



The prized possession you value above all others... My bed. It's incredibly comfortable. It's only a single with an old brass bedstead that was given to my daughter Sophie [actress Sophie Thompson] when she was 18, but the mattress is Tempur foam, which was developed by NASA and moulds to your body.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... Giving up the piano when I was 16. I'd had lessons and loved playing, but I began devoting all my time to studying to become a doctor.

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

I'd take my best friend Mildew on a tour of the islands of Scotland – by kayak! We'd paddle to Eigg, Rum, Muck and Jura and tow a dinghy behind us full of Puligny-Montrachet wine and catch lobster, langoustines and crab. Then I'd magically arrive in Quito in Ecuador for a sundowner drink and end the day at home in West Hampstead with my four grandchildren having a roast beef dinner with Yorkshire pudding made by my other daughter Emma [actress Emma Thompson] and Sophie. We'd have all the trimmings and drink some nice Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Chocolate raisins. I don't have to worry about my weight – I'm 80 so it's too late to care about things like that – but once I start I eat rather too many.

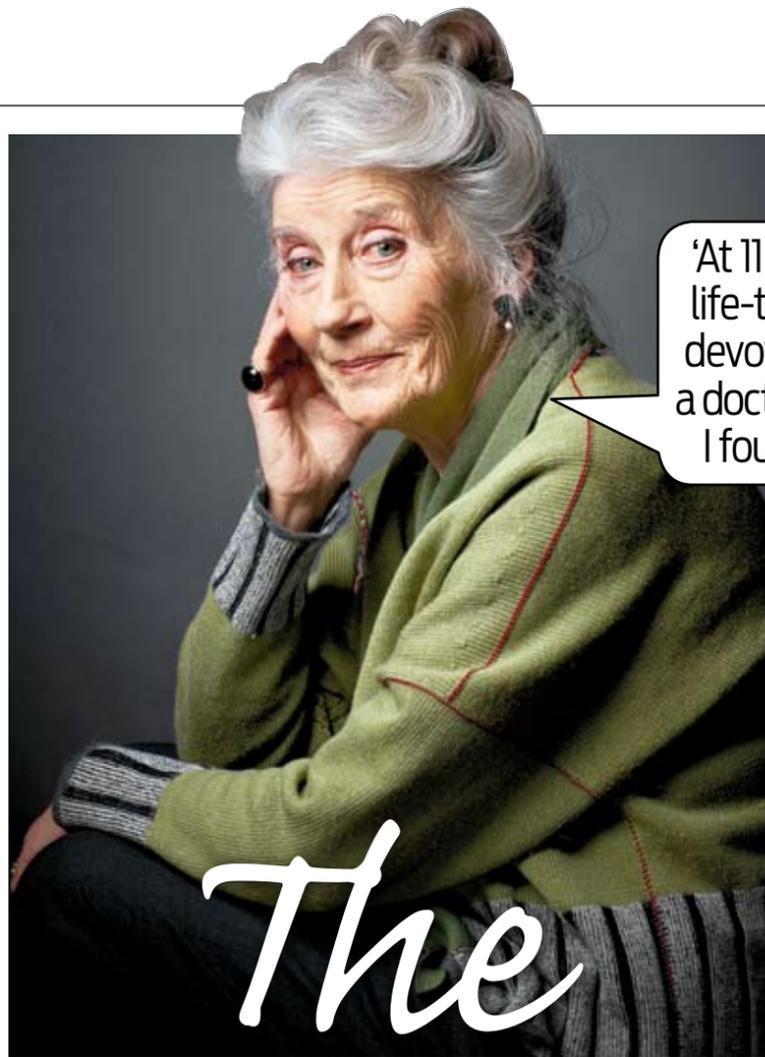
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... All Quiet On The Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque. I first read it in one sitting when I was 19 and stayed up until 3am sobbing. It was so devastating and really took me to the horrors of the First World War.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd have a good snoop inside the Vatican and look through all those secret archives.

The pet hate that always gets your back up... The sound of people typing non-stop on their laptops on the train.

The film you can watch time and time again... The beginning of Ice Age 3 with the squirrel who has to find the acorn. I've watched it with my grandchildren many times and love it because it's so witty and enchanting.

The person who has influenced you most... A lady called Jenny McAra, who was my first proper teacher, for two years from when I was nine. I admired and respected her – she taught me so much about listening and learning.



'At 11 I was convinced I had a life-threatening disease, so I devoted myself to becoming a doctor. I threw it in at 17 when I found out it was anaemia'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's the turn of actress Phyllida Law

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... The Russian mystic Grigori Rasputin. I'd love to know what he was up to with the Tsar's family and how he really died.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Don't waste time trying to be perfect. It's fine to have faults.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Dry stone walling. I marvel at the intricate beauty of them, especially across Scotland.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... I lost my virginity when I was 24, so it would be fun to go back and start all over again!

The unending quest that drives you on... To find peace in each day.

The poem that touches your soul... Carcassonne by the 19th-century French songwriter Gustave Nadaud. It's about a man who dies before he realises his dream to see the town of Carcassonne, which is a metaphor for heaven.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm Phyllida Lloyd, the director of Mamma Mia!. People tell me they loved that show and the film. They're crestfallen when I say I had nothing to do with it!

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Discovering at 17 that I didn't have a life-threatening disease! From the age of 11 I was convinced I was ill. That made me devote what I thought remained of my life to becoming a doctor. Then I found out I was only anaemic. I threw in medicine and became a theatrical designer.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal a painting by the Dutch artist Vilhelm Hammershoi and look at it in awe.

The song that means most to you... Miss Otis Regrets by Cole Porter. It moves me whenever I hear it.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... When I bought my cottage in Ardentiny, Scotland, 50 years ago. It's the most stunning place in the world.

The saddest time that shook your world... When my husband [narrator of The Magic Roundabout Eric Thompson] and my brother, James, were ill in 1982. Both were 53 and they died within months of each other.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To speak French. I have lessons but I can't imagine I'll ever manage it without living there.

The philosophy that underpins your life... You have to keep laughing.

The order of service at your funeral... I'd be taken to the crematorium by dustcart with a jazz band playing. I want my ashes scattered in a glen near my home in Scotland and I'd like an unsuitable reading to make everyone smile.

The way you want to be remembered... With a glass of wine and laughter.

The Plug... How Many Camels Are There In Holland? Dementia, Ma And Me by Phyllida Law is published by Fourth Estate, £12.99. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

From top: Eigg and Rum, kayaking, the Vatican, Rasputin, lobster, All Quiet On The Western Front, Interior With Woman At A Piano by Vilhelm Hammershoi, Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape and Ice Age 3



PS...

Fancy One Night With Joan? Then book for her new live tour, kicking off in Northampton on Saturday. Christopher Walken stars in A Late Quartet – in cinemas from Friday. And a new album from 80s popsters New Kids On The Block, 10, is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- BGT's back! And you've never seen the four judges like this before
- Rory Bremner goes in search of Britain's best view
- Jamie Oliver's tasty ways with Italian cheese
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings