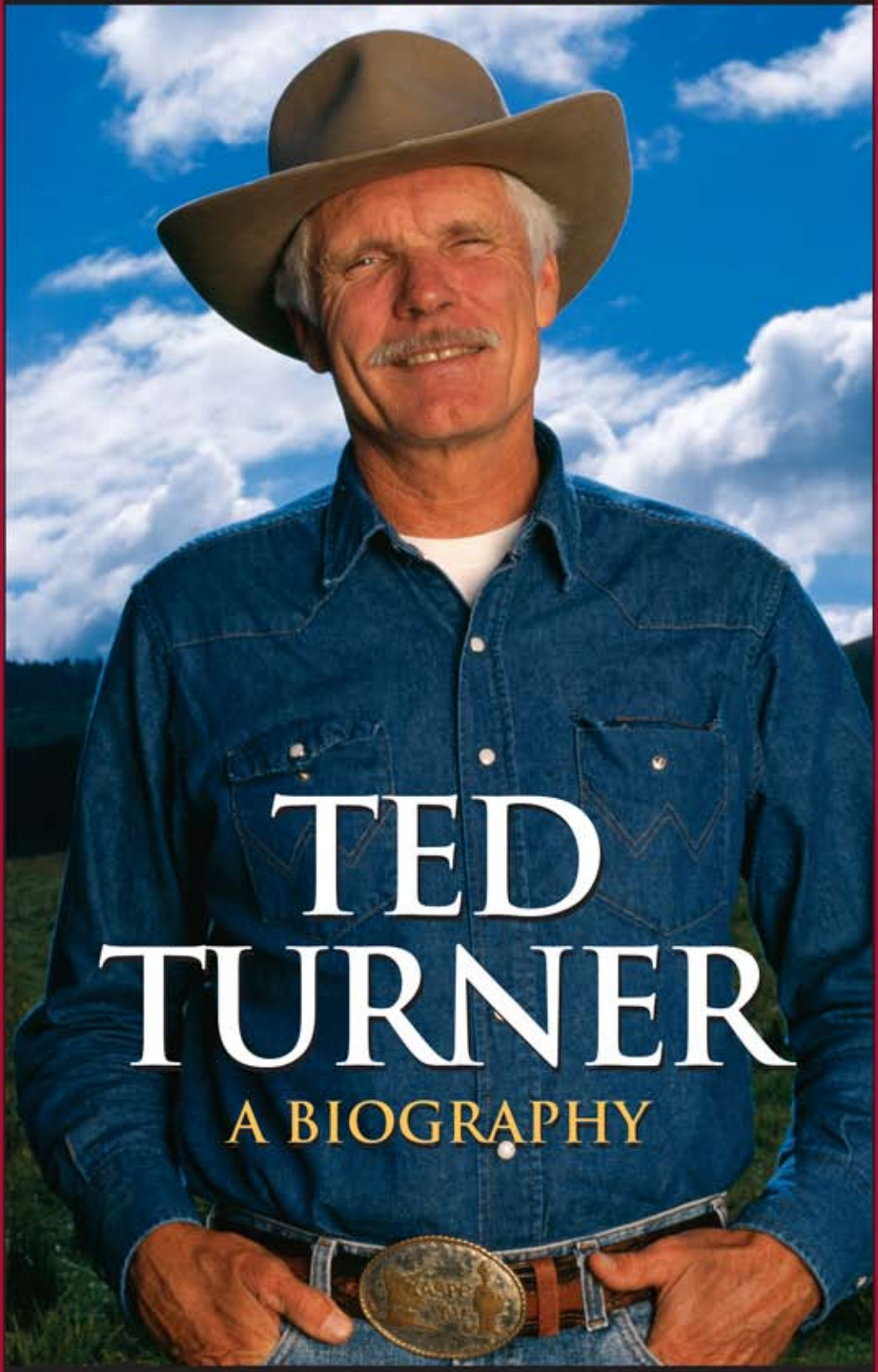


GREENWOOD BIOGRAPHIES



TED
TURNER
A BIOGRAPHY

MICHAEL O'CONNOR

TED TURNER

**Recent Titles in
Greenwood Biographies**

Diana, Princess of Wales: A Biography

Martin Gitlin

Nancy Pelosi: A Biography

Elaine S. Povich

Barack Obama: A Biography

JoAnn F. Price

Sacagawea: A Biography

April R. Summitt

Yo-Yo Ma: A Biography

Jim Whiting

Ellen DeGeneres: A Biography

Lisa Iannucci

Frida Kahlo: A Biography

Claudia Schaefer

John McCain: A Biography

Elaine S. Povich

Beyoncé Knowles: A Biography

Janice Arenofsky

Jerry Garcia: A Biography

Jacqueline Edmondson

Coretta Scott King: A Biography

Laura T. McCarty

Kanye West: A Biography

Bob Schaller

Peyton Manning: A Biography

Lew Freedman

Miley Cyrus: A Biography

Kimberly Dillon Summers

TED TURNER

A Biography

Michael O'Connor

GREENWOOD BIOGRAPHIES

GREENWOOD PRESS
An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC

A B C  C L I O

Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

Copyright 2010 by Michael O'Connor

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

O'Connor, Michael.

Ted Turner : a biography / Michael O'Connor.

p. cm. — (Greenwood biographies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-313-35042-9 (alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-313-35043-6 (ebook)

1. Turner, Ted. 2. Businesspeople—United States—Biography. 3. Sports team owners—United States—Biography. 4. Telecommunication—United States—Biography. I. Title.

HC102.5.T86O28 2010


384.55'5092—dc22

[B] 2009031625

14 13 12 11 10 1 2 3 4 5

This book is also available on the World Wide Web as an eBook.
Visit www.abc-clio.com for details.

ABC-CLIO, LLC
130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911
Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911

This book is printed on acid-free paper 
Manufactured in the United States of America

*To my mother, Francesca O'Connor,
for her love, devotion, and perseverance.*

To my wife, Renée Gelman, my perfect love and partner.

CONTENTS

<i>Series Foreword</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	xiii
