

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's the turn of actor Peter Bowles



'People think I'm posh, but I'm working-class. My parents were in service and brought home how to speak nicely'

venue where the great Scottish singer Annie Ross is performing. I'd have veal with spaghetti, a tomato and onion salad, and some Bordeaux. We'd end the day chatting to the workers at an Arctic weather station over a glass of Jameson whiskey.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Receiving a letter from John Osborne praising my performance in his play *The Entertainer* in 1986. To please the author is the biggest accolade.

The saddest time that shook your world... My father Herbert suddenly dying from a heart attack on Christmas Eve in 1981. He was a wonderful man and I was very disturbed by his death.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To finish my novel. It's all in my head, so it's just a matter of sitting down and writing it. But it's been in my head for a while now!

The philosophy that underpins your life... To thine own self be true. It's also important to be honest and to stand up for yourself.

The order of service at your funeral... It's not something I think about, so I'll leave it to my family. But at some point I'd like there to be some rock'n'roll.

The way you want to be remembered... As a loving husband, father and grandfather. That's all that matters.

The Plug... Peter Bowles's autobiography, *Ask Me If I'm Happy*, is published by Simon & Schuster, priced £8.99. ■
As told to Rob McGibbon

The prized possession you value above all others... A signet ring my wife Sue gave me after accepting my proposal – we've been happily married for 54 years.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not having lunch with Marlon Brando in London in 1984. I was invited but never got the message. Long afterwards I was told I was his favourite actor.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Smothering a bowl of lovely, healthy fresh fruit with Jersey cream!

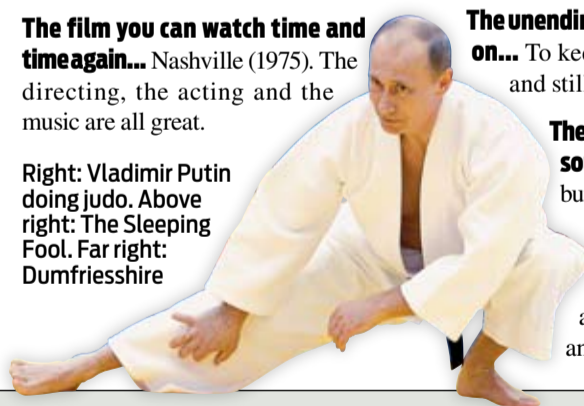
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... *The Story Of My Heart*, Victorian nature writer Richard Jefferies' autobiography. It woke me up to the fact I was part of the bigger world.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd see how good Vladimir Putin is at judo. I got to brown belt [one before black].

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Adults cycling on pavements.

The film you can watch time and time again... *Nashville* (1975). The directing, the acting and the music are all great.

Right: Vladimir Putin doing judo. Above right: *The Sleeping Fool*. Far right: Dumfriesshire



The person who has influenced you most... Theatre director Sir Peter Hall. He convinced me I could be far better than I'd imagined.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Lord Lucan. I think he escaped, so I'd like to know how.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... You are unique, and your opinion matters.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... True crime. I have hundreds of books about infamous crimes. The fact they really happened makes them all the more compelling.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... An unbroken night's sleep. I discovered rock'n'roll on all-night radio in the US when I was 19, and it shattered my sleep pattern.

The unending quest that drives you on... To keep acting. I'm nearly 79 and still busy.

The poem that touches your soul... I'm not into poetry, but I like the Garry Essendine character's comment in Noël Coward's *Present Laughter*, 'Rise above the whole situation and do the best you can.'



The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal Cecil Collins's painting *The Sleeping Fool* from Tate Britain. It's beautiful and moving; the essence of tranquillity.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm posh. I'm working-class and from Nottingham. My mother and father were in service and brought home good manners and how to speak nicely.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Winning a scholarship to RADA when I was 16. I was with Peter O'Toole, Albert Finney, Alan Bates and Richard Briers, and met beautiful girls. It was extraordinary!

The song that means most to you... *A Whiter Shade Of Pale* by Procol Harum. David Hemmings played it in his Cadillac when we were making *The Charge Of The Light Brigade* in America in 1967, so those memories come flooding back when I hear it.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd wake up alone in a small B&B in Dumfriesshire. I'd have tattie [potato] scones, black pudding and two fried eggs with a large mug of tea for breakfast, then go for a long walk in the Cairngorms. Sue and I have three children [Guy, 52, Adam, 50, and Sasha, 48] and six grandchildren [aged seven to 23], but we see them all the time. So, as this is a fantasy day, we'd simply go alone for lunch at the Beverly Hills Hotel. I'd have cod roe on toast. At some point I'd go to the gents and in the next cubicle would be a major film director, who would ask me to star in his next film. This happened to me once, but I declined. This time I would accept! In the afternoon I'd go to New York and walk from Broadway to Greenwich Village, where I'd meet Quentin Tarantino for tea. He would then tell me he's bought the film rights to my unfinished novel. Sue and I would have cocktails at the St Regis Hotel, then go for dinner at any



PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID ROSE/TELEGRAPH; GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY; TATE

PS...

*Salma Hayek stars in rom-com *Lessons In Love* – in cinemas from Friday. A new solo album from Eagle Don Henley, *Cass County*, is out the same day. And Liza Minnelli plays the first of her two UK shows tomorrow night at the London Palladium*



NEXT WEEK

- Judge Ellie Harrison says it's not too late to enter our fabulous wildlife photography contest
- Thomasina Miers' Mexican cookery masterclass
- Monty Don's star plant of the season
- PLUS Britain's best TV guide