

Kathleen Turner: Battling Arthritis, Love, Life

Contributed by Chris Yandek
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In the 1980s, Kathleen Turner was one of the most talented and desired actresses. She starred with major actors from Michael Douglas to Jack Nicholson to an Oscar nominated role alongside Nicholas Cage in the 1987 film *Peggy Sue Got Married*. In 1992, Turner was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and her career came to halt. In her biography *Send Yourself Roses*, out now in paperback, Turner writes deeply about how the disease changed her life. She now says that another knee replacement surgery is in the distant future. She refuses to give up her craft that keeps her moving.

Listen to the Kathleen Turner interview{audio}<http://thesportsinterview.com/mp3/KTurner.mp3>{/audio}

Chris Yandek: You are open in the book about your battle with arthritis and you say it's currently in a remission stage. How are you doing today and how does it still impact your life?

Kathleen Turner: "Well, actually at the moment it's having a great impact. I am doing a play off Broadway right now down at the Lucille Lortel called *The Third Story* and given that it's a little more difficult in the winter, the backstage essentially consists of just steep stairs (Laughs) going up and down. I am having difficulty and in fact I think I'll probably have to have another knee replacement, which is no fun. But if I want to work, which I do because that's my love, that's what I have to do."

CY: For years you decided to not disclose that you had the arthritis and the press made numerous negative assumptions about you. What do you think was the main reason you didn't come out and tell the public what was really going on besides how it would affect your professional career?

KT: "Well, that was basically it. When this first really hit, all the autoimmune diseases were not very well understood. For example, look at Michael J. Fox who kept his illness secret for longer than I did with his MS. Again because people are frightened of what they don't know or understand. They would be less willing to employ you. It's pretty simple."

CY: What do you struggle with most today?

KT: "Just one of my knees."

CY: You say in the book you're probably most proudest of your daughter Rachel. What are the most important things that you've learned about motherhood?

KT: "It's the most extraordinary. I suppose we're all to a certain extent at whatever age we may be, we think of ourselves as sort of the center of the universe and then you have a child and you get bumped out of the middle. To me it was a fabulous feeling of relief. Here was something that was my most important and it made life very simple in terms of is this good for the child or bad for the child? To answer that question, it answered most conflicts."

CY: It seemed like she became the most important thing to you and as you saw her progress as her life has gone on. You say that she's just not scared to take chances and gone on with things. With that being said, kind of more confident than I guess you were growing up but obviously it was a different era.

KT: "Very different. I think for one thing she's had so much exposure to the world both in traveling and with extraordinary people that she's met through my life. I think that she has a much stronger sense of herself at her age that I think I ever did. She has a very strong talent and passion for her music. That's a wonderful thing because you can encourage a child but you cannot give them a passion. You cannot give them something thinking I have to do this you know? To be born with that I think is the greatest gift."

CY: You played so many different roles and you made note you didn't want to be typecasted. Do you have any favorite one in particular?

KT: "In film, I truly loved doing the *Romancing The Stone* with Michael [Douglas] and Danny [DeVito] because it was just flat out fun. We just had a good time. I like the character because she's a good woman, good heart. I think on stage of course just having completed last year a long tour of Broadway and then I did the West end and then a national tour of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Martha was a role I dreamed of doing for almost 30 years. To be able to do that and to do that up to my hopes and expectations was I think one of the most thrilling experiences I've ever had."

CY: When it comes to *Body Heat*, you talked about how you weren't really comfortable with your sexuality at the period in your life. Do you think it's harder for performers to discover their sexual identity and let someone in?

KT: "Oh sweetheart, I don't know. That's terribly general. I simply wasn't brought up in a world where sexuality was that much of an issue. I wasn't brought up very much in the United States where I believe we have this tremendously hypocritical attitude towards sex and not very healthy I think most of the time. It just wasn't that much of an issue to me not as it is I think to most people who grow up in the United States. I don't think there is a specific answer to that question."

CY: Focusing on sex scenes and how *Body Heat* transcended them to where they are today, have they gone too far in movies? Are they not meaningful anymore? Do you think there is too much of it?

KT: "Well, it depends like everything else. Like elements of violence or anything. It depends on how and why they're used. Sex as an abuse, yeah I am very disapproving of it. Sex as a celebration of relationship or love, I am very approving of it. Like everything else it depends on the intention behind it."

CY: During the filming of Romancing The Stone, which you admit you had a blast, you openly admit at that point and time you could've possibly had a long-term relationship with Michael Douglas. Do you ever think what could've been?

KT: "Oh I suppose so. When I thought I was falling hard for the boy for Mr. Michael, yeah I suppose one fantasizes about the life, but in fact very...very soon thereafter and of course very soon after I met Jay my husband, it's clear to me that is not a world. This world of Hollywood elite, that kind of money and lifestyle would never have suited me. I think that would've made me extremely unhappy. Once again, things work out for the best."

