

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: House Of Cards author Michael Dobbs

The prized possession you value above all others... My family tree. It tells me where my parents came from, which gives me a greater understanding of them and, consequently, my own life.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not getting to know my mother, Eileen, better when she was alive. She died from ovarian cancer when she was 50 and I was only 26. She was a marvellous woman who did everything possible to raise her four kids, often as the main breadwinner. Whatever the Dobbs family is today, we owe to her.

The film you can watch time and time again... Casablanca. Play it again, and again, Sam! All the acting is magnificent, especially Humphrey Bogart's.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Politics [Michael held senior posts in the Thatcher and Major Governments and is now in the Lords]. It's a rollercoaster ride and the pay is awful, but it's endlessly fascinating. And it matters.

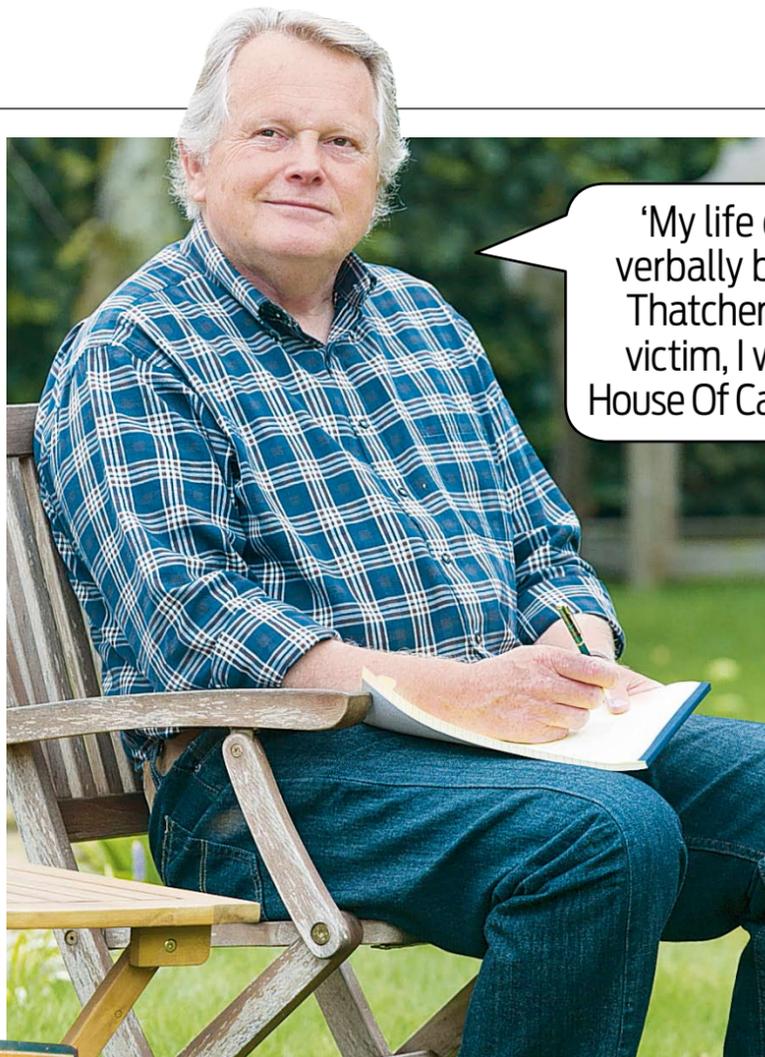
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. I read it at the age of seven by torchlight under my bedcovers. It taught me that books are doorways to different worlds.

The crime you'd commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd lace together the boots of the opposition goalie so England wins a penalty shoot-out.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Intolerance.

The person who has influenced you most... Ernie Vale – my headmaster at primary school. He taught me there are consequences when you do wrong.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Jesus. I'd like to judge him as a man. I wouldn't ask him anything, just listen and decide for myself.



'My life changed when I was verbally beaten up by Margaret Thatcher in 1987. She needed a victim, I was it. I started writing *House Of Cards* as a form of therapy'

on the Great Barrier Reef and feed giant grouper fish hard-boiled eggs, which is thrilling. Teatime would involve a glass of ice-cold Mythos beer at Petros's bar in Spartochori on the island of Meganisi, Greece. I'd then head to the Moon and sit alone, thinking and looking back at Earth. I'd have some nuts and a glass of good Gevrey-Chambertin red wine. I'd end the day with a walk on Mars.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... A day years ago when I was telling one of my sons off and realised I should stop being so pompous.

The saddest time that shook your world... The Brighton Bomb in 1984. Seeing what my friends Norman and Margaret Tebbit went through was awful. Since then I haven't taken anything in life for granted.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be 14th again, like I was at 19 when I rowed for Oxford. These days the scales are tipping 15th.

The philosophy that underpins your life... They're coming to get you, so run as hard as you bloody well can.

The order of service at your funeral... I'll be fired into space then have the best wake my Irish ancestors could devise.

The way you want to be remembered... Who cares? It's what you do before then that matters.

The Plug... Watch *House Of Cards* on Netflix and read my novel *The Lords' Day*. Visit www.michaeldobbs.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Love your parents. If you can't, then try and remember it wasn't all their fault!

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Driverless cars, which will make traffic jams a thing of the past. I'm appalled by the time people waste driving.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The ability to sprint across the rugby field. I was pretty speedy in my younger days and played prop for my county.

The unending quest that drives you on... To provide for my family.

The poem that touches your soul... *The Listeners* by Walter de la Mare. My son Harry, who's 16, recited it for a school competition. It was beautiful.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm 'Westminster's baby-faced hitman'. That was a nickname given to me by a newspaper in 1987 when I was Margaret Thatcher's chief of staff. Obviously, I had to be tough and sack a few people, but that was a long time ago.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Being verbally beaten up by Margaret Thatcher in 1987. She needed a victim and I was it. Two weeks later, I sat down to write *House Of Cards* as a form of therapy.

The song that means most to you... *Adagio* from Mahler's Fifth always brings tears to my eyes.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... To sit in a British woodland on a sunny spring day surrounded by wildlife – I'd marvel at the foxes, birds and deer.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd breakfast on muesli and Darjeeling

tea on a balcony in Les Mazots de Gryon in the Swiss Alps, gazing at the mountains with my wife Rachel. I'd go snow-shoeing while my four sons [Will, 26, Mike, 24, Alex, 18, and Harry] skied like maniacs. I'd then have a massage while looking out on the wonderful landscapes of Vietnam. Then I'd go scuba diving



PHOTOGRAPHS: ALL STAR, GETTY, ALAMY



Left: Bogart and Bergman in *Casablanca*. Above right: *Treasure Island*. Far right: Deer

PS...

*Jessica Alba stars in the long-awaited sequel to crime thriller *Sin City*, in cinemas Friday. Noël Coward's hilarious *Hay Fever* previews at Bath's Theatre Royal from the 20th. And Britain's Got Talent winners Collabro release their debut album *Stars* on Monday*



NEXT WEEK

Judges Simon, Cheryl, Mel B and Louis raise the curtain on this year's *X Factor* ● Meet the four finalists in the Daily Mail National Gardening Competition ● Plus Britain's biggest and best TV guide