

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

**KATHLEEN TURNER**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*

*Initial Interview Date: October 3, 2012*

*Copyright 2012 ADST*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Born in Springfield, Missouri	
Father, Foreign Service Officer Allen Richard Turner	
Father's Foreign Service postings	
Responsibilities (chores) of FS spouse	
Schooling at posts	
Parents' background	
Parents Foreign Service postings	
Parents' China connections	
Parents' Shanghai/Evacuation	1945-1947
Havana, Cuba	1960-1961
Environment	
Schooling	
Fidel Castro	
Batista deposed	
Anti-Americanism	
Evacuation to US	
Caracas, Venezuela	1964-1969
American colony	
Oil nationalization	
Racial and social groups	
Social work	
Troops on Foreign Soil (TOFS)	
Recreation	
Social life	
Environment	
Anti-Americanism (FALN)	
London, England	1969-1972
Employment at Embassy	
American School, London (ASL)	
London Underground	

Environment  
Protest march

Desire to be an actress

Comments on life in the Foreign Service

Reading preferences

Personal political persuasion

Springfield, Missouri  
Local environment

Benefits of foreign languages

William Hart

John Waters

## INTERVIEW

Kathleen Turner was one of the iconic actresses of the 1980's, starring in such movies as *Romancing the Stone*, *Jewel of the Nile*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (where she was the voice of Jessica Rabbit), *Prizzi's Honor*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*, *War of the Roses*, and the movie that started it all, *Body Heat*. After a debilitating bout with rheumatoid arthritis, she made a string of cameos on *Friends* (where she appeared as Chandler Bing's estranged gay father) and *Californication*, before getting the title role in John Waters' dark comedy *Serial Mom*. She then returned to the stage, earning a Tony for Best Actress for her performance in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, starred in *The Graduate*, and earned rave reviews for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* From August through October 2012 she starred in the critically acclaimed one-woman show *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins* in Washington. In this interview, she discusses her father's internment in China by the Japanese, her life in Cuba during the revolution (and how she prayed to Castro and got candy), her five years in Venezuela, and her love of London, where she got the acting bug and protested the Vietnam War, much to her father's chagrin. She was interviewed by ADST's Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 3, 2012 backstage at Washington, DC's Arena Stage.

TURNER: My father died about 40 years ago – it was a week before I turned 18. I was brought up in the diplomatic foreign service, and I really had thought that it was so long

ago that although I maintain an interest in many things, certainly in international fronts and everything, I hadn't felt so involved, or hadn't realized, when [U.S. Ambassador to Libya Chris] Stevens was killed [in Benghazi], I couldn't believe the feelings that flooded back into me about the protectiveness and loyalty and the anger, that I thought, "My God, I'm still a 'dip kid.'"

*Q: The Foreign Service is family.*

TURNER: It sure feels like it.

*Q: And when something happens, it's part of it.*

TURNER: Something like that. I talked to my mother because I told her I'd be speaking with you and I wanted to get a little more of her color, of her experience since I was so, so young, and she carries very excellent, very good memories of the time in the Foreign Service. Even though she says that [Secretary of State during the Kennedy Administration] Dean Rusk said at a speech he gave to the families at one point, that it was the best deal in the business - that you get two for one always, because the wife is certainly [going to work for free], I mean - it's full time, it's a job and although I understand women can now have a job outside the Foreign Service, where they could not when my mother was, when my father was alive. I don't know if she'd have had time, because I can remember endless events. For example she tells a story that, when we were in Caracas, the ambassador was going to be retiring and my mother said that she and the other wives got the impression that the ambassador's wife was quite ready to go. And there was always an annual July 4<sup>th</sup>, huge event for all the local people and the other diplomatic embassies, and that they were ordered by the ambassador's wife - each wife to produce 250 canapés, because she was tired of dealing with this party, and mom said all the wives got together, and they counted everyone to make sure that they all had 250. Anyway, it was very funny. But I have wonderful memories of the communities, I mean in Caracas, we basically went to the English-speaking Protestant church and the international schools were much more varied, they weren't just diplomatic, they were also top businessmen from other fields and their families.