<i>Timeline: Events in the Life of Ted Turner</i>	xvii
Chapter 1 Beginnings	1
Chapter 2 Poison Ivy	13
Chapter 3 Stepping Out	21
Chapter 4 Riding the Waves	31
Chapter 5 Mediated	39
Chapter 6 Oceans Away	53
Chapter 7 Into Heaven	63
Chapter 8 Atlanta Braves	69
Chapter 9 In the Cup	81
Chapter 10 News Cable	95
Chapter 11 Almost	113
Chapter 12 Stepping Up	123
Chapter 13 Reaching Out	139

Chapter 14	Getting Personal	151
Chapter 15	Color My World	163
Chapter 16	Remote Control	169
Chapter 17	Time Worn	177
Chapter 18	Synergy Crisis	189
Chapter 19	Clear Cut Reminder	203
	<i>Selected Bibliography and Further Resources</i>	215
	<i>Index</i>	227

Photo essay follows page 112

SERIES FOREWORD

In response to high school and public library needs, Greenwood developed this distinguished series of full-length biographies specifically for student use. Prepared by field experts and professionals, these engaging biographies are tailored for high school students who need challenging yet accessible biographies. Ideal for secondary school assignments, the length, format and subject areas are designed to meet educators' requirements and students' interests.

Greenwood offers an extensive selection of biographies spanning all curriculum-related subject areas including social studies, the sciences, literature and the arts, history and politics, as well as popular culture, covering public figures and famous personalities from all time periods and backgrounds, both historic and contemporary, who have made an impact on American and/or world culture. Greenwood biographies were chosen based on comprehensive feedback from librarians and educators. Consideration was given to both curriculum relevance and inherent interest. The result is an intriguing mix of the well known and the unexpected, the saints and sinners from long-ago history and contemporary pop culture. Readers will find a wide array of subject choices from fascinating crime figures like Al Capone to inspiring pioneers like Margaret Mead, from the greatest minds of our time like Stephen Hawking to the most amazing success stories of our day like J.K. Rowling.