CY: What do you make of these star power couples today and how much press they get everywhere they go? Has it just gotten ridiculous?

KT: "Yes. I actually feel badly for them in some ways although they can use it to some extent for their own interests and charities and commitments. I find it so relentless and so intrusive. One of my intentions always was to protect my family from that kind of exposure and I managed to do that very well I think."

CY: I think you did very well too. With all the press you got over the years and the things that were said about you, do you think you really let it get to you or was it just you knew they were all lies and it didn't really bother you?

KT: "Of course it gets to you. Of course it does. People saying hurtful things about you is – I would like to be someone perhaps that this stuff bounces off, but I don't honestly know many people like that. (Laughs) I am certainly not like that. Of course it does but you try and keep it in perspective. You try and say how important is it? And how much of this is my vanity or is it an issue I really have to deal with? You just have to try and keep a perspective on these things, but I don't think you can avoid feeling them."

CY: Are you surprised by the public battles that many young stars, actresses have today like Lindsay Lohan with substance abuse? I know that you had some battles with alcohol over the years, but are you surprised at how magnified these things are in what these stars are going through?

KT: "There is this incredible invasion of privacy and not allowing any private life at all. If you consider people as I do to truly be artists if they have that capability there should be a certain amount of respect with that. I think that the coverage and the intrusion that many of these young actors have to put up with is very disrespectful."

CY: I know you haven't done much film in recent years, but if you could go back and be in a film, who would you most like to work with, star with that you haven't had a chance to work with?

KT: "I will never ever talk about names because I always leave somebody out and I hurt somebody's feelings and I never mean that to happen so no. I don't do that. I won't answer that question."

CY: Then let's talk about who you have worked with besides Michael Douglas, Danny DeVito, Jack Nicholson, who have you most enjoyed working with?

KT: "Well I tremendously enjoyed working with Bill Hurt and Larry Kasdan. We worked together both in Body Heat and Accidental Tourists. Larry wrote and directed both of those as well. The relationships that we had, putting together that work I think was very...very special. I had a ball working with John Walters. I saw him the other night. I don't know how I got through that. I loved working with Bill Irwin as George in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf. There are very few people actually I didn't enjoy working with because good work comes out of good relationships within the working atmosphere. Hard to think of everybody you know? I got a lot of ground to cover here."

CY: 30 more years of it still hopefully.

KT: "From your mouth huh?"

CY: The original [hardcover] copy of Send Yourself Roses got a lot of press, a lot of attention. Three weeks on the NY Times Bestseller List. There was a legal matter with Nicolas Cage about him having two DUI's. How did that end up in there? Was it just not clear memory?

KT: "I don't think I was still supposed to talk about it in fact, but the thing came about in fact because British law is extremely different from the American in terms of slander, defamation and what was not considered defamatory here was able to be attacked there. That really was more in terms of a legal system than me."

CY: Is there any reason why you and Nic Cage have never been on the same page?

KT: "What do you mean?"

CY: The differences. I know when you guys worked together in the movie and he apologized for his bad behavior over the years. Do you think there are still any tough issues there, or is it just it is what it is?

KT: No. As you know I've worked well with Sophia and Frances. I certainly consider a friend and I believe he feels the same. No. We're very different sorts of actors I think."

CY: What's in store for you in the future? What would you like to do most? Would you like to film? Would you like to do some TV movies?

KT: "No...No. Theater. I have two wonderful offers for the Fall Broadway season, which I have not yet decided on. That will be my next big project I think."

CY: And again, how should people feel about your physical state? Should they worry?

KT: No. I mean God knows I'm a fighter. I'm a very... very hard fighter. So whatever I have to do to create myself in operational form I will do. Don't worry about me."

CY: And is Kathleen Turner still going bachelor or has she found somebody?

KT: "Still bachelor. Yeah. I'm still liking that a lot."

CY: One day at a time, enjoying your life. Getting to see what you want to do and being independent and enjoying the projects.

KT: "After 22 years of marriage and 21 years of motherhood it's kind of nice to have my own life. You know? Not everybody gets that chance."

CY: And what would you like to say to the people? Anything that you'd like them to know?

KT: "One of the things I tell my students, cause I teach at NYU when I can, be brave, be brave. Just don't talk yourself out

of something before you've tried it. I don't mean some kind of recreational drug or something. I mean setting yourself a task. I mean a real mountain that you want to climb. Anything you want to achieve."

CY: Have a goal and achieve it.

KT: Yeah. And don't be afraid of going for it."

CY: Why do you think people are afraid to achieve their goals in closing?

KT: "Well, I think they sort of talked themselves out of it before they even try. Learning and growing I think is what life is about. Don't be afraid to do that. Take risks." You can find more information and order a copy of Send Yourself Roses in paperback by clicking [here](#). Kathleen Turner's Official Website is at <http://www.kathleen-turner.com>