*Q: From the community - from the indigenous community, you know, I hear the top business people often sent their kids there.*

TURNER: Well, no, as I recall, Campo Alegre was our school in Caracas, and although it was considered international, I don't remember many Venezuelans there. In London, it was the American School in London, and again, many diplomats would send their children there, as opposed to - really the only other great choice in England were the public schools, which were usually boarding schools. And I wouldn't have wanted to lose my kids - ASL [American School-London] was a big school in London. Also, the extraordinary thing was that both these schools - there were 500 applicants for each teaching post, so we had some of the best educators, some of the best teachers. I think, when I got out of high school and I ended up in Springfield, Missouri, which is the story of when my father died quite suddenly - we hadn't lived in the United States for 12 years

– we had no home in the United States, so we went to my mother’s parents in Springfield, Missouri. And my older brother and sister were already in college, but my younger brother and I were not in college yet. And I had planned to stay on in England and go to the Central School of Speech and Drama [at the University of London]. But that was not possible when my father died. My mother needed me, and so that was that.

But I tested out of the entire freshman year because of the education I’d received. I mean, the exam – It was laughable what they had. I mean are you kidding me? OK, so all of those things were extraordinarily positive, but at the same time, I also remember some very difficult times, many nights, including holidays when my father was away from home because an American was detained or in trouble somewhere and that always came first, rightly so. And even in times, the two years we spent here in Washington when he was at State, the very, very long hours that he worked. And we lived in Chevy Chase. But we still had very little of him here in Washington. I think we saw more of him overseas, really, when he was posted to the embassies.

*Q: Sort of to keep to the chronological order – you were born in Washington?*

TURNER: No, Missouri – mom was on home leave. Lived there 3 months.

*Q: But your father had a very interesting early life – did he talk much about it?*

TURNER: Yes, see, he did not join the Service in any usual way. He was brought up in China. He went out when he was about a year and a half – two years old, and grew up with his older brother and sister, much older brother and sister, with his grandfather who was a missionary – a Methodist missionary to Shanghai – and his maiden aunts. So he grew around when he was 18, going on 19, you know the Japanese invaded China and he was interned. After Pearl Harbor, the Americans were separated to another camp, which was a great deal harsher. And one of my aunts, my great-aunts, died in that camp.

But when China was liberated by the Americans, my father’s family had an excellent name and very high standing in the community, and he was of course bilingual in Mandarin and Cantonese. And so he was sort of drafted into the Foreign Service. There were no males of eligible age allowed to leave China by the Japanese after 18. Anyone eligible to serve in the military service was interned, be it an American or not. And so he never – he had planned to come back to university, but that was stopped, so he never went to university. He went right into the Foreign Service in ’45, in Shanghai. And I think that was something he felt his whole life – that he had never qualified quite the same way as some of the other officers had, and it drove him, I think, to prove himself continually in his job.

*Q: The Foreign Service is still the only government executive position where you don’t have to be a college graduate. You pass the test, or come in through different means, but there are very few who do that*

TURNER: Very few who do that.

*Q: There are a number of high school graduates who have gone off and done something else, and then came back, but of course, today is a different matter. In your father's day, getting a college degree was quite something.*

TURNER: It was, well, in my family, it was expected. I mean, all four of us, all four children hold doctorates. It was just -- we promised my father that basically we would do what he had not, which was to take an advanced degree. We all kept our promise, but in any case, my mother went out first in '46 under - with UNRA [United Nations Relief Association] -- and she was actually posted inland to distribute the supplies and she got extremely ill. She was sent back to the United States, and when she recovered, she went back to Washington and said she wanted to go back to China, so she went back under the Foreign Service in '47. And my parents met, and fell in love and married there in Shanghai.

One thing I've never been able to understand about my father, because he did not speak much of the years of internment.

*Q: He really didn't.*

TURNER: No, he really didn't. Bits and pieces, and over the years, I've learned more about him from other people. I mean in London, these people approached me, older people, and said that my father had saved their son's life, you know, things like that. That came up, and my father saying once, that they broke into the -- when the Japanese fled because of the advance of the American army. They broke into the office and found orders that they were to be executed in two weeks, in anticipation of losing Shanghai.

So that was all bits and pieces like this.

*Q: Did your father ever bear hatred, resentment towards the Japanese?*

TURNER: See, well this is what I wanted to say, what I cannot understand is that his first post was Tokyo, he was sent to Tokyo. That's where my oldest sister was born. They were there, I think, almost three years. See, I don't know how he did that. I don't know how.

