

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's broadcaster Justin Webb's turn



'I'm not a trainspotter but I've loved trains since I was a kid. I'm even deeply interested in Crossrail and HS2'

**The prized possession you value above all others...** The key to a hotel room in Bosnia, where I was staying in 1992 during the civil war. My room was destroyed by a shell seconds after I went into the corridor to make some tea. It reminds me how life can turn on a moment.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** That my mother Gloria didn't live to see me work on the Today programme. I joined in 2009, but she died in 2006 when she was 81.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** Raymond Carver's short story collection *Where I'm Calling From*. It's profoundly moving.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Sullen shop and restaurant workers.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** My son Sam, who's 15, has type 1 diabetes so I'd watch Professor Doug Melton's work to find a cure at Harvard University.

Right: Uma Thurman and John Travolta in *Pulp Fiction*. Above right: Cadbury's Fruit & Nut chocolate. Far right: Deer Valley ski resort, Utah



**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Cadbury's Fruit & Nut chocolate – I can't stop myself.

**The person who has influenced you most...** Lord Tom McNally, my mentor and father figure. I was his speechwriter for a year aged 21 when he was an MP.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** *Pulp Fiction*. It's clever, funny, shocking and the music is wonderful. And Uma Thurman is gorgeous!

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Ronald Reagan. He did so much to rally everyone against Communism during the Cold War and I'd like to hear his advice now that we're fighting a world war against Islamic extremists.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** I always encourage my kids [twins Sam and Martha, 15, and Clara, 11] to laugh about life because a sense of humour is the one character trait that can get you through anything.



**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** I'm not a trainspotter but I've loved trains since I was a kid. I'm even deeply interested in Crossrail and HS2.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** A little train set I had when I was eight. My mother sold it to buy me a bike when I was 12.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To take a week off work and spend the entire time reading. The combination of an all-encompassing job and children makes that impossible.

**The poem that touches your soul...** *Buffalo Bill's* by EE Cummings – it's wonderfully unsentimental.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm posh. My stepfather was severely mentally ill, so my mother was essentially a single parent. I only went to a private Quaker school because I had a bursary.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Going to the London School of Economics. I'd hardly been to London before, so to be in the heart of the city was incredible.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd disable all the speed cameras on the M4 so I could race down to watch Bath play rugby on a Friday night.

**The song that means most to you...** Elton John's *Rocket Man*. I remember it playing on the radio when I was painting my bedroom with my mum when I was 11. I didn't have many good days as a kid, but that song takes me back to that very happy moment.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I'd start with a croissant and an espresso at a cafe in Rome, which is such a captivating place. Then I'd go skiing in Utah with my wife Sarah and our children. After that we'd go to Los Angeles – my favourite city in the world.

For lunch I'd have a big Californian salad with fruit and a spicy tomato juice. We'd go to Cape Town for afternoon tea and enjoy the gorgeous light, then in the evening we'd watch Bath play rugby. I'd

end the day at home in south London with roast pork belly for dinner – a family favourite – and a glass of red wine.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** A family day out in 2005 at Rehoboth Beach in Delaware on the east coast of America. I remember thinking what a privilege it was to be working in such a wonderful country.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** My mum dying was desperately sad because she'd been such an intense part of my life.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To write an important novel that will last long after I've gone, but I haven't got the imagination.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** I'm not religious, but I like the Quaker saying, 'Walk cheerfully over the earth answering to that of God in everyone'. In other words, create some happiness in each day.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I'd be happy with something simple on a hill overlooking Bath, with readings of Philip Larkin's *The Old Fools* and Robert Frost's *Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening*. Then I'd like Clara to play Bach's *Cello Suite No 1*.

**The way you want to be remembered...** With a smile by my loved ones.

**The Plug...** Justin Webb presents the Today programme on BBC Radio 4 at 92-95 FM from 6am-9am on weekdays and 7am-9am on Saturdays. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



## PS...

Jennifer Lawrence reunites with Bradley Cooper in comedy-drama

Joy – in cinemas from Friday. Family favourite *The Nutcracker*

*On Ice* is at the Royal Albert Hall from Monday. And Bryan Adams

plays a New Year's Eve gig at London's Central Hall on Thursday



## NEXT WEEK

● All the gossip and star interviews from the BBC's *War And Peace* – set to be the TV event of 2016 ● Easy curries to keep the cold out ● Monty Don's New Year's resolutions ● PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide