

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's novelist Sandra Howard

The prized possession you value above all others... My mother Rosalie's sapphire and diamond engagement ring. She left it to me when she died in January 2002 and I've worn it since the engagement ring Michael [former Home Secretary Michael Howard] gave me was stolen when I was mugged later that year.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not going to university. I wanted to be a model, so I did a three-week charm course at 17. University would have given me a broader education, greater confidence and many friends for life.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Rich, creamy cheeses, especially Vacherin. I can eat spoonfuls of it.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The God Of Small Things by Arundhati Roy. It's a beautiful novel set in India.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd watch a book club discuss one of my books. It'd be painful but amusing.

Right: Frank Sinatra. Above right: a Liverpool FC shirt and football boots. Far right: Grand Anse beach, Grenada

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...

When the PC-brigade insists on using words such as 'Chair' instead of 'Chairman'. It's ridiculous. I can recall a US historian once demanding to be called a 'herstorian'!

The person who has influenced you most... My mother.

She was an Oxford scholar and very sensible. We were very close and I could tell her anything.

The song that means most to you...

One For My Baby (And One More For the Road) by Frank Sinatra. I became friends with him in the 60s and he was my eldest son Sholto's godfather. That song takes me back because it was one of the few of his own he ever played at his house in California. He had a huge heart.

The film you can watch time and time again... Darling, starring Dirk Bogarde and Julie Christie. It epitomises the 60s and reminds me of fun times.



The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Football. I'm a big Liverpool fan and I watch every game.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Martin Luther King Jr. I'd ask how far he thinks we've come in terms of losing our racial prejudice. I don't think we've done enough.

The piece of wisdom you'd pass on to a child... Do it your way, not mine.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My energy and suppleness. I'm doing well for 75, but I daren't go water-skiing any more.

The unending quest that drives you on... To write a better book than my last one.

The poem that touches your soul... The Soldier by Rupert Brooke. To think of the men in the trenches of the First World War is frighteningly sad.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal paintings by Picasso and Matisse from La Colombe d'Or Hotel in France.



'I was friends with Frank Sinatra in the 60s – he was my son's godfather and he had a huge heart'

Melbourne, Australia, because I love its buzzy atmosphere. The day would end in the comfort of our home in Kent.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Meeting Michael at a ball in 1973 – there was an instant spark. We chatted about books and I remember being a touch hurt because he didn't ask me to dance. He told me later that he wanted to, but felt it wouldn't have been fair on the lady accompanying him.

The saddest time that shook your world... My sister Carma's sudden death from a stroke in 2008 when she was only 72. It was such a huge shock. She lived in South Africa and I felt so sad that I could no longer call her up.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I'd love to cure my stammer. I've had it since I was a child and it's rather inhibiting. It comes and goes and I never know when it will catch me out. I once went to Michael Palin's school for stammerers, but it didn't help.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Look for the good in people.

The order of service at your funeral... Just a few conventional hymns and little fuss. Michael wants us to be buried side by side. I'll let him sort that out!

The way you want to be remembered... With amusement by my children.

The Plug... Tell The Girl is out now in paperback, published by Simon & Schuster priced £7.99, and my next novel called Absence will be out next year. Visit sandrahoward.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Ben Affleck and Henry Cavill star in Batman v Superman – in cinemas on Friday. James Norton's onstage in Bug at London's Found 111 theatre from Thursday. And former 1D member Zayn Malik's debut album Mind Of Mine is out on Friday



NEXT WEEK

- The most delicious Easter feast from Tom Kerridge
- Michaela Strachan on her Springwatch special
- Monty Don's passion for primroses ● PLUS Britain's best TV guide