

KIEFER SUTHERLAND

The son of actors Donald Sutherland and Shirley Douglas, Kiefer Sutherland is one of Hollywood's brightest and most versatile talents. Only 23, he has been featured in 14 films in the past three years. This year, he shared top billing with Dennis Hopper in "Flashback," teamed with Emily Lloyd in "Chicago Joe and the Showgirl" and starred in "Flatliners" and "Young Guns II." Sutherland has a daughter, two, and a stepdaughter, 13, but he and his wife separated earlier this year and he is now involved with "Flatliners" co-star Julia Roberts. Paul Engleman interviewed Sutherland in Beverly Hills. "My tape recorder chose that afternoon to go on the blink," Engleman remembers. "Neither Kiefer nor I is mechanically inclined, but we diagnosed a recalcitrant PAUSE button, which Kiefer repaired—by biting it off. As far as I can tell, it may have been the only pause he's taken in his career so far."

1.

PLAYBOY: In *Stand By Me* and *The Lost Boys*, you play a convincing gang leader. Were you ever in a gang?

SUTHERLAND: Not per se. I've never been a great follower, though I've had my moments. My mother often questioned the intelligence of certain people I hung out with. I always wanted to be in control of my life, and that's why I hung out with those types of people.

2.

PLAYBOY: Who left the biggest imprint on you—your mother or your father?

SUTHERLAND: I lived with my mother but spent a lot of time with my father. When I was twelve, I saw my mother do Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and for the first time, I was able to recognize great acting. I knew it was my mother, and I knew that if something happened in the audience, she would run out and help me. But she was *not* my mother when I was watching the play. That's when I realized how rewarding acting could be.

hollywood's
pedigreed
young gun
shoots straight
about *bambi*,
donning a kilt
and how an
actor buries a
flat line

Then I saw *Ordinary People*, which was devastating. Here I was, watching a film starring my father, dealing with the relationship of a young man and a divorce. To see my father be so sensitive, so hurt and longing for everything to work out was incredibly moving. I wanted to phone him up and say, "I know it was only a film, but you're aware that everything with us is all right and I love you more than anything." So within that year, I saw performances by both of them that made me want to be an actor.

3.

PLAYBOY: If you hadn't gone into the family business, what would you be doing?

SUTHERLAND: Oh, shit. Well, I had a friend who got a really good job with the phone company in Canada. They've got a wonderful union and work pretty good hours. I'd probably be doing something like that.

4.

PLAYBOY: Your grandfather, Thomas Clement Douglas, was the architect of Canadian socialism and had a strong influence on you. Would you describe yourself as a socialist?

SUTHERLAND: Absolutely. The Bible has a wonderful parable about the men walking by a dying man on the street—we all know that's wrong. If you break down socialism to its simplest level, that's what it is: making it a national responsibility or a world responsibility not to let the person in the street lie there any longer.

5.

PLAYBOY: Is there something about being Canadian that Americans don't understand?

SUTHERLAND: For me there is. My roots are exceptionally deep there. My grandfather's involvement in the structuring of Canadian politics and the Canadian way of life—socialized medicine, nationalized transportation, all those issues—makes an incredible grounding in that country for me. Young Americans want to be patriotic, but because so many nations have political or economic problems with the U.S., they have a harder time with that concept than their parents and grandparents did. So it's nice to come from a country where it's easier to be patriotic.

6.

PLAYBOY: What's the first movie you saw?

SUTHERLAND: *Bambi*, and it's still the film with which I compare everything. Its structure is perfect. It has every element—comedy, with Thumper as your Shakespearean town idiot; high drama, when the mother is shot and with the forest fire. It's a great coming-of-age story, and it deals with love and growth in a very poignant way. It taught me about—I guess on a broad scale—sexuality. I was in love with Thumper's girlfriend from the time I was seven until I was ten. She's got all that eye shadow on and she's looking real good. And *Bambi* is adamant about remaining one of the guys. Then he turns and this fawn is looking at him and—boom!—he's gone. *That's* a feeling I understand real well: "I'm going to play pool with one of the guys," and then you look around and someone has a dress on. Then it's, "OK, when do you want me to feed the baby?"

