

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week: writer and actress Arabella Weir



**The prized possession you value above all others...** My late grandmother She-She's [Sheila] ruby engagement ring. She had a huge generosity of spirit and was a role model for me. She left me the ring when she died aged 79 from a heart attack in 1983 and I wear it all the time.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Not going to university. I went to Middlesex Poly to study drama and it was a complete waste of two years.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Alcohol. I should stop after two glasses, but I have a very inefficient OFF button. I'm the same with chocolate.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** Staying On by Paul Scott, about a British couple clinging onto their old life in India after Independence. It evokes India beautifully and is so moving.

**The person who's influenced you most...** Helen Scott Lidgett, who died from cancer aged just 63 in 2012. She was my art teacher when I was 16 and we became lifelong best friends. She taught me that you can achieve anything if you put in the work.

Right: Adolf Hitler. Above right: wine and chocolates. Far right: a Great White shark



**The unending quest that drives you on...** I love what I do, so I just want to always carry on writing and acting.

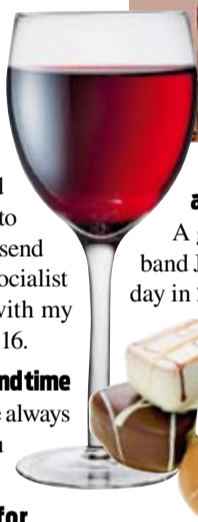
**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** So-called socialists who send their kids to private school. They should send them to state school. I'm a socialist and that's what I've done with my kids Isabella, 18, and Archie, 16.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** It's A Wonderful Life always makes me sob. It reminds you of what matters in life.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Hitler. I'm vain enough to think I could charm him into telling me what made him so full of hate.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Know what you want in life so you can go out and get it.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** The word game Bananagrams. It's an easier version of Scrabble, but my children refuse to play with me – they think it's only for old people!



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

A gold charm bracelet my ex-husband Jeremy gave me on our wedding day in 2002. I lost it six years ago during a trip to Scotland.

**The poem that touches your soul...**

Philip Larkin's This Be The Verse for its priceless opening line, 'They f\*\*\* you up, your mum and dad.' He couldn't have been more accurate about my life if he'd tried! My parents did whatever suited them best, but oddly their attitude taught me to turn misfortune into comedy.

**The song that means most to you...** I Say A Little Prayer by Aretha Franklin. It was played at Helen's funeral and it always makes me cry.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day...** I'm terrified of sharks, so I'd swim with Great Whites to finally conquer my fear.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** The publication of Does My Bum Look Big In This? in 1997. The book was a best-seller and it put me on the map.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd kill all the despicable despots in Africa.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm posh just because my name is Arabella and my dad Michael was a diplomat. Dad was only knighted at the end of his career, when I was in my 20s. He wasn't an aristocrat. I'm middle class.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...**

Helen would still be alive and we'd wake up in the swanky Four Seasons hotel in Florence. I'd have a pastry and a strong coffee for breakfast, then we'd wander around the city. Later we'd view Paris from the roof terrace of the Pompidou Centre, then head to New York: we'd hang out in the achingly trendy Ace Hotel, eat salmon with scrambled eggs at the Brunswick Cafe, and shop at Anthropologie, my favourite clothes shop. Then we'd have Sundowner cocktails on the banks of the Nile at the Winter Palace Hotel in Luxor, Egypt,

where my kids would join us. We'd have lamb tagine for dinner with a Côtes du Rhône red wine, followed by oum ali – the Egyptian version of bread and butter pudding. We'd all end the day at the Banyan Tree Hotel in the Seychelles.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** When the BBC told me they were commissioning my comedy series Posh Nosh in 2002. I was so excited I thought I was going to explode.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** Helen dying on 31 July 2012. We spoke at least four times a day and our friendship was like being in love, but with a friend. I miss her hugely.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To be thin and look great in jeans! One day...

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Regret nothing.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I want every useable bit of me to go to medical science, then they can have a service with what's left. I want it in a field, but nothing religious. A bagpiper can play something cheerful and then I want everyone to have a big party.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As a good person and a best friend who was always true to her word.

**The Plug...** Arabella plays Beth in a new BBC2 sitcom, Two Doors Down, to be aired in the spring. Her novel The Endless Trials Of Tabitha Baird is published by Piccadilly Press, £6.99. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: CAMERA PRESS; GETTY; ALAMY

## PS...

Rachel Weisz plays Michael Caine's daughter in bittersweet drama *Youth* – in cinemas Friday. Ralph Fiennes is *The Master Builder* at London's Old Vic from today. And extended versions of two classic Phil Collins albums – *Face Value* and *Both Sides* – are out on Friday



## NEXT WEEK

- Olympic heroine Rebecca Adlington on tackling winter sports in Channel 4's *The Jump*
- A second delicious helping of comfort food from James Martin
- PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings