The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it’s investigative journalist Donal MacIntyre

The prized possession you value above all others... My seven-year-old Chi-hua-hua Louie. He’s got an amazing personality. I named him after the dancer Louie Spence, who’s a friend.
The biggest regret you wish you could amend... I wish I’d discovered skiing in my teens. I learnt when I did Channel 4’s The Jump in 2014 and found my appetite for flying on skis.
The temptation you wish you could resist... Tayto salt and vinegar crisps. When I was an altar boy in Ireland our reward for serving at Mass was a bag of those. If I had to order a last meal, I’d have a giant bag of Tayto and die a happy man.
The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I’d infiltrate and destroy Boko Haram, the most heinous terror group in Africa. Their cruelties are unimaginable.
The film you can watch time and time again... Babe. Despite my occupation I don’t like movies with violence or horror. I’m a country boy at heart and that movie always makes me smile.

Right: Babe. Above right: Tayto crisps and whiskey. Far right: sunset over the Mississippi in Louisiana

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Umbrellas. They’re weapons of war, which should be banned. I’m 5ft 9½in, the perfect height to be poked in the eye.
The book that holds an ever-lasting resonance... The Wind In The Willows by Kenneth Grahame. I first read it when I was eight, living by the River Liffey. Toad is such a rascal.
The person who has influenced you most... Peter Salmon, the former controller of BBC1. He brought me to the BBC in 1993 and was a wise counsel. It was his vision to send me in undercover.
The figure from history for whom you’d most like to buy a pie and a pint... Grace O’Malley, one of the most powerful women of 16th-century Ireland. She was an infamous pirate who had an extraordinary meeting with Elizabeth I and I’d love to witness it.
The poem that touches your soul... Digging by Seamus Heaney resonates deeply because it’s a poem for writers. My father Tom, who’s 85 now, is a poet and it reminds me of him.
The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... People still think I work undercover, but I haven’t done that for 13 years. I’m typcast!

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... You can do anything you want, all you have to do is unlock your potential.
The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I have a new-found interest in punctuation. My current obsession is the em dash [–]. It’s wonderfully useful – the Swiss Army knife of punctuation.
The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... I’m not materialistic but my memories are precious, so to lose those through illness or dementia would cause me pain.
The event that altered the course of your life and character... When the first film I directed, A Very British Gangster, was selected for the Sundance Film Festival in 2007. It brought me into the world of cinema and directing and it woke up creative juices I didn’t know I possessed.
The song that means most to you... Bridge Over Troubled Water by Simon & Garfunkel. It was written against the backdrop of the Nixon White House and the Vietnam war. It’s a song of protest and resignation and tears well up whenever I hear it.
The unending quest that drives you... I’m driven to help underdogs or the oppressed who can’t get justice.
The philosophy that underpins your life... Be brave and never dwell on what can go wrong because it will hold you back. Nervousness is dangerous.
The order of service at your funeral... I’d wake up in the Arctic to a glorious pink sky. I’ve spent over three months there in total and it’s an extraordinary place. I’d then go for a geothermal spa in Iceland to thaw out, before brunch in New York with strong coffee. After that I’d go for a walk in the desert of Shariya Sands, Oman. I lived with the Bedouin tribe there and the people are wonderful. I’d eat fresh dates in the shade. I’d spend the afternoon sailing off Belize, dropping anchor to snorkel over coral reefs. At sunset, I’d drink whiskey on the banks of the Mississippi in Louisiana.

‘My ambition was to become an Olympic canoeist. I was in two Ireland canoe teams in my 20s, but I failed to make the grade’

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NEXT WEEK

• Heartwarming stories from celebrities in part one of our series on how to adopt a rescue pet
• Dan Toombs serves up a second helping of perfect British curries
• Britain’s best TV listings

As told to Rob McGibbon

Blondie’s new album Pollinator is out on Friday. Timothy Spall appears in Irish peace process drama The Journey, in cinemas the same day. And Miriam Margolyes opens in Madame Rubinstein at London’s Park Theatre on Wednesday

PS...