

A Life in the Day



WORDS OF WISDOM

BEST ADVICE I WAS GIVEN

My mother used to tell me: "Life's unfair, get used to it"

ADVICE I'D GIVE

Know your inner self and be true to your spirit

WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN

More about science. I studied humanities at school, so I am scientifically ignorant, which is a regret

Joan Bakewell

The broadcaster and Labour peer on still doing Pilates, aged 85, and afternoon naps

Dame Joan Bakewell has been a leading broadcaster, journalist and writer since the 1960s, when the comedian Frank Muir dubbed her "the thinking man's crumpet". She was made a life peer in 2011, and presents *Portrait Artist of the Year* on TV. She has been married twice and famously had an eight-year affair with Harold Pinter, which inspired his play *Betrayal*, now back on in the West End. She lives alone in Primrose Hill, north London, and has two adult children, Harriet and Matthew, and six grandchildren.

“ My day begins with a rigid routine that gradually gets more ragged as the day goes on. The alarm goes off at 6.50am, which gives me time to fetch a cup of tea and come back to bed to listen to the Radio 4 news at 7am. I have

earl grey — decaffeinated because I have a lot of adrenaline of my own. I've not had caffeine for at least 10 years, so if I ever have it these days without knowing I'm as high as a kite. I never listen to the Today programme after the news because that's too much testosterone for me at that time of the morning.

I've recently downsized into a former artist's studio after living in the same big house for 55 years. Moving was a great trauma, but it is important to make the move at my age, before it's too late. In 1963, when my first husband, Michael, and I moved to Primrose Hill, the area was really unfashionable. The house cost £12,000, which was a lot of money then and we needed a mortgage, but I will not say what I sold it for...

For years, breakfast was marmalade on toast, but recently I started having granola with fresh

fruit, honey and yoghurt. As you get older, you have to rely on people. Frances, my housekeeper and friend, turns up at 10.30am. She has been with me for 20 years and sorts me out. I work from a laptop, but I'm not techie, so I have a man called the MacDoctor who is a delight — if something goes wrong, I scream down the phone and he comes round and saves me. Two mornings a week I go to the same Pilates class in Belsize Park I have been doing for 25 years.

Quite often for lunch I fry up some leftovers — I was a war child, so I hate to throw anything away. I've been having an afternoon nap since 1959. I have a meditative technique that helps me neutralise my brain. I come out bouncing and refreshed, and will keep working happily long into the evening when everyone else is flagging.

I spend some afternoons at the House of Lords. I drive there in my red Mini Cooper, which is an extension of home. I chose my title Baroness Bakewell of Stockport because I felt that it was important to go back to my roots. My younger sister, Susan, and I were brought up on the outskirts of Stockport. The development was unfinished for years because of the war, so within a matter of yards of our house we could be in fields and the countryside. It was a wonderful place to grow up.

I had a complicated relationship with my mother, Rose. She was highly intelligent, but she married young and felt completely unfulfilled in her life. She was depressed, though no one described it as that. I just thought she was being difficult. She died from leukaemia when I was 28.

At about 4pm I need a sugar rush, so I have a cup of tea and a scone with cream and jam, or some chocolate cake. Work usually finishes at 6.30pm. Often I go out to dinner with friends. I will have a glass of white wine, but don't drink much these days. One of my great indulgences is using taxis.

I'm a news junkie, so my day ends with watching the headlines, and then I'm in bed by 11.15pm. I used to like a small brandy as a nightcap, but I have stopped that because, like most old people, I do not want to get up in the night ■ ”

Interview by Rob McGibbon
Portrait Artist of the Year is on *Sky Arts* on Tuesday at 8pm