*Q: He's brave*

TURNER: I would have thought so. But in any case, my mother tells the story very vividly. They were literally on the last boat out of Shanghai. That at this point, because the American government had not recognized the Chinese -- the interim government in '49 -- the boat, the last American destroyer allowed, it was 3 miles out in international waters. And they had to ferry the last Americans out to the boat. And my mother by then was pregnant with my sister, and she said they literally climbed up a rope ladder, with steps, but they climbed up this rope ladder and my surviving aunt, my great-aunt, the sailors carried her up, and they were on the last -- literally the last boat.

*Q: Yes, because we've had consular officers who were interned by the Communist Chinese, and had a very difficult time for some time before they finally were released...*

TURNER: Yeah, I'm sure

*Q: China business is very difficult. Was there any feeling, sort of, that you got from your parents about China?*

TURNER: Oh absolutely! My mother's home is filled with – they were able to ship through the British people who had recognized the government. They were able to ship out a lot of the family's treasures, artifacts, rugs and furniture and art and such. So, in fact, we have a lot of my great-grandfather's possessions still – quite beautiful – quite wonderful. So this is what –I mean this is the home I grew up in. The Chinese influence was very strong to me. I, unbelievably, have never been. I don't know why. Somehow...I don't know...

My mother's been back. And she tells a story that she went to the quarter where the internationals were allowed to stay, which actually was called the French section, the French quarter where the internationals lived, and she went back to the old, hideous red brick Victorian house that they – the four of them lived in or something, and – to find that there were 11 families living in it now, and she said she didn't go in or anything, but she turned away to walk away, and she heard this voice yelling at her "Missy Turner! Missy Turner!" and it was this man who had been house boy, and had managed to keep a room in the house, but I assume that the only white woman of that age who would be coming to look at that house would be someone connected with the family.

*Q: That's amazing.*

TURNER: I know, isn't that extraordinary?

*Q: Well, back to you – you were born... ?*

TURNER: I was born in Springfield. My mom was on home leave. My dad was still in Antwerp, in Belgium, and my mother wanted to come back while she could still travel. You know? And my father was supposed to be relieved, but he wasn't. So he didn't get to see me until I was almost 3 months old, just before we moved to Canada, which my mother says has a great deal to do with my attitude of "Oh yeah?? Yeah?? You're making tough?? Well, watch!" (laughter) She seems to feel that this is all very deep, psychological stuff...Any case...

*Q: Where did you have your first, might I say, foreign service?*

TURNER: In Canada. I was in nursery school...I was 3, I guess, and we went to the nursery school that was in the local church. And every morning we would come up on stage and sing "God Save the Queen" before we started to play or anything.

But then my father was posted to Cuba, so he went to Washington for 6 months of intensive training, and language and briefing. So my mother took us back to Springfield, Missouri, for those 6 months and put me in nursery school there, and I remember thinking, “Oh my God”, you know, well I didn’t think “Oh my God,” I mean I was very timid, very afraid. And then the teacher at the piano started to knock out these chords and I thought “Well, all right!” And I started to sing “God Save the Queen” and she slammed her hands down and turned to me and said “THIS IS AMERICA!” (laughter)

Anyway, so that was my most vivid memory from that. We were just there 6 months. Then we went to Cuba.

*Q: And when you were in Cuba – you were there before the revolution?*

TURNER: Oh yes! My father closed the embassy. Yeah!

*Q: Can you talk a bit about your experience?*

TURNER: Yes, I can! Well, we were in Cuba. Well, I was in “Pre-Primaria” then. And we were put into this school with these strict uniforms, and everything. And I remember, brown skirt, a tan blouse, and it being very, very hot. We had to ride – we had assigned seats on this bus and I was in between these two really big girls. Anyway, the teacher – now this was “Pre-Primaria”, which is basically kindergarten, but there was some kind of dictation or something, and I had no Spanish whatsoever. So every day the teacher would come by and look at my blank page, and take out this red pencil and write CERO, CERO OTRA VEZ! [Zero, Another zero!] You know – everyday (fake crying).

Any case, we lived in a lovely house. We had a beautiful garden. And the previous owners had left their dogs – these two Weimaraners, called Oro and Plata. Plata was the female, Oro was the male. He was big enough that I could actually sort of ride on him, you know? Beautiful dogs! And, any case, I remember when the tensions started to ratchet up. And well this one memory that – I came into my room, and there was a tarantula... and my father came running in with a machete and chopped it into pieces, and I remember the arms still wiggled after it was chopped up, and I was like “Ugh, God!”

