

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

*We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's Call The Midwife's Judy Parfitt*



'I have a bony face that looks severe in repose, so people think I'm forbidding. But I'm actually very giggly!'

**The prized possession you value above all others...** My home in West Sussex. My late husband [actor Tony Steedman, who died in 2001 after suffering dementia for ten years] and I renovated it and it's the place where I feel safe and happy.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Not learning languages fluently. Being in a country is more pleasurable if you can speak to the natives.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Buying endless amounts of oils and potions to straighten my curly hair. None of them work!

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** Elizabeth The Great by Elizabeth Jenkins. It's the definitive story of Elizabeth I and sparked my fascination with her.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day...** I'd sit at dinner with the Royal Family before the Brexit vote to hear what they really think.

Right: Elizabeth I.  
Above right: lobster and champagne.  
Far right: Machu Picchu in Peru



**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Sloppy speech. I wish people would speak more clearly. I'm always telling my granddaughters to speak up.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** Strictly Ballroom. It makes me feel happy.

**The person who has influenced you most...** Eric Capon, the principal at my drama school when I was 15. He told me I was useless and not to bother auditioning for RADA. I thought, I'll show him – and I got into RADA before I was 16.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Elizabeth I. I'd like to know how she coped through the maze of her life.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Plan for tomorrow, but live for today. I've always been a worrier and then you get to my age – 80 – and you realise it's a waste of energy.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** Painting people. I've been doing it for 20-odd years and I find it very relaxing.



**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** A photo Tony took of me in Cornwall in 1961. I'm naked by the edge of the sea. Tony loved it and it reminds me of a special time. I have no idea where it's gone.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To find a part that stirs me, stretches me and frightens me.

**The poem that touches your soul...** Oscar Wilde's The Ballad of Reading Gaol. It's such a moving poem. To think he went through all that simply because he was homosexual is unimaginable.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm forbidding. I have a bony face which looks severe when it is in repose, so people get the wrong impression. I'm actually approachable and a terrible giggler.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Doing rep for a year in Birmingham in 1960 because that's where I met my husband. I remember thinking, this man dresses appallingly. But we fell in love.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd steal Van Gogh's Irises from the Getty museum in LA, for my sitting room.

**The song that means most to you...** The Way You Look Tonight. It was used in the play The Compliant Lover by Graham Greene, which I did in 1962 with Tony. It conjures up that time.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** The day would begin in Peru with my son David and his wife Roxanna and my granddaughters Annabel, 14 and Georgina, ten. Roxanna's Peruvian, so she'd guide us up Machu Picchu to watch the sun rise. Then we'd nip to the Galapagos Islands to see the animals. Lunch would be at La Colombe d'Or in Saint-Paul-de-Vence in the South of France. I'd have champagne and lobster. I'd spend the afternoon in the Royal Box on Centre Court at Wimbledon watching Andy Murray win the men's singles. Then we'd go on the Orient Express to Venice for a Bellini at Harry's Bar before

jetting off to the Maldives for a swim and snorkelling. Dinner would be with family and friends at the River Cafe in London. I'd have pasta and sauvignon blanc, then go for a walk by the Thames. The day would end at home watching the news and Call The Midwife!

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** The births of my granddaughters. Tony didn't live to see them but they were such a comfort to me.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** When my husband died. Tony was a huge emotional support and made me laugh a lot. I still miss him dreadfully. It's very difficult being alone.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To do more comedy. I normally play heroic people who are suffering, but I really enjoy comedy.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Strive for what you want, but also accept what you can't change.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I want it to be simple, with little fuss, and to be a happy occasion. I want my ashes put in with my Tony's. Some are in the garden, some are in Spain and the rest are in an urn in the study!

**The way you want to be remembered...** With a smile and for people to think: She was peculiar, but fun!

**The Plug...** Please help Dementia UK provide more Admiral Nurses to care for people with dementia. Donate at dementiauk.org or call 0300 365 5500. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



## PS...

*Bill Murray voices Baloo in The Jungle Book, in cinemas Friday. Previews of Funny Girl with Sheridan Smith start today at London's Savoy Theatre. And Phil Collins' 1985 album No Jacket Required is re-released on Friday*



## NEXT WEEK

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