The prized possession you value above all others... The address book on my iPhone. I have over 1,000 contacts in there. If I lost it I’d become a recluse.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... Not going to drama school. My father [playwright and actor Hugh Williams] was opposed to the idea. He wanted me to be a hotelier. I’ve never felt part of the elite circle of actors who did go.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I’d begin the day with a walk along the cliffs in Polzeath, Cornwall, with my wife Lucy and my Collie-cross Flute. We’d join our family on the beach for a game of rounders, then I’d bodysurf. In the afternoon I’d dine in the garden hammock at our home near Henley, Oxfordshire, while listening to a Test match on the radio. At sundown, Lucy and I would have a fruit punch cocktail to some Bob Marley at Goldeneye, Ian Fleming’s house in Jamaica. In the evening we’d go to the latest big musical in the West End, then have a dinner full of laughter at The Ivy with friends.

The tempting you wish you could resist... Interrupting. I do it because I fear that a brilliant thought I’ve had will be lost forever, but it’s very rude.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Goodbye To All That by Robert Graves. It evokes the England that was lost after the Great War. It was the mainspring of my research for James Bellamy in Upstairs, Downstairs.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I’d rewrite the Autocue scripts just before the party leaders make their political broadcasts, forcing them to tell the truth.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... The voice on the telephone that says, ‘The person you are calling knows you are waiting.’ What’s wrong with just having the engaged tone?

The film you can watch time and time again... Some Like It Hot with Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis and Marilyn Monroe. It’s the most immaculate film, with amazing performances. The person who has influenced you most... Richard Attenborough. I’ve known him for 40 years and his energy and compassion always inspire me.

The figure from history for whom you’d most like to buy a pie and a pint... Pontius Pilate. I’d love to know if he most like to buy a pie and a pint…

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Cleaning shoes. I used to do it for the prefects at Harrow and I love the ritual. If friends come round with grubby shoes I’ll go off and clean them.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could erase... People still think it was stolen in 1970 and I still miss it.

The misapprehension about yourself... That I’m humourless, rude, chauvinistic, upper-class cad. I’m quite cuddly!

The unlikely thing you do well... To be more patient, especially with inanimate objects like the car.

The way you want to be remembered... Meaty, fishy or veggie – Jamie Oliver cooks lasagne three ways.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I’d steal banker Fred Goodwin’s ill-gotten gains and give them to Comic Relief.

The saddest time that shook your world... Learning about the Holocaust when I was 12. It shook me to know that such evil was possible.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Leaving Harrow School in 1962 when I was 16. I hated it. Many of the teachers were ex-military bullies.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I’d go to see a clairvoyant when I was 18 who said I was one of twins. I told my mother and she revealed she’d miscarried my twin brother at four months. I was quite shocked and it made me realise I could have been one of the perished and fuelled my desire to live for him as well as for me.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be original as an actor and as a writer.

The song that means most to you... Sad Sweet Dreamer by the Stylistics. It was my favourite when I was 12. It shook me to know that such evil was possible.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Goodbye To All That by Robert Graves. It evokes the England that was lost after the Great War. It was the mainspring of my research for James Bellamy in Upstairs, Downstairs.

The poetry that touches your soul... The poem that is my favourite, followed by the hymn The Battle Hymn Of The Republic and There Is A Green Hill Far Away. I would like a eulogy with plenty of jokes and, of course, lots of flattering.

The way you want to be remembered... With a smile and as someone who didn’t take himself too seriously.

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