



Above: The Taj Mahal, Casablanca and a Campari and soda. Below: Clock parts and Laurie Lee's Cider With Rosie



Below: Macademia nuts, Nicholas with Christine Hamilton, his wife Annie, Paul Merton and Gyles Brandreth at his 90th birthday party, and Sir Francis Drake



**The prized possession you value above all others...** A 19th-century French clock my father gave me when I was 17. It began a long-held love of clocks.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** That I didn't keep up tap dancing. I learnt it when I was 22 and I loved the freedom and spirit of it.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...**

My wife Annie and I would have breakfast on the Orient Express and enjoy the scenic journey to Venice. We'd have coffee in St Mark's Square, then go to the Four Seasons hotel at Kuda Huraa in the Maldives. As this is my *fantasy* day I'd go water skiing – I loved it when I was younger, but I was 90 last October and my legs aren't what they used to be! We'd be joined for a big lunch of Thai food by our four children [two each from previous marriages] and nine grandchildren, aged seven to 23. Annie and I would have afternoon tea at the Taj Mahal in India, then arrive at the La Mamounia hotel in Marrakech. I'd have a Campari and soda on the terrace then a delicious dinner of local delicacies. I'd end the day at home with a malt whisky.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Nuts, particularly macadamias. It's not wise to eat too many.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** Cider With Rosie by Laurie Lee is so evocative of life in Britain after the First World War.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd see how my young grandchildren behave when they're not being watched.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** American slang. Why do people use the word 'kids'? It makes children sound like small *goats*!

**The film you can watch time and time again...** Casablanca. It has such drama, humour and pathos.

**The person who has influenced you most...** The Scottish actor Duncan Macrae. I met him when I was a teenager and he taught me how to interpret a role and how to project your voice.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Sir Francis Drake. I'd love to hear about his explorations in uncharted seas.



'I've loved repairing clocks since I was a teenager. I'm fascinated by the way they give an accurate time. Clocks are quite beautiful'

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

*We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: comedy legend Nicholas Parsons*

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Work hard and be kind and forgiving. Remember that success is a journey, *not* a destination.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** I've loved repairing and restoring clocks since I was a teenager. I'm fascinated by the way the internal mechanics engage with one another to give you an accurate time. I find clocks quite beautiful.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** A 19th-century bracket clock I restored when I was a teenager. It was stolen in 1956. I loved that clock and I still think about it.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To keep working.

**The poem that touches your soul...** The Dong With A Luminous Nose by Edward Lear. It's nonsense verse for children but has sadness buried within.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** People only know me as a presenter but I've been an actor for 68 years and had many successful years in the West End.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** When my parents sent me to do an engineering apprenticeship when I was 16. I was a lad from a public school thrown into a tough world. But it was great experience.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I don't want to commit a crime. There's a joy in achieving things legitimately.

**The song that means most to you...** Stevie Wonder's I Just Called To Say I Love You. I often call Annie to say just that but I spare her the singing!

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** My 90th birthday party on 8 October. We had 200 guests to a party at a hotel in London. There was so much warmth and happiness, as well as some marvellous speeches.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** When my four-year-old daughter Suzy had a terrible skiing accident in 1962. It's sheer horror to see your child slumped in the snow motionless. It still upsets me and I haven't skied since.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To direct a film.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Try to get along with everyone.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I'd love to have the service at St Paul's in Covent Garden, which is the actor's church. I will want Jerusalem and I Vow To Thee My Country.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As a loving husband and a devoted father and grandfather.

**The Plug...** Just A Minute returns to Radio 4 on 10 February at 6.30pm. Visit [www.nicholasparsons.co.uk](http://www.nicholasparsons.co.uk) for details of his Edinburgh tour. ■

*As told to Rob McGibbon*

## PS...

*The Strictly Come Dancing Live Tour with Abbey Clancy and co kicks off in Birmingham this weekend. Meryl Streep's the matriarch from hell in August: Osage County – in cinemas from Friday. And Sophie Ellis-Bextor's new album Wanderlust is out Monday*



## NEXT WEEK

● Harry Shearer – The Simpsons' Mr Burns – on his hilarious new send-up of President Nixon ● The Hairy Bikers' favourite Asian dishes ● Jamie Oliver makes the most of seasonal leeks ● PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings guide

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