The things on Sarah's mind, from top: Billy Elliot, chocolate, Florence Nightingale, Stories Of Mothers Lost, Robin Hood, a beach in Fife, a Stephen Jones hat and George Harrison

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My grandmother's gold garnet ring, which I wore after she died from breast cancer in 1980 when she was 70 and I was 16. It slipped from my finger as I ran to my final exam at Bristol University in 1986 and I couldn't stop to look.

The unending quest that drives you on... Making a difference in any way I can. You can't control so much in life, but you can end each day knowing you've done something positive.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... Gordon is back and forth to Westminster and we both travel for charity work, so I'd want us and our two boys, John and Fraser, to be together in Fife – with total travel restrictions. We'd walk on the beach, play and just be at home.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Chocolate. I eat it for energy when I'm tired, but I know it's not a proper substitute for sleep.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Stories Of Mothers Lost, compiled by the White Ribbon Alliance. It's about mums around the world who died in pregnancy or childbirth. To know they died unnecessarily is devastating.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd sneak on to the set of the television series Glee and sing and do all the dance moves without embarrassment.

The way fame and fortune has changed you, for better and worse... We have no fortune and, let me stress, no complaints! For better: being in the public eye has forced me to learn new things, like public speaking. For worse, I am less trusting of some people, who write and say things they know to be untrue.

The film you can watch time and time again... Billy Elliot. Its writer Lee Hall is a friend. He captured the betrayal of the hopes of a generation in the 1980s.

The person who has influenced you most... My mum, Pauline, who is in her 70s. She made me believe that just because there's a glass ceiling, it doesn't mean you have an excuse for not pushing your head against it until it shatters.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Florence Nightingale. I'd reassure her that nurses remain heroes and that plenty of us are fighting to ensure they get the pay, training and respect they deserve. I'd also fill her in on the creation of the NHS!

If I were invisible, I'd sneak onto the set of Glee and sing and dance along without embarrassment!

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's charity campaigner Sarah Brown

The piece of wisdom you'd pass on to a child... How the world treats you should not determine how you treat the world.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I've become interested in the history of hats since going to British milliner Stephen Jones' showcase at the V&A Museum in 2009.

The prized possession you value above all others... The diamond eternity ring Gordon gave me. It is engraved with our initials and those of our children.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I wish I'd spoken out earlier, more frequently and louder when people told blatant lies about Gordon.

The poem that touches your soul... A Wish For My Children by the late Irish poet Evangeline Paterson. Gordon quoted it at Damilola Taylor's memorial service and it moved me. Every parent can relate to the hope that your children are safe, while wanting them to be out in the world realising their potential.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I 'gave up work'! It didn't feel like that to me and I'm sure it doesn't to any busy mum, charity worker or campaigner.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... In memory of my baby daughter who died when she was ten days old, we set up the Jennifer Brown Research Laboratory. Through that, I know science will transform our understanding of what can go wrong in pregnancy and childbirth, and avoid the heartbreak of losing a longed-for baby.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I can't think of the specifics but it would be Robin Hood inspired.

The song that means most to you... George Harrison's While My Guitar Gently Weeps. I've always loved it, no reason, just do.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Aside from the births of my children, it is Gordon's marriage proposal on a windswept beach in Fife on Millennium New Year's Day.

The saddest time that shook your world... Losing Jennifer was – and is – the saddest time for Gordon and me. We have so much happiness with our two sons, but we miss her every day.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... Making sure each day that everyone in our family is learning something new, contributing something positive and dreaming something big.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Everyone is unique and precious (even the superficially disagreeable) and you must recognise this in yourself, too.

The order of service at your funeral... I'd let my family choose, as they are the ones who will need to say goodbye.

The way you want to be remembered... That I tried to make a lot of small changes add up to a big difference.

The Plug... Sarah's memoir Behind The Black Door is published by Ebury. For information about the Jennifer Brown Research Laboratory, visit www.piggybankkids.org. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

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