7.

PLAYBOY: You dropped out of boarding school when you were fifteen. Do you have any regrets about not finishing school? Is there something you missed?

SUTHERLAND: It goes both ways. Probably the most significant thing I missed was emotional development—not that I was ever emotionally arrested—but in the relationships you develop with other people. As far as the intellectual stimulation that school provides, that ultimately comes from books. When I was sixteen and working, I was still getting book lists—books that I otherwise just would not have known to read. So I was doing my best to keep up. Then again, I got something of a street education—not that I've ever been in a terrible position. As far as communicating with people and understanding how to get from A to B, I picked that up quicker than most people who went to college, because I was young enough to adapt more quickly. You can't beat the hands of time that much, but I took a running start.

8.

PLAYBOY: For those of us who may not have enjoyed the private school experience, tell us what we missed.

SUTHERLAND: My boarding school was St. Andrew's College. And for the two years I attended that great institution—I say that with all the facetiousness I can muster—I (concluded on page 164)

KIEFER SUTHERLAND

(continued from page 125)

went to church every Sunday evening in a kilt. *[Grins]*

9.

PLAYBOY: Your stepdaughter is ten years your junior and entering her teens. Can you keep those years in perspective, having been through them so recently yourself?

SUTHERLAND: If I had met her when she was thirteen, it would have been more difficult. But I took her to her first parent-teacher meeting when she was nine, and the difference between nine and nineteen is considerable. I've seen her go from playing with Cabbage Patch dolls to wanting to get a leather jacket and wear make-up. Having that basis of a relationship, I think I probably have more insight into those desires. God knows, a thirteen-year-old doesn't put on make-up because she thinks it will make her look better. But I understand because I had my head shaved and ear pierced by the time I was twelve. I didn't think it made me look better, but it was my own statement of my identity.

10.

PLAYBOY: If one of your daughters told you she was going to drop out of school at fifteen to become an actor, what advice would you give her?

SUTHERLAND: I wouldn't let her do it. And that would be my right as her father. That was my parents' reaction also. The difference was, I had done it already. At that point, all they could say was, "OK, now let's all take a deep breath. We didn't realize this was something you wanted to do so badly." Then they became incredibly supportive. I wanted them to have faith in me, and I was shocked that they did. I'm sure in their hearts, they were dying. I know I would be if either of my daughters were to quit school and take off. And, as a parent, I would do everything in my power to stop it from happening, short of tying her to a chair. Ultimately, you have to gauge things according to people's desires and what they're willing to do to *show* how much they want to achieve something.

11.

PLAYBOY: You achieved teenage dudedom in the Eighties. What has changed for teens of the Nineties?

SUTHERLAND: In my high school, you had your druggies, your smokers, your jocks, your academics—and even *they* intermingled, depending on who was having a party on Friday night. But now the political structure of a young person's scholastic environment is so complicated it makes Congress look like a Saturday-afternoon tea party. In Los Angeles, at least, with its huge Asian influx, the academic pressure is monumental compared with what it was when I was in school. The Nineties will be a volatile period, because this age group is

the first to experience a universal world. They won't have that comfortable feeling that America is pre-eminent, and they're going to be pissed off. It's a world market now, and they're the ones who have to bridge that gap and be able to adapt.

12.

PLAYBOY: Aside from your walk-on role in *Max Dugan Returns*, you and your father haven't shared the screen. When can we expect that to happen?

SUTHERLAND: Not for a long time. We've been looking into it. There's a great script, *Woman Wanted*, that we've wanted to do for a while. It's about two scientists, a widower and his son, who live together. They hire a housekeeper and both of them try to seduce her. It takes place in one room, like a play, and it's a real dirty film. We hope something comes of that, but if not, there are other things we'd like to try.