While the emphasis is on fact, not glorification, the books are meant to be fun to read. Each volume provides in-depth information about the

subject's life from birth through childhood, the teen years, and adulthood. A thorough account relates family background and education, traces personal and professional influences, and explores struggles, accomplishments, and contributions. A timeline highlights the most significant life events against a historical perspective. Bibliographies supplement the reference value of each volume.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to thank the inimitable Vince Burns, Executive Editorial Director at ABC-CLIO and former Editorial Director at the Greenwood Publishing Group, for first proposing that I consider doing a book. The former Vice-President of Production and Editorial at Greenwood, Gary Kuris, an intriguingly interesting and good-humored man, also played a part. My sharp and dedicated editor, Sandy Towers, who must surely have been holding her breath throughout the process, has been very highly appreciated throughout; an author could wish for none better.

Thanks go as well to Michelle Scott at ABC-CLIO/Greenwood, for overseeing the production process. The editorial staff at Apex CoVantage did a spectacular job addressing my lax and sloppy grammar.

Shout outs go to Bridget, Mark, Nicole, Barbara, and everyone else who made a successful transition from Greenwood to ABC-CLIO, as well as all those, like myself, who didn't.

I am deeply indebted to those who have written on Ted Turner in the past, especially Ken Auletta, Porter Bibb, Robert Goldberg and Gerald Jay Goldberg, Roger Vaughan, Hank Whittemore, and Christain Williams.

I also take this opportunity to thank all the institutions, educators, colleagues, novelists, friends, and family that have all left residual pieces of themselves within me. Maimonides hospital and Frankie Esposito, both in their own way, probably literally saved my life in earlier years (though no one believes my story involving Frankie).

Special mention to Elie Azenberg, Steve Zwerling, Jim Haskins, Ted Estabrook, and Alan Liss.

My mother, who held herself and the family together after my own father's suicide and has always been the rock of my life, is loved and thanked more than words could ever express. My brothers, Mark and Patrick, are and will always be the best friends I have, whether we happen to be keeping in very close contact or not. My wife, Renée Gelman, sustains and enriches my life on every level, and I will love her deeply always and forever.

And of course, Ted Turner himself, a most remarkable man and subject. Given my own father's suicide—though I was considerably younger than Ted during the experience—I feel a sort of kinship with Turner, who couldn't be more different than myself in wealth, accomplishments, and intelligence. May he live 100 years, and savor every one.

INTRODUCTION

As he stepped down from his position as Vice Chairman of AOL Time Warner in May of 2006, Ted Turner said simply, “I tried my best.”

Over the past six years he had been humiliated, tied like ballast to the experimental design of a business merger that by theory was transformational but proved to be dead in the water. It was a repeat of his experience in his first attempt to defend the America’s Cup nearly 30 years before, with a boat named *Mariner* and its hull with no point. He had lost all control of a media empire that he had built with tenacious determination over the first phase of his life—an empire built on the synergies that proved an impossible dream for the suits of AOL Time Warner. And he had lost most of the fortune he had planned to use to continue his efforts to improve and save the world in the second phase of his life.

After bursting onto the national consciousness in post-Watergate 1976 with his exaggerated southern drawl, his brash, boisterous, yet self-effacing endless chatter, and outsized, quirky showmanship, he had become the anti-Zelig of the 20th century, popping up everywhere and never fitting in. The yachting establishment chastised him, the baseball establishment banned him, and the media establishment ridiculed him, all to their ultimate chagrin. He proved bigger than all three.

Robert Edward “Ted” Turner III was the ultimate outsider. Shaped by a domineering, success-driven father and a childhood marked by repeated abandonment, Turner was an outsider even within his own family. At-

tention, any attention, became life affirming. Throughout his life he has both struggled to live up to his father's expectations and rebelled against them, while only occasionally realizing that it was his own sense of self-worth that he struggled with. He transformed himself into a carbon copy of his father, adopting his drive, his business credos, and his weaknesses as his own, more hard edged and subtly distorted than the original but softer at the core. That core though was well hidden, buried within the aching soul of a past too painful to explore.

One wonders what would have become of Ted Turner had his father stayed in the used car business and never started Turner Outdoor Advertising, the billboard business that Ted was running by the time he was 24, after his father committed suicide. When he started out, Turner was hell bent on establishing a business empire that would conquer the world as surely as his hero, Alexander the Great, had conquered his. The shape and substance of the empire itself, however, would be part happenstance, part luck, determined by his starting point. At heart, Turner was a salesman, just as his father had been; his mission was to sell advertising. Initially, television was just a better means to that end. While he quickly understood the power of the medium, it was only by working through the connections that he proved more adept at making than any other businessman of his time that he would truly make peace with the Rotarian motto that his father had often repeated, "They profit most who serve best."