*Q: That’s one of those nice memories...*

TURNER: But we had this very nice maid – very nice woman, and when the tensions started to rise, when the government, when Batista was deposed and everything, then I went to school one day, and my brother and sister and I used to trade off. Every third day, one of us got to get a soda from the machine rather than our drink from home. It was a big day. It was a big thing. We went, and the teacher told us to close our eyes and pray to God for candy. And we did. And she said “Open your eyes.” And she said “There’s no candy.” “Close your eyes, and pray to Castro for candy.” And she went and put pieces of candy in our hands (of course I didn’t know that) and then she said “Open your eyes -

Who loves you more, God or Castro?" So I went home and said, "Mom! Castro gave me candy!", and that was it. That was the last day I went to school.

But it started that early, you know because the teachers and the intelligentsia were very much pro-Castro and the change and revolution. So that was the last day I went to school. And then we started to hunker down in the house, and things happened. Like the maid came by and said she could no longer work for Americans, and she left. And my mother, I remember complaining about not being able to shop at certain stores, because they wouldn't take her money... that kind of thing. The anti-American feeling was getting very high, and then one day we came out on the back patio, and Oro and Plata were dead, they had been poisoned. Someone had done that, which was a terrible, terrible, thing.

And then, one day I walk into the living room and when you picked up the phone, between the time we dialed, and the phone was connected, there was a recording "Castro is our leader. Castro is our savior. Castro..." and I can remember my mother yelling at the phone "Castro is a bastard! Castro is an asshole!" (Laughter). Any case, so, they got the women and children out to Florida, took us to Clearwater. And the men stayed. The officers stayed for almost another 6 months.

Then I was down in Miami, not too long ago, few years ago, ten years ago... I was doing a benefit for something, and I got a note -- a message at the stage door, saying "Please, understand, I must see you. Your father saved my life." And so I said: "All right." So this young man came back, and he told this story that I kind of remember from my father. That when the officers were given a plane to leave Cuba. And they knew that there would be major retaliations against the embassy staff. So under the pretext of the staff gathering to say goodbye to the officers, they all went to the airport and the officers loaded the staff onto the plane and stayed on the tarmac, knowing that they would have to give them another flight, another plane out of there. But one of the secretaries had a newborn baby without papers, without anything, and was terrified that she would not be allowed into the United States, or the boy would be taken away. And my father, evidently, took a piece of paper and wrote out a visa and signed it and everything and gave it to her and said: "Hold on to that." And that got her and the boy into the United States, and it was this boy, this man now, who said: "This is the story my mother has always told me, and when I saw you were going to be here, I wanted to thank his daughter. And I thought that was really wonderful.

*Q: One of the things that say, I've spent my entire career as a consular officer, and it's – I mean sometimes you do – you can really change lives.*

TURNER: A follow-up story to that is – then we were sent to Caracas, in Venezuela. We were there five years, which is the longest we were anywhere. But anyway, my first boyfriend was Dario Gonzales, and he went to the American school, but he was Cuban originally. The family had fled to Venezuela from Cuba, and I was taken, you know his parents invited me to his home for dinner one night. Because we were all very, very proper, I mean, every young woman was chaperoned. Nobody went anywhere alone, and by then, at that time, I was very blonde, blue-eyed. Not wise to run around, and you

couldn't anyway. You couldn't go anywhere on your own. But his mother, I remember looking at me and saying, "Turner, is your father Richard Turner?", and I said "Yes."

She had spent two weeks in line, on the sidewalk, to get a visa in the United States and she was second up to the window when they broke relations. And she said she'll never forget my father because he said "I have to close the window now, I'm sorry. I cannot grant any more visas." And she'd been sleeping on the sidewalk for two weeks...and she said "I know now, I do not blame him. But I did then. I said one more, just one more."

Anyway, they had trouble getting out, because they were professionals, and the father was a scientist, and they didn't want no one to let those people go. Anyway, that was a bit of a coincidence.

*Q: The type of experience you're having right from the get-go: the complexities of foreign relations, the movement of people, particularly with the consular side. Did your father bring home stories of people getting into trouble? I know with my three children, they got all sorts of drug stories.*

TURNER: Well, I remember one Thanksgiving, my father had to leave Thanksgiving dinner because an American plane – a small, drug smuggling plane -- had come down, had been forced down, and it was an American pilot, and he was in deep trouble, and so my father left to go to the jail and to see what could be done.