13.

PLAYBOY: Before *Young Guns*, had you ever fired a gun? And after *Young Guns*, did you ever want to fire one again?

SUTHERLAND: Yeah and yeah. I am not a firearms activist, but I'm also not one of those preachy fuckers who say putting six bullets in a target is any different from archery. I don't feel guilty getting the same kind of thrill firing a .44 at a target as I got when I was eleven firing a BB gun.

14.

PLAYBOY: We heard that while in Chicago filming *Flatliners*, you and Kevin Bacon left fifty- and hundred-dollar tips in restaurants. Have you ever stiffed someone?

SUTHERLAND: I don't remember ever consciously stiffing anybody. I also don't remember leaving a fifty- or hundred-dollar tip. Kevin and I were both taken by that. It made us look generous, so fine. *[Laughs]* There could be a lot worse things said about us.

15.

PLAYBOY: Is there anyone you'd like to work with whom you haven't worked with yet?

SUTHERLAND: Gene Hackman. He's the most proficient and efficient actor I've ever seen.

16.

PLAYBOY: What do you do when you have to say a terrible piece of dialog?

SUTHERLAND: Let's say you've got a good line in front, an average line in back but a real stinker in the middle you've got to get past. You submerge it. Burt Reynolds is a magician at that. Nick Nolte can do it. Gene Hackman does it all the time. They can take a line that is so fucking bad and make it *disappear*. They make it disappear in the inflection, so that it just passes through you. You get the information, but there's nothing attached to that line other than that it sets up the next one.

17.

PLAYBOY: What's the worst line you've been saddled with?

SUTHERLAND: I've had lines that were the best and worst together, lines that I thought were complete pieces of shit but turned out to be all right—which shows how much I know. And they were all in *The Lost Boys*. Joel Schumacher, who also directed *Flatliners*, enabled me to fly with them, to almost make them camp. Just try saying "Michael, it's time to die" or "Now you know what we are and now you know what you are" seriously. An actor's job is never to hit any one topic right on the head but rather to let the audience do the work. It's hammering a nail, but you *push* the nail in with your thumb. In *Lost Boys*, we took a jackhammer to a twelve-inch nail. That went against everything I'd learned from everyone whose opinion I valued. But it worked.

18.

PLAYBOY: What pisses you off most?

SUTHERLAND: Well, you know when you're making love and. . . *[Laughs]* A reviewer made a statement that just enraged me. Roseanne Barr came out with a film—I don't know her personally and I didn't see the film—but the reviewer said, It's bad enough that we have to watch her on TV at this weight, let alone pay seven dollars. Well, number one, *you* don't have to pay seven dollars to see her, asshole. And, number two, the guy isn't slim himself. If I wanted to pick on his wardrobe or some aspect of his personality, I could have a field day. I respect reviewers, but attacking someone on a personal level because you don't like a film—I find that more arrogant and infuriating than anything else.

19.

PLAYBOY: Do the Young Gunners have any secrets for avoiding saddle soreness?

SUTHERLAND: Yeah, to start off, we wear padded bicycle shorts under our trousers. After riding every day for five or six weeks, there's no problem. The most serious pain I got was from the indentations the saddle makes around your knees. I had to wear bandages. They tell me I was hanging on too tight because I was scared shitless.

20.

PLAYBOY: In *Chicago Joe and the Showgirl*, you flip a cigarette in the air and catch it in your mouth before lighting it. Was that a skill you brought to the movie?

SUTHERLAND: No, I learned it just for that one scene at the end. *[Demonstrates]* I thought it would be a nice touch. Then, after the filming was done, I couldn't do it anymore, and that freaked me out. But I realized it was the fear of not being able to do it that had enabled me to get it right every time. That was one of those little things that made me realize how much I enjoy what I do.