By the time he walked off that stage in 2006, Jimmy Carter, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Kofi Anan had hailed him as a hero. He had been named *TIME* magazine's Man of the Year, and *Broadcasting* magazine's Man of the Century, and been named to numerous halls of fame. He had won the America's Cup and an unprecedented four U.S. Yachtsman of the Year awards. The baseball team he owned had won a World Series and an unprecedented fourteen straight divisional championships. He had received a number of honorary degrees, including one from Brown University, which he had left in his senior year after being suspended for the second time. He was collecting humanitarian and environmental awards at a rate too quick to register. He was an enduring mass draw on the lecture circuit and one of the most recognized people in the world.

While the unlikeliest of folk heroes, with a tongue set loose from his head and a penchant for making crude, biting, and ill-considered remarks, he has been well loved, though rarely completely, by far more than those who can't stand the thought of him. During his early sailing career he was feted by several crown heads of Europe as being the quintessential American, and in the sense of being self-important and selfless, arrogant and beneficent, clever and naive, I suppose it fits. A longtime member of Turner's sailing crews may have provided the best succinct description of Ted when he said, "he's an asshole, but a glorious asshole."

To understand how that day in 2006 came about we can look to the 1950s sitcoms that filled much of the airtime of his Superstation, or his favorite movie, *Gone With the Wind*, with its dashing hero whose name mimicked his own initials, RET. Deep down, Ted Turner yearns for the splendor and tranquility of a time that never was. He was cable before cable was cool, but only because he couldn't afford a network and was never able to acquire one. Like a tragedy from the classics that he loves so well, he succumbed to being the insider that this ultimate outsider always yearned to be. Those who have known him best most often cite his childlike innocence as one of his most redeeming qualities, and loyalty, honesty, and trust as being the most cherished principles passed onto him by his father. Inside a corporate boardroom, such gentlemanly ethics are for losers. In the end, the maverick that always insisted on being his own unique self was undone by a culture principally geared to looking out for yourself.

Turner still retains some bitterness over being ostracized by the lesser mortals that had conceived the shipwreck of AOL Time Warner, but for the most part he has moved on.

While he is far less wealthy than he once was, he is still quite comfortable. He continues to advocate for the causes he deems critical: environmental stewardship, nuclear deterrence, population control, sustainable energy, the eradication of poverty and disease.

He continues to find solace in land, "the only thing that lasts," owning and protecting over two million acres in the United States, much of it active rangeland dedicated to protecting and reintroducing native flora and fauna. He still has his hands in business, being the co-owner

and operator of Ted's Montana Grill, serving bison burgers in a neighborhood near you. He is still contributing money to UN projects, still funding the UN Foundation, the Nuclear Threat Initiative, and the Turner Foundation. He has finally completed the autobiography he had been promising for decades.

His biggest regrets are not for the businesses or the fortune he has lost, but for his three failed marriages and the pain, particularly that most attributable to his own failings, they have visited upon his wives and children. He is still haunted by the specter of *Citizen Kane*, as he has been since first seeing it as a young adult. He is still trying his best.

TIMELINE: EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF TED TURNER

- November 19, 1938** R. E. (Ted) Turner III is born in Cincinnati, Ohio, to R. E. (Ed) Turner Jr. and Florence Rooney Turner.
- September 18, 1941** Ted's sister, Mary Jean Turner, is born.
- 1943** Ed Turner enlists in the Navy and takes his wife and daughter with him.
Ted Turner, left in Cincinnati, is sent to a boarding school.
- 1944** Turner is sent to Sumner, Mississippi to stay with his paternal grandparents and attend public school.
- 1945** Turner is reunited with his family in Cincinnati.
- 1947** Ed Turner moves the family to Savannah, Georgia to oversee a recently purchased Outdoor Advertising plant. Ted is sent to Georgia Military Academy, south of Atlanta.
- 1948–49** Ed Turner purchases a yacht he names the *Merry Jane*, and hires Jimmy Brown as its caretaker.
Turner is reunited with family, and attends Savannah public school.
- 1950–56** Turner attends McCallie Military Academy in Chattanooga, Tennessee, becoming the young-