I think looking back, my life was really extraordinarily sheltered. Particularly in countries where there was another language, like Venezuela. The American community was very, almost insular in some ways. And it wasn't just the embassy personnel. It was Americans abroad, the ex-pats. We'd form a community anywhere we'd go, but particularly in different language cultures. Obviously in England it didn't feel nearly as restrictive, or as – we felt much more absorbed, much more part of – but then if you contrast it to the military service kids who never got off base, I mean, I met kids who spent five years and never spoke any Spanish because their schools, their movies, houses, their stores, everything was on military base, and they never mingled with. So, for that I am very thankful. You know, as a diplomat, we were part of the community.

Then, in London, I worked two summers at the embassy when I was too young, but my father let me do it anyway, because he was Consul by then. So I worked in the visa section, which was quite amusing.

*Q: Before we get to that, I would like to ask about Venezuela. Venezuela has these terrible troubles right now there, but the troubles were there before. There was a discrepancy between wealthy and the poor, and there wasn't much of a middle class.*

Turner: Well I can remember when I lived there, that there was talk already. Now, we left there in '68 to go to London. I remember there was already a great deal of discussion about the threat of nationalization to the oil, and some of the huge land wars. You know, in the beautiful open farmlands, these people owned tracks of hundreds or thousands of

square miles. So even then, I just turned thirteen when we left, but I remember discussions even then of the threat of the terrible inequity. And in the class system that existed, because there were the hidalgos, there were the pure Spanish settlers, and then there were the Indians, the natives of course were the bottom of the bunch. And in between there were the mestizos, kind of the middle class, mixed blood, and blacks. The Indians being the very lowest of the social order, but the gap between the hidalgos, the “real” descendants of the conquistadores, and the native people was huge. Absolutely huge, and there was – we rarely came into contact with anyone of the lower classes, except through charity work, of course.

And this was something that – I think my mother said to me once that, of course it was expected – that every Foreign Service wife, but also the young women of the family, would work in charity organizations. It was an unspoken rule, which is dead. When I was eleven, I went to work once a week on Wednesdays for a couple of hours a day in a national government orthopedic hospital, which was a really, truly terrible, terrible situation. Each week I would make up these little plastic bags of toys and candy for the girls in my ward, and then usually I would read to them, or something like that. By now, of course, I was quite fluent because it was half Spanish and half English a lot of the days. You obviously were immersed, you know. But there was a practice – IS a practice - in most South American countries, very strong then, called “limosnas” [alms] where you take a child, a beautiful child usually - an attractive child, and you would break a limb or something and would bind it badly so that it grows back as a cripple, and then you use the child to beg. And very often this is the only income for the family, perhaps. So, about once a year the government would sweep through, pick up these kids, re-break their limbs, reset them, and that’s when they would put them in this hospital. And when they were healed, they would release them, and if they were still young enough and attractive enough, they would be back in another six months. There was this beautiful young girl who had both legs badly broken and she was in a body cast from the waist down while I was there. She was finally healed and when she came back, I said, “I can’t do this anymore” to my parents. “I really can’t.” And they completely understood, but you did that, and the wives did all kinds of outreach to organizations, sometimes through church, or very often through programs at the embassy.

*Q: I remember my wife ran an international girl scouts unit with...*

Turner: Absolutely! My mother was the head of TOFS [Troops on Foreign Soil]!

*Q: This was, these were Indian, Pakistani, and with the Burmese. They wore their national uniforms.*

Turner: Yeah.

*Q: With your Spanish, had you been able to keep up with it?*

Turner: Oh, yes, and tackled some French and some Italian, yep. This is something my father gave me as a great gift. He said, “If you have only one language, you only have

one way of thinking”, and I agree, I truly do. It isn’t a question of translating words. It’s concepts and cultural context that gives you an education you know.

*Q: Were you able to get out much and around in Venezuela?*

Turner: In Venezuela we could not go anywhere without a parent driving us somewhere. Now, the practice was after school, or on weekends, everybody belonged to a club, mine was the swimming and tennis club. And there were other kinds of clubs, you know, four or five, and basically all the internationals went to one of these clubs. Mine was tennis and swimming. And then we had, through the scouting program, we had a camp, you know, up in the mountains that we would visit once a year. Oh, I got impetigo, I remember. I fell down and cut my face and got impetigo, and the only thing to treat it with then was gentian violet. Yes, so I had to go to school looking like Hitler with this purple moustache (laughter). It was really lovely - everyone was going “Heil!”. My confidence barely survived that one (laughter)

*Q: It prepared you for household audiences.*

Turner: But we did travel as a family some. We went – well, in the church choir, we had a hand-bell choir, and my brother and I, my older brother and I, were in that. And we traveled a couple times to Maracaibo, and once up to the Colombian border to play for groups. And as a family we tried to – we went on some trips down into the Amazon, I don’t think we ever went very deeply. And I never went to Angel Falls, I think my older brother did, but I never got up there. I don’t know why. But no, we lived a fairly restricted life to be honest.

