

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

*We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's the turn of presenter Paul O'Grady*

**The prized possession you value above all others...** My five dogs – Olga, Bullseye, Boycie, Conchita and Eddie (pictured, far right, with Olga and Paul). They're rescue dogs, each with very different personalities. If there was a fire, they'd be the first things I'd save.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Messing around and not having a game plan when I was a teenager. I lost valuable years of education and had no real goal until I found a job I loved in social services aged 22.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Staying up too late. I'll read a book or start writing, and suddenly it's 4am. I feel like death the next day.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** The Complete Essays of Michel de Montaigne, the 16th-century French philosopher. It's full of little nuggets of wisdom.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd go to friends' houses and pretend to be a poltergeist.

Right: Tom Jones.  
Above right: herbal medicine. Far right: an orangutan in Borneo



**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** Herbology. I've been making my own potions since my 30s. I can mix infusions that cure all kinds of ailments.

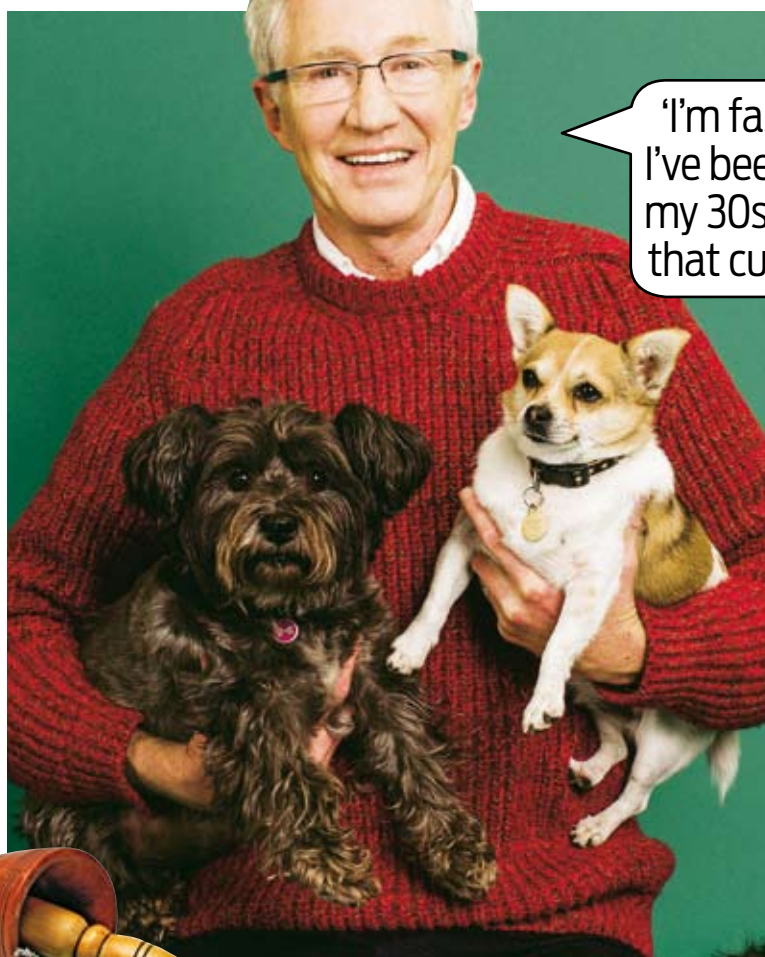
**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** First is animal cruelty, but I also hate ticket machines at railway stations. They give you 30 different options when all you want is a single or a return.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** Wild Strawberries from 1957, directed by Ingmar Bergman. An old man recalls his past as he makes his last journey. It's beautifully shot, superbly acted and very moving.

**The person who has influenced you most...** My whole family unit. They were great characters and all so funny.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Rosa Lewis, a famous chef in the 19th century. She owned the Cavendish Hotel in London so I'd go there to eat one of her feasts and talk about her life.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Don't worry, it will all turn out well in the end.



'I'm fascinated by herbology. I've been making potions since my 30s and I can mix infusions that cure all kinds of ailments'



**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** My hair colour. It was originally red-brown, now it's white as snow.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** Curiosity. I'm constantly wanting to learn about new things.

**The poem that touches your soul...** First Fig by Edna St Vincent Millay. It only has four lines, but it's beautiful. 'My candle burns at both ends/It will not last the night/But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends/It gives a lovely light!' I recited it in hospital 15 years ago after the first of my three heart attacks.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm delicate because of past health issues. My cardiologist recently said, 'I don't know how you do it, but you're in great health!' I'm 62 and tough as old boots.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd poison all the rotten world leaders.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Being Lily Savage for the first time to compete a talent contest at the Elephant And Cas-

tle pub in Vauxhall in 1978. It's a Starbucks now, but it was the roughest pub in London. I had no idea what to say, but it just flowed out and people loved it. The next day I had loads of calls wanting to book me and it all took off.

**The song that means most to you...** You've Gotta Have A Gimmick from the musical Gypsy. It was part of my act for years so I can't bear to hear it these days, but it served me so well.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I'd have the Orient Express re-routed to take me, my partner Andre and a group of friends to Scotland. We'd start at night with a fabulous dinner on the train and then I'd sleep like a log, because I always sleep well on trains. We'd wake up in Scotland and have breakfast as the beautiful landscape flipped by then fly to the Isle of Skye by helicopter for lunch at The Three Chimneys. I'd have oysters and a Guinness. In the afternoon we'd visit three wildlife rescue charities that are special to me – Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre in Borneo, Wildlife SOS in India, and CROW in South Africa. We'd have dinner in Vienna at Hotel Imperial. I'd have

goulash soup followed by tafelspitz, which is boiled beef with carrots. We'd end the night at a burlesque show in a seedy Berlin club, drinking absinthe.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** Around my 30th birthday. Lily had taken off and I was enjoying a very hedonistic time.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** The death of my long-term partner and manager Brendan Murphy in 2005 from a brain tumour.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** I've always wanted a bright red Lotus Europa Series 2, but I can only drive an automatic.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Get on with it is my mantra.

**The order of service at your funeral...** It'd be at a church on Romney Marsh, Kent, led by the Salvation Army band playing Nearer, My God, To Thee. Tom Jones will sing St James Infirmary Blues and Mica Paris will sing a Mahalia Jackson gospel song. I'd be carried out to When The Saints Go Marching In.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As someone who tried to help animals.

**The Plug...** Paul's memoir Country Life is out now, Bantam Press, £20. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

*Jake Gyllenhaal plays a Boston Marathon bombing victim in Stronger – in cinemas from Friday. Liam Gallagher launches his UK tour in Leeds tomorrow. And James Norton previews in Belleville at London's Donmar Warehouse from Thursday*



**NEXT WEEK**

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- PLUS Britain's best TV guide