

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's broadcaster Michael Buerk

The prized possession you value above all others... My Spitting Image puppet, which I bought at auction about ten years ago for £180. It makes me smile.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not asking my mother Betty about my childhood before she died of a heart condition when I was 16. I wanted to know about my father and how their relationship ended [Michael's parents separated when he was three after his father, Gordon, was revealed to be a bigamist].

The temptation you wish you could resist... Sudoku puzzles. I do one every day and they make me believe that I'm clever, but they're just a waste of time.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... The mangling of the English language. Top of my list is using 'decimate' to mean completely destroy something. It means to reduce by one tenth.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance...

Passage To Juneau: A Sea And Its Meanings by Jonathan Raban. It's a wonderful sailing adventure, but also an historical analysis of the British naval officer Captain George Vancouver.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...

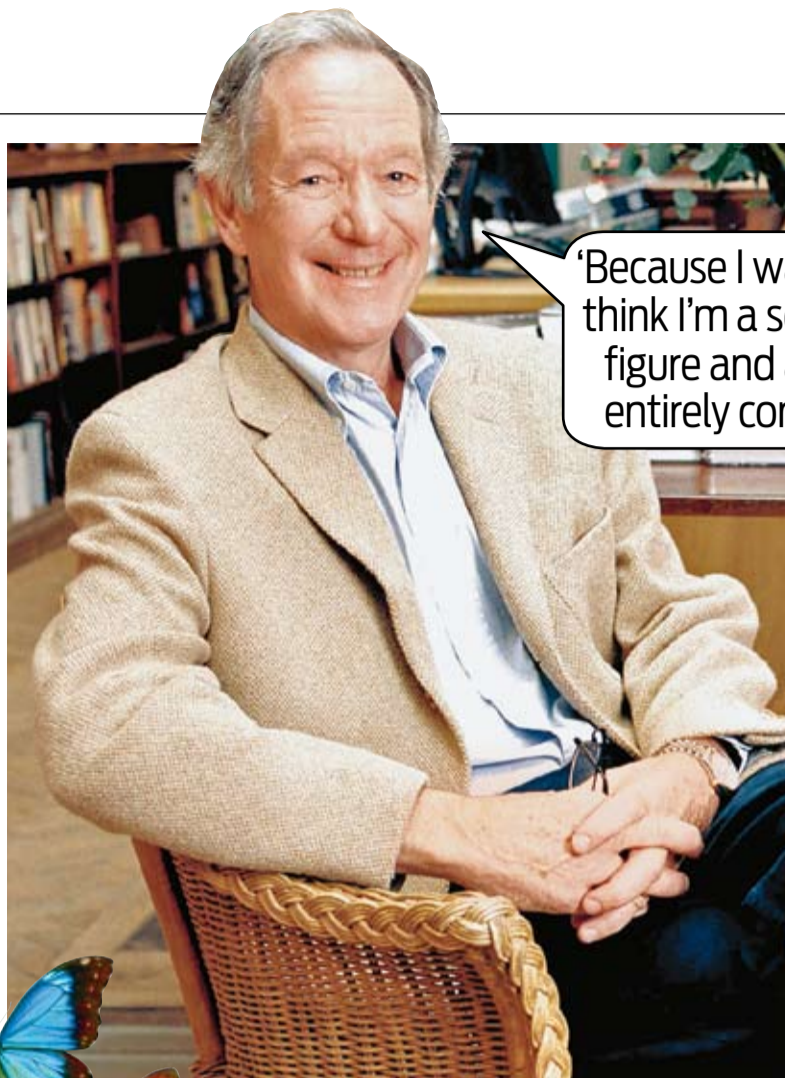
I'd sit in a meeting of TV executives as they pick 'celebs' for a reality show. I've yet to find out why I was chosen for I'm A Celebrity.

The person who has influenced you most... My wife Christine. We've been married for 46 years and she never fails to tell me when I'm being an idiot.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My eyesight. I wore bottle-bottom glasses as a teenager which I blame – wrongly – for my lack of romantic success. I also failed my medical for the RAF because of it.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Samuel Pepys. He was an incredible gossip who would be wickedly fun company.