TIMELINE

- est boarding student in its institutional history. During summers he works 40-hour weeks at Turner Outdoor Advertising, and his father charges him for room and board.
- 1952** Mary Jean is diagnosed with a fatal form of systemic lupus erythematosus. Opportunistic encephalitis and ensuing coma leave her brain damaged.
- 1955** Turner wins the Interscholastic Tennessee debating championship.
- 1956** Turner enters Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, joins the sailing club, and will be named the best freshman sailor in New England.
- 1957** Turner's parents, Ed and Florence, divorce. Florence moves back to Cincinnati with Mary Jean.
In December, Turner is suspended from Brown for the upcoming spring semester.
Ed Turner marries Jane Dillard.
- 1958** Turner serves a six-month stint in the Naval Reserves.
- 1959** Turner has a personal letter from his father published in the *Brown Daily Herald*.
Turner is named captain of the Brown varsity sailing team, and then meets Julia (Judy) Gale Nye in November.
- 1960** Turner is suspended from Brown for the second time and will not return.
- June 22** Turner marries Judy Nye.
Turner starts work as a salesman at Turner Outdoor Advertising.
- December 15** Mary Jean dies in Cincinnati.
- 1961** Ted and Judy's first child, Laura Lee, is born.
Ed Turner spends time at Silver Hill facility in New Canaan, Connecticut.
- 1962** Ted and Judy divorce but soon reunite.

- Ed returns to Silver Hill for a brief time late in the year.
- March 5, 1963** Ted's father, Ed Turner, commits suicide.
 Ted, at 24, becomes president of Turner Outdoor Advertising.
 Ted and Judy have a second child, Robert Edward (Teddy) Turner IV.
 Ted and Judy break up for good.
- June 2, 1964** Turner marries Jane (Janie) Shirley Smith.
- 1965** Ted and Janie have their first child, named Rhett Turner after Ted's favorite movie character.
- 1966** Turner wins the Southern Ocean Racing Conference (SORC) in his second year of ocean-racing.
- 1968** Ted and Janie's second child, Beauregard, is born.
 Turner purchases his first radio station, WAPO, in Chattanooga, Tennessee.
- 1969** Ted and Janie's third child, Sarah Jean (Jennie), is born.
 Turner Advertising is rechristened as Turner Communications Group.
- 1970** Turner acquires independent UHF-television station WJRJ in Atlanta and changes its call letters to WTCG.
 Turner purchases a second UHF station, WCTU, in Charlotte, North Carolina and changes its call letters to WRET.
- 1971** Turner is named U.S. Yachtsman of the Year for 1970.
 WTCG expands its schedule to 24 hours.
- 1972** FCC relaxes rules on cable television's importation of distant signals.
 WTCG begins airing Atlanta Braves and Atlanta Hawks games.
- 1974** Turner is named U.S. Yachtsman of the Year for 1973.

TIMELINE

- Turner fails in a bid to defend the America's Cup.
- 1975** WTCG begins broadcasting *17 Update Early in the Morning*.
HBO begins satellite distribution of its signal.
- 1976** Turner buys the Atlanta Braves baseball franchise.
Turner signs Andy Messersmith, baseball's first free agent.
- December 17** WTCG Superstation initials satellite distribution, redefining cable.
- 1977** Turner buys the Atlanta Hawks basketball franchise.
Turner serves as manager of the Braves for one day.
Turner is suspended from baseball for one year for tampering.
Turner wins the America's Cup.
- 1978** Turner wins U.S. Yachtsman of the Year for 1977.
Charlotte station WRET becomes an NBC affiliate.
- 1979** Turner wins the U.K.'s Fastnet race in the deadliest race in the history of yachting.
Turner Communications is rechristened as Turner Broadcasting Systems.
WTCG Superstation is rebranded as WTBS.
- 1980** Turner wins U.S. Yachtsman of the Year for 1979.
Turner sells WRET to Westinghouse to help finance CNN.
Turner and Reese Schonfeld launch Cable News Network (CNN), the world's first 24-hour televised news channel.
Turner fails in a bid to defend the America's Cup.
- 1981** Turner retires from yacht racing.

