

ABQJournal » One on One with Doug Turner

By Autumn Gray, Mon, Apr 25, 2011

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Yes, Doug Turner may again run for governor. No, he will not seek retiring U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman's seat.

"I do have political aspirations beyond my last effort but not in the next 18 months," he says from his DW Turner office chair that's finally warm again after about a year's vacancy during last year's campaign. "The company suffered," and his young family did, too, he says.

While politics and public policy have always been a passion of Turner's, he is a family man and businessman first. Anyone who knew him as a kid growing up in the Country Club area could have seen that even then. Lemonade gave him his first sweet taste of entrepreneurial success when he was just 7. "My father made me a lemonade stand and took me down to Old Town, and I was mortified. 'What if they don't buy the lemonade?' ... And my father was like, 'What's the worst thing that anyone could say to you?' And I was like, 'Well they could say no.' (His dad said,) 'Well, if that's the worst thing, you've got nothing to lose.'

"I think I opened up my first checking account maybe a month after I started selling lemonade" — and then bought himself a Swiss Army knife and skateboard.

He and his brothers continued working that stand for about nine years, sometimes making a few hundred dollars in a day.

Other Turner start-ups included candy and T-shirt sales, and a luminaria business he shared with his brothers during Christmastime in their neighborhood.

"When I walked to school, up until about fifth grade, I would stop at Circle K and I would buy baseball cards and gum and candy and so forth, and I would put it on a little strongbox, and then during recess at school I would sell it," Turner said.

Years later, it was T-shirts. "I sold them at concerts and stuff like that," he said. "I'd order the shirts from some manufacturer somewhere in the country and then I'd get them screenprinted. ... I remember parking outside of Paolo Soleri up in Santa Fe and selling shirts. I sold anti-apartheid shirts at, it might have been an Alpha Blondy concert 'cause I knew that the crowd was interested in the issues and so forth, and then I donated some of the money."

Turner's first long-term employment working for someone else was as a junior staffer in U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici's office just after college. Next, he worked in Belgium doing European public affairs.

And at about age 26, with a \$10,000 loan from his father, Turner started DW Turner Inc. in a stand-alone apartment on Gold. The public affairs, policy and strategic communications firm is still located on the same street, although it now occupies the entire 12th floor of the 13-story Simms building and employs about 22 people.

"I always wanted to be in business, you know."

Q: What did you learn about yourself from the run for governor?

A: Oh, you learn how little you know. It takes a certain level of insanity matched with ego to get into it in the first place, to think that you could actually run. And you think you have all these great ideas, and you've got the answers, and you're gonna go out there, you're gonna tell them, and they're gonna love it. And the reality is you know very little.

Q: How did you know about business at such a young age? Was it instinctive or learned from your parents?

A: Probably from my father. My father's a hydrologist, geologist, but he's always been in business for himself. I think I've always grown up with the mentality to never rely on anyone else to do something for you. You've got to be able to figure out how to get it done.

Q: So you did not grow up on a silver spoon?

A: No. No. I never had an allowance. I mean my parents gave my brothers and I amazing opportunities. I mean, you know they were not the kind of people to buy a new car every couple of years, but instead would send us to summer camp or whatever. But you know, I didn't grow up in a household that gave us allowances or cars or, you know, anything. It was always important for my parents to make sure that their kids understood the value of a dollar and how hard it is to earn it.

Q: What are some things you do to unwind?

A: I love to ski. ... This year I did more snowshoeing. I like camping, hiking, that sort of thing. I love to cook. ... If I'm in a restaurant and I eat something that I like, I sort of make a mental note of what's in it. I don't know. ... I've also thought that another career at some point might be to become a chef, but every restaurant owner I know has said, 'Don't do it.'

Q: How did you come to run political campaigns?

A: The first race that I worked on was the mayor's race in Washington, D.C., in — it must have been 1990. And I had just gone to the School for Advanced Campaign Management in Washington, after college. It was like a three-month intensive, nonpartisan, summer hard-core campaign school. And we had to choose a real race that was going on somewhere. ... We chose the mayor's race in Washington. And we ended up writing a plan, and he thought it was great, and he sort of sucked us in to work on that. And so my father asked me to help him on his race (for U.S. Senate), and he lost the primary. And then Gary Johnson asked me to help, and so I became Gary's state director.

Q: You have taken risks in business and in running for office. Is there anything that you are afraid of?

A: All of it. I mean I think you've got to be a little afraid. ... I'm one of these people that once you're in, you're in. You finish what you start, even if the outcome is terrible. Because you always learn something about yourself, about what you're capable of, about, you know, what not to do the next time.

Q: At your core, what makes you the happiest?

A: Well, my family. I have a close family, not only my own wife and kids but my brothers and my parents and so forth. We always grew up doing a lot together. And that's important to me. I loved my

dogs. I mean, for the most part, I love life and all the crazy things that it throws at you. And sometimes it's awful, but you know if everything was great all the time, we wouldn't appreciate all the things that are really great. You know the challenges that you face on a daily basis. ... I have always been the kind of person who — and everybody's probably familiar with this — that someday somebody's gonna lift off the sheet and they're gonna find that there's nothing there. Despite everything that you've ever done, there really is nothing there. And you know, I'm no different. You're always certainly striving to prove, not to anybody else but to yourself, what you're capable of and what you can do. But you know life, in general, I'm excited about most things.

The Basics:

Born Douglas William Turner on Jan. 3, 1969, in Albuquerque; graduated with a bachelor of arts degree from the American University School of International Studies and has a master's degree in international relations from the Centre Européen de Recherches Internationales et Stratégiques, Université Libre de Bruxelles/Université de Paris-Sud XI; married to Mala Nani Htun since January 2006; two children, Zander, 4, and Livia, 18 months; no pets. His beloved dogs died fairly recently.

Position: CEO of public relations firm DW Turner Inc.

What You Didn't Know: "I like to collect Chinese political posters. I have a couple here that are very hard to get."