

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week: childcare guru Dr Miriam Stoppard, 77



'People think I'm frivolous because I love fashion, make-up and hair, but I can be deeply serious too'

**The prized possession you value above all others...** My collection of drawings, birthday cards and Thank You notes from my 11 grandchildren – aged six to 15. I look at them each day and feel loved.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Buying books. I buy four or five a week and my house has piles of unread or half-read books everywhere.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Florence Nightingale. She defied convention to succeed in a man's world. I'd love to talk to her about the Crimean War.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** I love all Humphrey Bogart's films, especially *To Have And Have Not* with Lauren Bacall. The sexual chemistry crackles.



Left: Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall in *To Have And Have Not*. Above, right: Le Perlé wine. Far right: Frank Auerbach

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** *The History Of Love* by Nicole Krauss. It's about love transcending time.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Not learning to speak Mandarin. I used to watch Chinese films in the 80s and have loved it ever since.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** People who feel the world owes them a living. I'm from a poor Geordie family and we had a strong work ethic. It was impressed upon me that you have to work.

**The person who has influenced you most...** John Ingram, my mentor when I was training to be a doctor in my 20s. He took me under his wing and lit the fuel in me to pursue medicine.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Be the best you can be and take failure in your stride.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** The origins of the universe. I could listen to Professor Brian Cox for hours. I love the science of working out how everything began.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** A pencil drawing of a horse by the late artist and friend Elisabeth Frink. She gave it to me, but it was thrown out by mistake during a house move.



**The unending quest that drives you on...** Discovering knowledge, particularly about medicine. I'm 77, but my brain is as voracious as ever and I keep engaged.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm frivolous because I love fashion, make-up and hair. I love those things but I can be deeply serious.

**The poem that touches your soul...** Seamus Heaney's *Digging*. He talks of his father's ability to dig peat and shape earth, while he only has a pen.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Passing my 11-plus. We were from a slum area and my ambitions were not great. Passing that exam got me into Central Newcastle High School and a new life. I realised that by working hard and passing exams anything was possible.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** My life's full of happy moments. A recent one was collecting my ten-year-old granddaughter Esmé from school when she told me she'd been voted Form Captain.

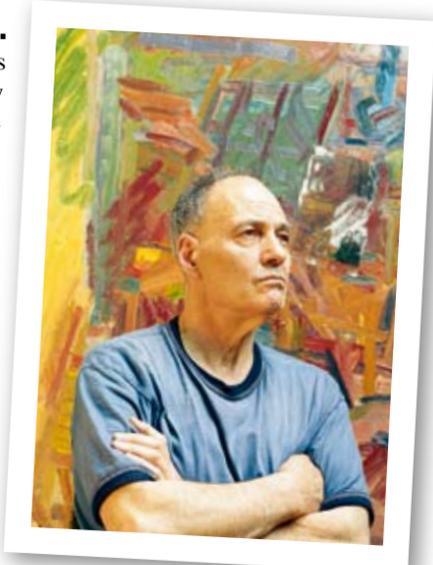
**The saddest time that shook your world...** When my son Will, now 42, got whooping cough when he was three months old. We had to rush him to hospital and he was put in an oxygen tent. I thought I would lose him.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd steal all the art squirrelled away in private collections and put it on display.

**The priority activity if you were the invisible woman for a day...** I'd watch the painter Frank Auerbach work.

**The song that means most to you...** Richard Strauss's *At Sunset*. It's about the brevity of life and how one day you'll no longer see the things you most cherish.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I'd wake up in a bolt-hole I own by Bamburgh beach, Northumberland, where I spent much of my childhood. I'd begin the day with my favourite walk to Stag Rocks then have a coffee and a croissant at Noel's village shop, which hasn't changed since I was a child. Later, I'd go fishing in the Bahamas with my husband Chris, Will and my other son Ed, 40.



As told to Rob McGibbon

## PS...

Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper star in drama *Serena*, in cinemas from Friday. Hit Broadway musical *Memphis* opens at the Shaftesbury Theatre on Thursday. And Neil Diamond's new album *Melody Road* is out on Monday



## NEXT WEEK

- You'll be astonished at the brilliant winning shots in our wildlife photography challenge
- Scrumptious comfort food recipes from Marcus Wareing
- PLUS Britain's best TV guide