



From top: La Boqueria market in Barcelona, a helicopter, Erasmus Darwin, a Roman vessel, Boney M, Alec Guinness in Kind Hearts And Coronets, Tony Blair and Vladimir Putin at No 10 and a flamenco dancer

The prized possession you value above all others... My integrity. I was an alcoholic for 12 years and it's been a long battle back to find it again.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... Turning down the chance to cook for Tony Blair and Vladimir Putin at No 10 Downing Street in 2000. I could have happily poisoned them both with E. coli.

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

I'd wake up at the Marcliffe Hotel near Aberdeen and have the locally sourced smoked haddock for breakfast with a poached egg and some Stornoway black pudding. Then I'd take a cruise around the islands of West Scotland. For lunch, I'd fly by helicopter to London to St John restaurant near Smithfield Market. I'd have roasted marrow. I'd then wander around Hatchards bookshop on Piccadilly before a cream tea at Fortnum & Mason. I'd end the day having a look around La Boqueria food market in Barcelona. I'd have white garlic soup with almonds in any restaurant in the city – they're all great – then go to a flamenco dance.

The temptation you wish you could resist... I'm extravagant when buying presents or eating at restaurants.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Defeat Of The Spanish Armada by Garrett Mattingly. I read it when I was 15 and it was the first time I really understood big historical events.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd be a poltergeist in the Cabinet Room at No 10 and make things fly across the room to put some fear into rotten politicians.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Hypocrisy and lying. I was a dreadful liar when I was drinking.

The film you can watch time and time again... Kind Hearts And Coronets from 1949 with Alec Guinness. He plays eight different parts and his acting is amazing. It's also terribly funny.

The person who has influenced you most... My mother, Molly. She had a tough childhood and my father was a horrendously abusive alcoholic but she always maintained a positive outlook.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Erasmus Darwin, Charles Darwin's grandfather. He had all the ideas about evolution long before Charles. He's a great unsung hero.



'People think I'm a batty old toff, but I have an IQ of 196, got my cut-glass vowels from the nuns at school – and I'm only 65!'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's chef Clarissa Dickson Wright

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Everyone has at least one natural talent. Find yours.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Archaeology. I've been on digs and love delving into the past.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... An 18ct gold Napoleon III snuffbox, which my mother gave to me when I was 18. I sold it for £100,000 in the 1980s and drank the proceeds – mainly gin!

The unending quest that drives you on... To see the hunting ban repealed.

The poem that touches your soul... The Young British Soldier by Rudyard Kipling. It's about the waste of life in the two wars in Afghanistan in the 1800s.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm a batty old toff. I have an IQ of 196, my father was a hard-working surgeon and I was taught my cut-glass vowels by the nuns at school – and I'm only 65.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Getting sober. At my lowest, I was drinking two bottles of gin a day, plus strong beer. But I had my last drink – a large gin, naturally – in a pub on 10 April, 1987. I then went to rehab.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal enough money to never have to work again. I inherited £2.8 million from my mother in 1975 and blew the lot.

The song that means most to you...

The Libiamo duet from Verdi's La Traviata. I heard Montserrat Caballé sing it at Covent Garden in 1972 when I was 25. I was with my first real love. That song makes me feel young and in love.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever...

Being inaugurated as the Rector of Aberdeen University in 1999. The students carried me through the streets on the back of a stuffed Angus bull. It was the most frivolous, carefree day I've ever had.

The saddest time that shook your world... My mother's death on Derby Day in 1975. She had a heart attack and I found her in bed. I was devastated and that's when my drinking started.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To promote honest food labelling and help people buy British.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Leave it to God because he has a better imagination than you.

The order of service at your funeral...

I want a proper church funeral with people weeping in the pews. I will be carried into the church to Boney M's Rivers Of Babylon. The poem Something Like A Stone by my friend Christine Coleman will also be read and I will leave a booklet for everyone with all my favourite recipes.

The way you want to be remembered... As a battler who always fought for what she believed in.

The Plug... Clarissa's England is published in hardcover by Hodder & Stoughton, priced £20. Visit www.hodder.co.uk ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Prepare to be shaken and stirred when new Bond film Skyfall hits cinemas on Friday. Laura (Lady Edith!) Carmichael and Anna Friel star in Uncle Vanya at London's Vaudeville Theatre. And country sweetheart Taylor Swift's new album Red is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

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