Superstation qualifies for Nielsen ratings after Turner prevails in having viewership requirements readjusted.

Turner Broadcasting sues the major networks, unions, and the White House for being denied pool coverage membership.

Superstation begins “Turner Time” programming, starting five minutes past the top and bottom of the hour.

1982 CNN2, later renamed Headline News, launches in an effort to hold off announced competition from Westinghouse and ABC.

CNNRadio launches.

CNN initiates CNN NewsSource syndication service.

Turner travels to Cuba to meet with Fidel Castro.

Reese Schonfeld is fired from CNN, and Burt Reinhardt is promoted to president of CNN.

Westinghouse/ABC co-venture Satellite News Channel launches.

1983 Turner buys out Satellite News Channel for \$25 million.

1984 CNN launches International Hour.

Government’s Cable Act deregulates the industry and spurs further growth.

1985 Turner creates The Better World Society.

Turner launches a hostile takeover attempt of CBS.

1986 CNN has exclusive footage of the Challenger disaster.

Turner purchases MGM film library.

Turner’s Goodwill Games open in Moscow.

Turner announces plans to colorize several of his newly acquired MGM screen gems.

CNN pioneers use of “flyaway” portable satellite uplink transmitters.

TIMELINE

- Janie and Ted separate, and Ted moves in with girlfriend J. J. Ebaugh.
CNN moves into CNN Center.
Turner's son Teddy is in a serious car accident in Moscow.
- 1987 A group of 26 cable operators purchases 37 percent of Turner Broadcasting to save it from crushing debt. Turner cedes veto power to two of the investors.
CNN initials World Report, and opens a Beijing bureau.
Turner purchases his first Western ranch property, the Bar None in Montana.
- 1988 Turner Network Television (TNT) is launched.
Ted and Janie's divorce is finalized.
- 1989 Turner and Jane Fonda have their first date.
Turner buys a second ranch property in Montana, the Flying D, and starts building his bison herd.
Turner's bid to purchase Financial News Network is vetoed by his board.
Turner launches Turner Productions to create documentaries and docudramas for TNT and theatrical release.
CNN signal is beamed to Africa, the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia. Coverage of Tiananmen Square wins wide acclaim.
- 1990 Turner starts the Turner Foundation, a conservation-minded personal trust.
Turner creates *Captain Planet and the Planeteers* animation series.
Tom Johnson, former publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, becomes president of CNN.
- 1991 CNN has its "finest hour" with coverage of the Gulf War from inside Iraq.

- CNN's coverage of Soviet coup attempt reaches Soviet nationals.
- Turner funds Captain Planet Foundation, which is dedicated to environmental education.
- Government relation of "Fin-Syn" rules signals media consolidations to come.
- Turner purchases Hanna-Barbera animation studios.
- December 21** Turner and Jane Fonda are married on Jane's 54th birthday.
- 1992** Ted Turner named *TIME* magazine's Man of the Year for 1991.
- Turner's mother, Florence, passes away.
- Turner considered as possible third-party presidential candidate.
- Cartoon Network is launched.
- Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act is passed.
- 1993** Turner purchases New Line Cinema and Castle Rock Entertainment.
- Turner Broadcasting profit is greater than that of any of the three major networks.
- 1994** Turner Classic Movies (TCM) is launched.
- CNN profit is greater than that of any of the three major networks.
- 1995 Turner agrees to sell Turner Broadcasting to Time Warner.
- 1996** Time Warner's purchase of Turner Broadcasting is approved and becomes official.
- 1997** Turner pledges \$1 billion in cash and stock to the United Nations, and sets up the United Nations Foundation to administer the bequest.
- Turner is featured in Apple Computer's Think Different advertising campaign.