*Q: Did your family ever get together around the dinner table and talk about the situation in Argentina or Venezuela or in the world?*

Turner: Oh, definitely. Definitely. We weren’t as interested or involved with domestic politics. My father felt, or said that it didn’t really matter to him who the president was. The president of the United States was his commander in chief, and that’s all there was to it. So whatever political party he belonged to made no difference to his job, you know, or loyalties. I have long since grown out of that – a lot.

*Q: I take it you’re an ardent Republican.*

Turner: I am a liberal! I am liberal! Anyway, I think part of the reason I am so liberal is because of all the exposure around the world to different levels of living and different backgrounds and different – a lot of it being different access, different possibilities for people. You know, visiting some of the countries as we did – you just need that. The inequalities were so vast in some places, that how could you not be liberal and wonder. I mean, I really think the Foreign Service fosters this kind of compassion, this ability to put yourself in someone else’s place, and see! Grant you, we are a huge country, and most Americans can spend days traveling and never have to leave, or speak another language, or deal with another currency or another historical background. And all right, OK, I

understand that, but the fact that we don't seek it out, the fact that we are not encouraged as a country to broaden our horizons, I find, discouraging.

*Q: This is one of the things I miss most about the Foreign Service experience, as you come back to the United States in home leave. I remember doing a cross-country trip coming from Yugoslavia, and I had a car which had the Yugoslav plates and I thought "Oh boy! I'm gonna get a lot today...questions about Yugoslavia. But nothing, nothing. It must've been hot there, or less lonely.*

Turner: What do they eat or what do they drink? When I ended up back in Springfield, Missouri from London – that was the greatest culture shock of my life. I didn't know any of the TV shows, I had never been to a McDonald's, for God's sake, and I couldn't find out anything about the rest of the world. I mean all the news programs were local, the papers. I was completely cut off from the rest of the world – it was the most shocking thing to happen to me. And even at that time, the national news was only domestic. They didn't cover foreign affairs. It was terrible.

*Q: When you went to London, you were there for...*

Turner: Four years. '68-'72.

*Q: How did you find...I mean you went to an American school but, was this different? It was a pretty good school?*

Turner: Well, I was lucky enough to be part of an experiment with that school. First of all, let me say that the first thing that my older brother and I did when we went to London was jump on the underground, and just move, just travel. We were liberated, you know? I mean we could never go anywhere before in our lives without someone taking us, knowing where we were, deciding when we were leaving. Wow! I mean, I think we must've scared the hell out of our mother, but we just got a ticket and just rode the subways and just rode the underground until we felt free. And of course the transit system in London is fabulous. And this is one reason I brought my daughter up in New York City. Because I think at 12 you get the bus pass, you get the metro card, and that sense of being able to take yourself places is so important to confidence, to a sense of who you are and your capabilities. I could never bring up a child in Los Angeles and never would've and never did. Any case, that was what we had in London, the ability to move ourselves around. Now we moved up to Hampstead Gardens, suburbs above Hampstead Heath. So our options were to walk across the Heath, basically to get the northern line at Hampstead and take that down, or to walk to this side marketplace.

The first year we were there, the American School was under construction – they were rebuilding the whole thing – so we shared with a school called the Working Men's College in Camden, which was not a very nice area then at all. But we had it during the day, and the Working Men's College was at night. And I can remember we walked to and from the Tube in groups, and they didn't necessarily like the white rich Americans very much.

*Q: Did they take advantage?*

Turner: Well yeah, it was a little hairy there. That was only a year. When the American School was finished in St. John's Wood, they wanted to do pretty much a very experimental sort of program where they designed a course of study, that a good student, working hard and responsibly, could finish the week's requirement by Wednesday night. So that would give you two days to decide your own course of study. And if you got 7-10 students together, you could design a class you wanted and they would provide a teacher. This was unheard of, and there were no closed rooms; they were all pods that opened onto a central location, which the teachers actually grew to hate because it was too noisy. We had, in a school of 400, we had 50-some English courses, because somebody just wanted to do Chaucer and going around London. This kind of thing, it didn't work. We lasted a little over a year, and too many kids were not doing the work, and they felt they had to go back to the constant supervision. To me it was like, oh hell, I loved it! I absolutely loved it.

