

The open case of agent Turner

Once a crack FBI interrogator, she took on the agency as a whistle-blower. Reputation ruined, she has few regrets.

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Three times in her life, former FBI agent Jane Turner felt a chill down her spine.

It takes a lot to make the St. Paul woman's list: She's shared confession chambers with rapists, killers, child molesters. She covered one of the FBI's most difficult, unwanted placements for more than a decade. And in the midst of a lawsuit in which she fought the bureau for a reputation largely in ruin, she became one of the most shunned and controversial agents in the Minneapolis region.

The first chill Turner talks about was when she helped profile a prolific serial killer from Vancouver. In the early 1980s, Clifford Olson Jr. had hammered a railroad spike into a teenage boy's head.

"He did it because he wanted to see what would happen," said Turner, a Quantico-trained profiler, who thought about the crime on a night drive back to Seattle, where she was stationed at the time.

She had reviewed records, photos and tapes to help create a psychological portrait of the killer. "I felt like I'd been touched by evil. That's what he was. I was sweating all over."

While she relates the tale, her 12-year-old daughter, Victoria, sitting next to her in the seat at a St. Paul diner, pipes up, taking off the headphones of the iPod she was pretending to listen to. "That's sick," she says.

Turner, 55, appears miffed by her daughter's snooping, but the two get to talking. Young Victoria seems to know all about crimes against children: her mother's specialty. In many cases, her mother sat down in a small room with a killer or rapist and made them relax. And talk.

"My mom's wonderful at making people confess," Victoria says.

"Except you."

"Especially me."

"I feel sorry for Victoria. She has had to go through a lot because of the decisions I've made."

Like Victoria's 5th birthday, which Turner had to miss.

"She remembers that. I had two dead babies that day," Turner related in private, talking about some of the worst cases she encountered on a North Dakota Indian reservation - her beat for 14 years, including 13 as a senior resident agent. Based in Minot, N.D., she was the bureau's first female SRA.

Most people know Turner from a 2007 trial, in which she successfully sued the FBI for retaliating against her after she filed a sexual discrimination claim. In February, a Minneapolis jury awarded her more than half a million dollars (later capped by law at \$360,000).

U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, a vocal FBI critic who sits on the Senate Judiciary Committee, hailed Turner as a hero, a whistle-blower who risked financial and personal ruin by standing up to the bureau.

"She is an example of a lot of federal employees that are just good, patriotic people. They see something wrong, and they

want something done about it ... but they're treated by peers like they're a skunk at a picnic," Grassley said in a phone interview. "Without a doubt, she had the courage to stand alone."

But nothing about her case against the bureau - the case she now looks back at with a mixture of repulsion and pride - makes Turner's list of visceral chills.

Though she said the case has personally cost her about \$100,000, and along the way she picked up a diagnosis for post-traumatic stress disorder, and though she is placing her Macalester-Groveland home on the market while the case goes through an appeal, she embraced the conflict - some say too willingly. She said she would do it again.

Worse memories remain.

THE WORST KIND OF CONFESSIONS

Another time Turner felt a chill, she traced it back to Victoria. It was just after her daughter's birth in Minot.

She was interviewing a woman accused of sexually abusing her 3-year-old grandson. The dialogue descended into insults, threats, shouting.

"It went south quick," Turner said. "Guess what? I wasn't able to get a confession."

The experience, and her anger, shocked and even shamed her. Before, she had always maintained the manner and distance of a clinician - even when sharing a room with the worst child rapist.

"I'm not repulsed. There's no shame. I'm simply there to record the story," Turner said.

Banter, rather than browbeat, if you want a confession. Besides, criminals who commit the worst crimes know exactly what they are, Turner said.

According to some federal prosecutors, Turner's technique worked uncommonly well.

"Jane had a superior reputation for child-abuse cases ... with a remarkable record of getting confessions," Fargo-based Assistant U.S. Attorney Janice Morley testified during Turner's trial. Another assistant U.S. attorney, Clare Hochhalter, called Turner - he considers her a friend - "the best agent I worked with at the time."

The pair's previous superior, the late U.S. attorney for North Dakota John Schneider, pushed Turner's supervisor to put her on a case of national merit involving child pornographer Larry Froistad Jr., who confessed in an Internet chat room to killing his 5-year-old daughter. Then he recanted.

Then he confessed again, to Turner.

"To me it wasn't foreign or strange," Turner said. "They're able to pick up how you feel about them. ... I just feel walking in there that I should know where they're coming from."

It was the birth of her daughter that made her less able to sit calmly in her chair that day and listen, she says.

NO MIDDLE GROUND

Talk about Turner with anyone who knows of her, and her lawsuit comes up.

The crux of it: In 1998, she filed an internal FBI complaint saying female agents were getting shortchanged in credit for cases. She named names and instances - including several involving her immediate Fargo-based supervisor, Craig Welken.

Before that, her North Dakota performance reviews had been "superior" or "exceptional." After the claim, she received several bad reviews - culminating in a final "unacceptable" rating.

Those later reviews are damning: Turner crossed too many lines, stepped on too many toes. She exaggerated her abilities, her paperwork was slipshod, she cut corners.

One such review alleged a serious breakdown in liaisons with local law enforcement - so much so that other agencies didn't want to work with her. Welken said he didn't want to send new agents to her far-flung office for fear of the bitter effect she would have.

"I have found SA Turner to be near the center of internal controversy and ill-will in too many instances. She is not a peacemaker. ... She stirs the pot," Welken's transfer recommendation noted.

Welken, now retired and living in Minnesota, declined comment on the suit, noting it is in appeal in the 8th U.S. Circuit. He referred questions about Turner's performance to his final reports on her - reports he maintains were fair.

"I don't want to talk bad about people. There were a number of good cases over the years. It was hard work, and she did it - as did a number of other people," Welken said.

But Turner was no better at child sex-abuse cases than many of her cohorts throughout the state, according to Welken - and her work dropped off at the end. The consequences: "well documented."

But as for the cause, "I really don't know why," Welken said.

"Absolutely unfounded and untrue," Turner said. The jury sided with her, finding Welken's reports retaliatory.

In the end, Turner was transferred to the Minneapolis district office for closer supervision - an action the jury did not find retaliatory. And her discrimination allegation, which became part of her original suit, was dismissed by a judge.

Many law enforcement officials mentioned in Welken's reports declined to comment.

"That's really between her and her agency. I really would rather not get involved in that whole thing," said Elmer Four Dance, who was chief of police for the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the reservation where Turner did most of her work.

Vern Erck, sheriff of North Dakota's Ward County, which includes Minot, was more blunt: "I don't want anything to do with that case. No way."

Erck had a quintessential case of crushed toes, according to the FBI. He and Turner crossed swords over a child-pornography case against a local, renowned TV anchor. Turner said she was furious because investigators in the case had not interviewed the victim, a 9-year-old boy. But according to an FBI document, a plea already had been negotiated with the man.

"You'll talk to some people that thought she was the end of the world, she did everything right - and you'll talk to others that think she did everything wrong," said Dan Draovitch, a former Minot police chief who teaches criminal justice at Minot State University.

"Kind of barged into things and did what had to be done - 'Jane Wayne,' that's what they called her. She just took the bull by the horns and got things done. Maybe raised some questions or whatever, but the bottom line is, the kids got taken care of."

Draovitch said Turner took cases that had never, in his recollection, been brought before on a reservation. Several others in the area agreed. One tribal chairman mailed a 1998 letter to then-FBI Director Louis Freeh saying, "Prior to Agent Turner's arrival on FBR (Fort Berthold Reservation), there was no aggressive federal pursuit of child abuse cases, physical assaults, domestic violence cases, or suspicious deaths of our infants. But after her arrival, all of these areas have changed."

Was she considered pushy? Fractious?

"That's a difficult question, because she was very determined to make her cases if she believed a crime had been committed," said Carroll Erickson, a former Minot mayor and chief of police and now a Ward County commissioner.

When asked to talk about Turner now, her former fellow FBI agents speak with caution and caveats - if at all. Several

former FBI agents and supervisors declined comment personally or through a national bureau spokesman or did not return calls.

"Jane has enormous stats. I think she was effective ... for awhile," said one former agent who knew Turner for years but asked not to be identified because the case evoked such strong feelings among the former agent's colleagues.

As for her interviewing and her ability to get confessions, "We had several that were good; she would've been in the group that was fairly good at it," added the former agent, who claimed to be "in the middle" about Turner.

Still, it's much easier to find someone in the FBI who doesn't like Turner than someone who does, the former agent said. It's something Turner is the first to admit.

JOB WAS GOOD FIT

"Love" still lingers in Turner's vocabulary when she talks about the bureau, particularly the training. "I loved the discipline, firearms law. I loved the food in the cafeteria. It was the perfect complement to my personality."

The very last chill Turner brought up was the first one she felt, back in 1981. She was sitting in a small room packed with fellow agents, listening to a confiscated audiocassette: two men torturing and taunting a kidnapped woman in the back of a van.

Turner had three years as an agent, and her Seattle office had picked her for Quantico's first psychological profiling class. The class required disturbing study material.

Turner, the only woman, broke into a sweat.

"But I thought, 'If I get up and leave, it's going to be very noticeable,'" Turner said.

At the time, Turner recalled, FBI agents were typically ex-accountants and ex-lawyers. The first two women to join were an ex-Marine and a former nun.

Turner was neither. She had been a counselor at a court-adjudicated facility for troubled youths and a supervisor at an all-girls prison in Nevada and had earned degrees in psychology and theology.

While training at Quantico, she often jogged past a monument of longtime FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. And spit on it.

"I really felt he kept me from getting in earlier," Turner said, explaining that women were not allowed into the bureau until after Hoover's death in 1972.

She was first stationed in Seattle - helping with the profile of the Green River Killer and participating in the capture of Soviet spy Christopher Boyce - and later New York City.

Then she put in a request for North Dakota, looked upon by many as "flyover" territory.

But she'd grown up in Rapid City, S.D. "My heart was in the heartland," Turner said.

Following her negative reviews and her transfer to Minneapolis, Turner was declared unfit for duty - a move that often ends careers. But she fought it, hiring an attorney and her own assessor, and was reinstated about a year later.

After the reinstatement, she was charged with investigating alleged thefts from Ground Zero, site of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City. While trying to build a case against a Twin Cities contractor accused of stealing from the site, she stumbled across a piece of Tiffany crystal on the desk of an FBI district supervisor's secretary. She asked about it.

"It came from Ground Zero. ... I suppose you're going to tell somebody," Turner recalls the secretary replying. Turner reported it to her supervisor, and 10 days later the head of the Minneapolis division filed a complaint with the FBI's Office of Professional Responsibility.

Turner had seen the crystal sit untouched. The day after the complaint was filed, she bagged the crystal on her own and

sent it to the Department of Justice's inspector general, which investigated. In a 2003 report, the inspector general found misconduct on the FBI's part. The report resulted in a bureau policy that effectively prohibited the taking of such nonevidentiary "mementos" from crime scenes.

Before the report came out, Turner was told in writing she had embarrassed the FBI and damaged its reputation with other agencies. Her final performance review said she was disorganized, hard to motivate and did not work well with other agents or authorities. Turner replied that she was held to a different standard after her whistle-blowing, treated like a black sheep and never given viable cases, and she alleged lies and retaliation.

She finished her 25 years and left without a handshake. The Minneapolis whistle-blowing case is still pending within the Department of Justice.

A MOUNTAINOUS REBUILDING

The case still consumes her. What she called integrity her detractors called contention. The actions and consequences she said she was forced into, they said she sought out.

Regardless, the toll is evident.

One agent called Turner just last week: a stranger alleging something similar had happened to her, asking for advice on what to do, whether to proceed. Turner didn't know what to tell her.

"It's really difficult to move on with your life if you have this sword of Damocles hanging over your head," Turner said.

Ed Wunsch, a Hopkins-based private investigator who specializes in child-abduction cases, has sent work Turner's way. He praises her accomplishments, having met her while she was still at the FBI, working a runaway case.

But getting work with a law enforcement agency - any law enforcement agency - is out of the question.

"There aren't going to be a whole lot of people in law enforcement that trust her," Wunsch said. "Any time you narc on another officer, you take it in the shorts."

She's made friends in her new hometown of St. Paul - but conversations can be a minefield, for those not reared in the realm of law enforcement.

"I have to tell her sometimes to stop telling me about the cases up in North Dakota, because it's just too gruesome. I can't go there very often with her," said Barbara Brunzell, a friend who goes on morning walks with Turner and witnessed the trial's effect on her.

"There was just an unbelievable, profound sadness in her. It struck at a personal level you can't imagine," said Brunzell. "But you know Jane, she puts on a pretty good front. She has to."

Joe Flahavan, a sixth-grade teacher at St. Paul's Randolph Heights Elementary - where Turner spent a couple of days a week tutoring kids - called her "a very solid, good person who cares about the kids in our class like they're her family."

Nobody calls from the bureau where she spent her career: no former co-workers, much less supervisors. Not one long-term relationship with an agent has endured from her time there - a fact her detractors point to.

"After I walked out, I never heard another word from anybody, ever. That was it. That was it," Turner said, taking a deep breath. "Yup, that was it."

Back in the diner, Victoria's assessment of her mother is simple, childlike: "She's one of my heroes, and I want to be like her someday."

"God, let's hope not."

"You've stood up to people. You spoke your mind and took action. I wouldn't because I'm timid. I'm just me."

"Honey, you'd do the right thing," Turner replied.

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