TIMELINE

- 1999 Turner named *Broadcasting & Cable's* co-Man of the Century with CBS's Bill Paley.
- 2000 Ted and Jane Fonda announce separation.
America Online and Time Warner announce merger plans.
Turner negotiates deal in U.S./UN dues dispute and pays the United States' \$35 million shortfall in past dues.
Turner is told he will be stripped of all operating authority with the AOL Time Warner merger.
- 2001 Turner funds Nuclear Threat Initiative, a foundation dedicated to reducing the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.
Merger is approved, and Time Warner becomes AOL Time Warner.
Ted and Jane Fonda's divorce is finalized.
- 2002 Jerry Levin resigns as CEO of AOL Time Warner.
Turner and partner George McKerron Jr. open the first of their Ted's Montana Grill restaurants.
- 2003 Steve Case resigns as AOL Time Warner Chairman.
Turner resigns his post as AOL Time Warner vice chairman on the same day the company announces a net 2002 loss of \$98.7 billion.
Turner becomes an outspoken critic of the Iraq war.
Time Warner drops "AOL" from its company name.
- 2004 Turner publishes *My Beef with Big Media*.
- 2006 Turner resigns from his seat on the board of Time Warner.
- 2008 Turner, the largest individual landowner in the United States and the owner of the world's

largest herd of bison, announces that he is almost done purchasing land.

Turner releases an autobiography, *Call Me Ted*.

2009 Turner supports Ashton Kutcher's bid to gain one million Twitter followers before CNN; Kutcher pledges 1,000 nets to the "Nothing But Nets" campaign.

Chapter 1

BEGINNINGS

Robert Edward (Ted) Turner III was born at 8:50 A.M. on November 19, 1938, not in the South, but in Cincinnati, Ohio, 15 months after the wedding of his parents, Robert Edward (Ed) Turner Jr. and Florence Rooney Turner.

Ed Turner had come to Cincinnati on the promise of a sales job at Queen City Chevrolet. His own father, Robert Edward Turner, had migrated to Sumner, Mississippi in search of opportunity when the extensive landholdings of his forebears had gone barren. By the time Ed was born in 1911, his father had managed to turn a meager inheritance into a respectable holding of agricultural property while building a life as a cotton farmer, but the success would prove short lived. As his forebears had before him, he watched his harvest dwindle as this land too gave out. With his income declining, he moved the family to town, where he was an elder of the Methodist Church, and opened a general store where Ed would work as a boy. Despite and because of his reduced circumstances, Robert Edward Turner was determined that Ed would go to college, and though he couldn't afford Duke, where Ed had been accepted, the Methodist Millsaps College in Jackson seemed both appropriate and affordable. Timing would prove critical, however, as just weeks after the decision was made the stock market collapsed, initiating the Great Depression. Before long, Robert Edward Turner had to close the general store and give up his house in town, moving

his remaining family back to the farm where they would be dependent on whatever income could be provided by the sharecroppers that worked his lands. Deprived of nearly all assistance from his family, Ed tried supporting himself with whatever odd jobs he could find. It wasn't enough, though, and he was forced to leave Millsaps without a degree. After wandering the South in search of a job, Ed started working for the General Outdoor Advertising Company in Memphis, Tennessee, where he worked as a "counter," standing by the side of the road and counting the number of cars and passengers that passed the company's billboards, until an acquaintance introduced him to the owner of Queen City Chevrolet.

Before leaving to go north, Ed reportedly told his parents that he would become rich and own a plantation and a yacht; whether apocryphal or not, he wasted little time in trying. Before long he was the top salesman at Queen City and his outgoing nature, Southern drawl, and good sense of humor made him a popular young man around town, especially with the ladies. He soon struck up a relationship with one of his customers, George F. Rooney Jr., who insisted he meet his sister, Florence, who had largely retreated from socializing after her fiancé had developed acute appendicitis on the eve of their planned wedding and died a few days later. George and Florence's grandfather was Henry Sicking, who had owned a chain of 20 grocery stores and a popular livery stable and is said to have been the spitting image of Ted Turner. Reportedly despondent over stock market losses, he died while absent-mindedly stepping from a streetcar into the path of another, leaving behind a modest fortune. When introduced to Florence Rooney, who had lived with her mother at her grandmother's quite swanky boarding hotel since her parents' divorce, Ed Turner was immediately intrigued. Florence was tall, beautiful, refined, and surprisingly outgoing, and Ed Turner seems to have decided on the spot that he would win her hand. Florence, however, would need convincing, as would her mother, since the Rooneys were devout Catholics, with Florence having attended convent schools, while Ed, though hardly religious, still identified with his father's Methodist faith.

Ed would soon take up residence at Mrs. Sicking's hotel, where a classical ensemble performed every night and limousines lined the driveways. It may have been an extravagance, but it gave him the