*Q: Well, the acting, when did this hit you?*

Turner: When I was in Venezuela, which makes absolutely no sense. I was 12, but I had never been to a theatre performance. When we lived here in Washington, when I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, my mother took me to the ballet once. And that was the only real, live performance I had ever seen, so I was just a voracious reader. And I was always reading plays out loud and would influence my brothers and sisters to sing, do other roles, and things. You made a lot of your own entertainment in those days.

*Q: So you used to do a lot of play reading?*

Turner: Yeah.

*Q: One of those things where families get together and do play readings...*

Turner: Something like that, but we kind of did it all for me. But, in any case... I remember when I was twelve, I would say to my mom: "Well, I'm gonna be an actress," they just thought this was real cute, you know. But then when we moved to London, of course, I had access to theatre. And the first night we were there I snuck out, and I snuck into a theatre, went up to the gods [British expression for the highest part of the theater with the cheapest seats], and I think it was Angela Lansbury in "Mame". And I remember sitting up there, and you're almost afraid that you're gonna fall over and fall off the balcony because it's so high and it's so steep. I remember thinking that "Oh my God, I can earn my living this way!", because we all knew we'd have to earn our living. There was no money that we were going to inherit or anything like that, so any career we chose had to support us. Which was our father's objection, because he couldn't see any way that this could ever work out so that I could be safe and secure financially. Which, as a parent, I completely understand, but he was wrong. They were both wrong, and it took years for my mother to confess.

*Q: I was wondering whether you felt there was something in the water or something...*

Turner: Well, I do think many actors actually come from a similar background. If it's not Foreign Service, it's where they have been moved to other countries or different schools or had to adapt and compensate for being the new kid all the time, or something. And I think you learn how to present yourself. You know, you go to a new school. And again, I can remember, when I moved from Venezuela to London, thinking "Oh, I have a chance to reinvent myself, because nobody there will know me from the years before." So whoever I say I am, I am to these people, which I thought was quite handy. I mean not that I was going to lie, but I wasn't carrying any baggage.

*Q: Did you find that there were lots of opportunities for trying things on, I mean skits or anything like that, or was it just a matter of serving?*

Turner: Well, we had a great group of kids in high school in ASL, and we wrote, directed, produced everything, you know, acted everything. We did everything. And we put on play after play after play and the school was very supportive. We hated this one drama teacher – got him fired and got another one. Then we traveled to Paris, to other international schools and productions. And I think, you know, one of the most thrilling things about being based in London was how easily you could just go to the continent. My older brother and I would get down to Paddington and take the train and cross to Amsterdam. My father had this sort of an honorary aunt who lived in Amsterdam, and we'd show up and knock at her door and say "Can we stay here tonight?" and it was a sort – we had that kind of freedom, to just go to Paris. On a few francs, I mean, it wasn't a big deal and you didn't expect to stay in a nice hotel or anything like that. But you could buy a baguette and some cheese and hang out. I mean, come on, that's just extraordinary!

*Q: You say your father was not- didn't feel that this was the world for a successful...*

Turner: He was very, very against it. Also because I think he felt that it was a very dubious profession – that young ladies didn't go into acting. It was one step above a streetwalker. But I can remember that my mother... I was doing Brian Friel's play "The Winners and Losers" at ASL, at the school. It was a beautiful piece. I'd like to direct that one day. Anyway, my father drove my mother to the school, and he stayed in the car because he would not give the tacit approval of coming in. So it was incredibly foolish because he never saw me act – very foolish. But my mother said she went out at the intermission to say it's going well and she's doing well, and he was sitting there with his hands clenched on the steering wheel. Idiot.

*Q: Did he and your mother see plays or things of that nature?*

Turner: Oh, once we got to London, yeah. Yeah. Not as much as I did, but yes. And theatre was frankly cheaper than movies, I mean it was great. You could just go to a play almost twice a week at least.

*Q: You mentioned you were a reader.*

Turner: Huge. I still am. I read at least four books a week.

