870 1608080; timesonline.co.uk/booksfirst

TED TURNER'S FIRST DATE WITH JANE FONDA

I picked her up at her home in Santa Monica and I was taken with her the moment she met me at the door. From meeting her before and watching her in the movies I knew she was attractive, but as we talked through our dinner date I was surprised by the strength of our connection. Knowing that a lot of people assumed I was a male chauvinist and a greedy capitalist, I was up front with her. I let her know that my dad had raised me without a lot of respect for women and that this was something I'd been working hard to change, especially with my most recent girlfriend. And knowing of Jane's political leanings, I even bragged to her about how many friends I had who were communists, including Castro and Gorbachev! I always tend to talk a lot when I'm excited or nervous and that night I was

really excited. Before our date I'd done research on Jane and while a lot of people saw us as an unlikely couple, we really did have a lot in common. We both had difficult, complicated fathers and we both had a parent commit suicide (Jane's mother killed herself when Jane was just 12 years old). I could tell right away that she was very smart and a hard worker. My sense was that, like me, she had a difficult upbringing that contributed to her drive to be a super achiever. Jane and I also figured out very quickly that we cared about a lot of the same issues. Our first date together ended with a hug and I told her that I was smitten. I knew that Jane Fonda was someone I wanted to get to know better.

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Extracted from Call Me Ted