Left: Michael and his Spitting Image puppet.
Above: butterflies.
Right: Alec Guinness in Kind Hearts And Coronets



'Because I was a newsreader people think I'm a self-important authority figure and a bit of a snob. I'm not entirely convinced they're wrong'

Hotel in Cape Town. Dinner would be in London at the Garrick Club. I'd have the set menu with club claret.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Professionally, discovering my report about the famine in Ethiopia in October 1984 was having an impact.

The saddest time that shook your world... My mother's death. My grandparents didn't allow me to go to the funeral, which is a continuing regret.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be made a member of the House of Lords, but I'd be completely unqualified.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Churchill again: 'Keep b*****g on!'

The order of service at your funeral... I'd have an Anglican service with an African choir singing Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika (God Bless Africa). I'd be taken out to Show Me The Way To Go Home.

The way you want to be remembered... He tried to be a good son, husband, father and reporter.

The Plug... Michael Buerk presents The Moral Maze on BBC Radio 4 on Wednesday. Visit bbc.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That because I was a newsreader I'm a self-important authority figure and a bit of a snob. I'm not entirely convinced it's wrong!

The song that means most to you... Brothers In Arms by Dire Straits. It was the favourite song of cameraman Mohamed Amin, who filmed with me during the Ethiopia famine. That song reflects our camaraderie. He died in a hijacking in Africa in 1996.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd start with a canoe ride down the Zambezi with Christine and our twin sons Roland and Simon, who are 41 now. Breakfast would be a full English with HP Sauce at Il Blandford's cafe in London. After that we'd check into the Singita Pamushana Lodge in Zimbabwe and go on a game drive. Lunch would be at L'Hirondelle restaurant in Monte Carlo, where I'd have lobster salad and Provençal rosé wine. In the afternoon, my four grandchildren, aged five to eight, would join us in Turkey on our boat Skysong as we sail around Skopea Limani. Later, Christine and I would drive along Chapman's Peak Drive to Cape Point in South Africa, then we'd have tea at Belmond Mount Nelson

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Butterflies. I was a keen collector as a child, and now I spot them with my grandchildren.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Churchill's dictum, 'The secret of success is to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.'

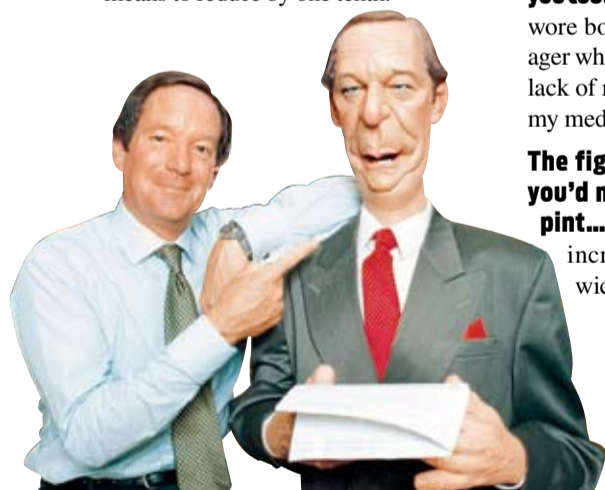
The unending quest that drives you on... To avoid being found out! Journalism is bluff; I hope to stay a step ahead.

The poem that touches your soul... Wilfred Owen's Dulce Et Decorum Est. It distils the tragic gap between the leaders in a war and the soldiers.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... My mother's death. It made me wayward at school and left an enormous hole in my life.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I wish I'd tipped Jimmy Savile over the side when I met him on the QE2 years ago.

The film you can watch time and time again... Kind Hearts And Coronets with Alec Guinness and Dennis Price. It's so deft and deliciously witty.



PHOTOGRAPHS: BBC, REX, GETTY

PS...

Cate Blanchett stars in The Turning, a collection of short films, in cinemas from Friday. Jason Donovan plays Lionel Logue in The King's Speech at Chichester Festival Theatre from Thursday. And Bob Dylan's new album Shadows In The Night is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Learn how to draw your house and garden in the final part of our series
- Julie Walters on her lavish new period drama Indian Summers
- PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings guide