*Q: In the early years, what sort of things were you reading?*

Turner: Well, I read a lot of historical drama. I'm very attracted by history and that sort of thing. I mean, for example, right now I'm reading Ken Follett's second book of the century, you know, the one that's about World War II. Excellent. His work is so good in any case. Still drawn to all of that, but I love... I read a lot of poetry. I read every piece of Shakespeare I could get my hands on, and I've recorded many, many pieces there. It wasn't until – and this is an interesting coincidence that just occurred to me. It wasn't until I moved back to Missouri, or was forced back to Missouri, to be more accurate, that I picked up and was fascinated by science fiction, and I think it's really because I wanted an alternate world. I really didn't want to be where I was. So, yeah there I got hooked on science fiction, which I love too.

*Q: A great thing I've used to get the hell out of where I am. Did you run across any anti-Americanism?*

Turner: Tremendously.

*Q: Any problems?*

Turner: Within Venezuela, there was a group called the FALN, and what they did was they would target American houses, very often the embassy's staff. They didn't kill anyone, they'd come in and tie up anybody in the house and then spray paint the house with their initials and things like that. Tear furniture off and all this kind of stuff. But in Venezuela everyone, not just Americans or anything like that, everyone lived in fortified homes. There were huge fences, there were bars on every window, broken glass on every perimeter wall. You know it was just, it's how everyone lived.

*Q: Was there a safe room?*

Turner: No. We were never attacked...my family. But there was...yes...there was toward the end of our stay there, again when there was talk starting about nationalizing the oil and things like that. But the anti-British sentiment at that time was almost greater because of Shell. Shell owned the major interest in the oil fields out West. They were more targeted than we were, in fact. In London, no. No, I remember at one point, in almost – it must have been '71 – when Nixon went into Cambodia. By then I was quite political and we put together a march, and we got permission to go down Oxford Street, into the embassy, into the north, on the street in Grosvenor Square, and then to meet at Hyde Park corner afterwards. Well, my father said, "You're not doing this", and of course I was one of the organizers, and I said, "Yes, I am." And we had a really huge fight. He said "All right, now let me ask you this. Do not go in front of the embassy. Leave the march at

north on this street and then rejoin it to go to Hyde Park. Please, do not come and stand in front of the embassy. I can't bear it." I said, "Well, of course", you know, of course I won't. And I didn't, I mean had to respect his wishes, and he felt, you know...

*Q: Looking back on it, did you find that your Foreign Service experiences translated into any of those delightful movies I've seen of you and stage things. Was there any transference there?*

Turner: Well my education, for heaven's sakes. I mean, whether it's – obviously the Spanish came in very handy in "Romancing the Stone", and French came in rather handy in "Jewel of the Nile". We were in Morocco and the South of France. I think what it really gave me was an extraordinary edge on many, many American actors, many born and bred American actors. I had a greater breadth of knowledge, I had a greater depth of language, both English and others. I had so much more experience that, when I would see a piece of writing, I didn't go for the cliché – for the expected interpretation or response, because my whole history didn't necessarily include the expected response. And I think that that was always very powerful to have someone who had a seemingly unique interpretation of everything, simply because they saw the same thing over and over and over, because the people came from the same background. And so, having such a different upbringing, for this country, I think worked hugely in my favor. Yes?

*Q: I'm thinking obviously anybody interviewing you comes back to Body Heat sometimes.*

Turner: Well, yes.

*Q: You can't help this. To me it seems interesting that William Hurt is also a Foreign Service kid.*

Turner: He is.

*Q: And all I can say is...*

Turner: Yeah, he didn't serve outside the country much, but the [parents'] marriage didn't last.

*Q: But still, two Foreign Service kids put into a difficult social truth...*

A: (laughter) Well you know this was thirty-one years ago. The film is thirty-one years old now. We knew we were breaking ground. We knew we were pushing limits, but we didn't realize, I don't think anyone realized, you know, that it would be such a...

*Q: The thing is the movie, I mean, some of these things.*

Turner: Well when you look at it, all my movies are good movies. I really don't have a bad one

*Q: No, you really don't. Particularly one that struck me...*

Turner: Choices.

*Q: I can't remember the name of it, but you took an exception. A violent exception to Patty Hearst wearing white after Labor Day [in the 1994 John Waters movie "Serial Mom"]...*

Turner: Oh that was John Waters! He was here last night. He came last night. Labor Day.

*Q: I thought that taking a stand like that. I liked it.*

Turner: Well she had to die didn't she?

*Q: Well, rightly so. It was stuck in my mind. Well I'm looking and this is probably a good place to stop.*

*End of interview*