The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: Inspector Morse author Colin Dexter

The prized possession you value above all others... A signed first edition of AE Housman’s A Shropshire Lad. I have about 75 first editions, but I’d rescue that one if the house was burning down.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Having four operations on my ears in my 20s. I began losing my hearing at 18, but the surgery hurt and didn’t help.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Ginger nuts. I have diabetes but I find them hard to resist, and then my wife Dorothy tells me off.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Bleak House by Charles Dickens. It’s a masterclass in writing.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I’d see what life is like in private for the Queen and Prince Philip. I heard they liked Morse – maybe they watch Endeavour now!

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Litter. I’m 83 now and in a wheelchair, but each day Dorothy takes me for a walk and we pick it all up.

The film you can watch time and time again... The African Queen. It has such tension and chemistry.

The person who has influenced you most... My big brother John. We shared a bed for 19 years as we were so poor. One night, when I was 16, he woke me up playing Beethoven’s 7th. He was in tears and I was intrigued. Classical music’s been one of the great joys of my life. Sadly, John died two years ago.

The figure from history for whom you’d most like to buy a pie and a pint... Thomas, 24, and James, 22. I’d paddle to the Princes in the Tower [the sons of Edward IV who were put in the Tower of London by Richard, then vanished].

The piece of wisdom you would pass on... Elegy Written In A Country Churchyard by Thomas Gray from 1751. It’s so lyrical it’s like music when you read it.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. I love it so much I put a print in Morse’s home.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I’m cleverer than I am! The Inspector Morse plots made people think I’m very smart, I’m definitely not as smart as Morse.

The song that means most to you... Something by The Beatles. It reminds me of my daughter Sally, because it was her favourite when she was young.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I’d start my writing career. It’d help if I were younger – so let’s say 1964 started my writing career.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Aeternum est dimidium facti, which means ‘The beginning is half of the deed’. I’ve always found that the beginning is the hardest part of anything. Once that’s done, I’m off and away.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be World Chess Champion. I was pretty good at school – but never good enough.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I’d steal a boy, and then see England win The Ashes at The Oval. I’d end the day at the Trout Inn in Oxfordshire, with Sally, 55, and our son Jeremy, 33, and his children – Thomas, 24, and James, 22. I’d paddle in the sea at Skegness, which I loved as a boy, and then see England win The Ashes at The Oval. I’d end the day as the Bayreuth Festival in Bavaria listening to Wagner’s Die Walküre.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I’d steal Vermeer’s The Milkmaid from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. I love it so much I put a print in Morse’s home.

The way you want to be remembered... As a good teacher.

The way you want to be remembered... The way you want to be remembered...

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...

The least conventional tip you would give to the next generation... To write the best page I can. As told to Rob McGibbon.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Being given the Freedom of the City of Oxford in 2001. At the time, the only living recipients were Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi.

The saddest time that shook your world... When my daughter’s dog Mycroft died. He was very poorly and he looked at me with such sadness as the vet prepared the needle. I could hear Sally, who was 13, weeping next door. It was one of the few times I’ve wept.

The order of service at your funeral... The order of service at your funeral...

The piece of wisdom you would pass on... The piece of wisdom you would pass on...

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...

The ordered service at your funeral... The ordered service at your funeral...

The way you want to be remembered... The way you want to be remembered...

The treasure item you lost and wish you could have again... The treasure item you lost and wish you could have again...

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