

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week: *Paddington* creator Michael Bond

The prized possession you value above all others... The original Paddington bear I bought for my ex-wife Brenda from Selfridge's in 1956 as a stocking-filler. He changed my life, so I keep him safe.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not buying a flat in Montmartre, Paris, that I rented for 35 years. I used to go there every month to write. I was offered it ten years ago, but said no, and last year the owner decided to move in.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Ferrero Rocher chocolates. I like to have a box on the go when I'm writing. I'll eat four, then make myself stop.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... It's actually a weekly magazine called *The Magnet*, which had a running story about schoolboy Billy Bunter. I read it under the covers from the age of nine and it had a big impact on me.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd do some eavesdropping. A bit of snatched conversation can be good for a story – it's helped me in the past.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Cold calls in the evening.

Right: Billy Bunter. Top right: Ferrero Rocher. Far right: Paris



The film you can watch time and time again... *The Third Man*. Graham Greene's screenplay is excellent and Orson Welles is wonderful.

The person who has influenced you most... My maternal grandfather. He came to live with us in Reading when I was a boy and he thought highly of me – more than anybody else! He taught me that you can do anything if you concentrate.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... John Logie Baird, the man who invented TV. I'd love to watch a modern set with him and discuss what's happened since.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Politeness costs nothing, but it can be worth an awful lot.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Bricklaying. Like Winston Churchill, I find it restorative in times of stress. It sets the mind free.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A little toy dog my girlfriend Nora gave me when I joined the RAF at 17. I



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The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The day my young daughter, Karen, was made better. She was born with a dislocated hip and was in and out of hospitals having operations for her first six years. One surgeon really b****red it up and made it worse. Then a very good surgeon in Oxford put it right and she made a full recovery. It was such a relief.

The saddest time that shook your world... The death of my grandfather when I was 13, from a heart attack. It was the first time I'd had a death in the family and he was so nice to me.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To have a lawn with a surface like a billiard table. The previous owner of our home in north London filled in the garden with lots of old bricks. We've lived here 30 years and it's been a losing battle trying to lay a nice lawn. Bricks and holes always appear, or the foxes dig it up.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In life, it's important to treat people well.

The order of service at your funeral... I'll leave the details to my family and do as I've always done – which is to go where I'm pointed!

The way you want to be remembered... As a friendly person, who was approachable and ready to listen. And for never missing a deadline!

The Plug... *Love From Paddington* is out in paperback on 8 October, £8.99, from HarperCollins Children's Books.

As told to Rob McGibbon

carried it in my breast pocket for four years, but one day in Cairo I sent my clothes to the laundry and it was gone for good.

The unending quest that drives you on... To keep writing. I'll be 90 in January but I still write every day and I hope Paddington and my other characters will have plenty more adventures.

The poem that touches your soul... I'm not good on poems, but the French national anthem *La Marseillaise* stirs me. I'm quite a Francophile at heart.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That writing is easy. People think this of me because the *Paddington* books are short, but I hone them from a much longer text.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Replying to an advert at 16 for someone interested in radio. The BBC was setting up a transmitter in Reading and wanted someone to look after it. This led to me working as a BBC cameraman, a job I loved.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... There's always a cost to pay for the smallest

crime, so nothing could tempt me. When I was ten I took a half-eaten chocolate bar off the counter of a shop. It's still on my conscience to this day!

The song that means most to you... All Or Nothing At All, by Frank Sinatra. Nora bought me a vinyl disc of it and I kept it for years. It reminds me of her.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... At my age, I wouldn't want an action-packed day. I'd simply board the first Eurostar to Paris with my wife Sue and go back to my old flat. My last day there was 4 December 2014. I miss it dreadfully, but on this day it would be *mine!* There'd be no emails, no phone calls – and no visitors! I'd spend the day reliving my life, gazing out of the window with its vista over northern Paris. I'd be happy to go for lunch at my favourite fish restaurant – Le Dôme in Montparnasse. I'd have the lobster salad followed by a *tarte fine aux pommes*. But after that I'd like to be back in the flat, reading and writing and looking out over Paris.



PHOTOGRAPHS: HAWKS BOOKS; SHUTTERSTOCK

PS...

Michael Fassbender takes the title role in a big-screen Macbeth – in cinemas from Friday. Janet Jackson's first studio album in seven years, Unbreakable, is out the same day. And Michael Palin's The Thirty Years Tour continues tonight in Carlisle



NEXT WEEK

- Paul Kaye takes us behind the scenes as he guest stars in the new series of *Doctor Who*
- James Martin shows you how to make his favourite puddings
- As the apple season arrives, Monty Don on the best tree for you
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide