

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week: documentary-maker Louis Theroux



'People think I'm a calculating inquisitor who affects a pose to achieve his ends, but I'm just as bumbling off camera'

salt and chilli. We'd drop the kids off with granny and go to the Louvre in Paris. We'd then wander around Le Marais district and have dinner at a bistro. We'd end the day with the kids in a town in Provence, playing pétanque with locals, drinking wine as the sun goes down on a summer's evening.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** Winning a Spelling Bee in New York when I was 25. I was against 15 other journalists. I won by spelling 'shillelagh' – an Irish walking stick.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** My parents getting divorced. I was about 22, but even when you're an adult it's upsetting.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To play tennis well. I go on court thinking I can execute great shots, but they end up hitting the net.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** To be honest and kind. Sometimes for a journalist being honest means being unkind. It's a conflict, but above all you must be honest.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I'd have a Quaker-style service on the South Downs in Sussex. People could share a few memories of me then throw my ashes to the breeze.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As a gifted athlete and artistic colossus. Failing that, as a thoughtful person.

**The Plug...** Transgender Kids, tomorrow, 9pm, BBC2. Louis's archive documentaries are repeated on Tuesdays at 10pm on the Really channel. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDREW COMLEY/CAMERA PRESS; REX; SHUTTERSTOCK

**The prized possession you value above all others...** A print of the outlaw Ned Kelly by the late Australian artist Sydney Nolan, which my dad [writer Paul Theroux] gave me for my 40th birthday.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** That I didn't go to art school before going to study history at Oxford. I've always enjoyed painting but I went to teach in schools in Zimbabwe instead.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Chocolate with sea salt. I'm particularly weak in the evening.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** Love In The Time Of Cholera by Gabriel García Márquez. The sweep of his writing is bewitching.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd go to the headquarters of the church of Scientology. I've been working on a film about them for a year, but access has been tricky. It would be a coup to follow its leader David Miscavige.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Casual snobbery from people obsessed with materialism. I tell people I live in Harlesden in north-west London and I can see them thinking, 'Why do you live there!'

Right: Coraline. Above right: a squirrel. Far right: the Louvre

**The film you can watch time and time again...** Coraline, about a girl who finds a secret passage to another world. My children loved it when they were younger.

**The person who has influenced you most...**

The film-maker Michael Moore. He gave me my first break in television on the show

TV Nation in 1994

and encouraged me to break the rules.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Shakespeare. I'd document his writing process and get to know about the difficult passages in his life that gave him his craft.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...**

Look after your body, because I'm 44 and things are happening that I never dreamed of – like bad joints and man boobs!

**The poem that touches your soul...** The Embankment by TE Hulme always moves me.



**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...**

The Crossrail tunnelling machines. I'm on an email alert list that tells me when they've reached a certain point. I then click through to see some pictures.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd hunt pigeons and squirrels to use as food. A lot of money could be saved if we ate urban wildlife. I've heard of people 'harvesting' squirrels from parks and serving them at dinner parties!

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** My healthy left knee. It's been damaged by jogging.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To make the perfect TV programme. It always becomes a damage-limitation exercise, from what you hope to film to what you actually get.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm a calculating inquisitor who affects a pose to achieve his ends. The word 'faux-naive' is used a lot. It's flattering that people think I have a plan but I'm as bumbling in real life as I am on camera.



## PS...

Christina Hendricks and Matt Smith star in fantasy thriller *Lost River*, in cinemas from Friday. Roald Dahl's *The Twits* comes to London's Royal Court Theatre from Tuesday. And ex-Beach Boy Brian Wilson's new album, *No Pier Pressure*, is out the same day



## NEXT WEEK

- Hugh Bonneville on the return of BBC satire *W1A*
- Delicious recipes from Claire Macdonald of Scotland's Kinloch Lodge
- Time to mow the lawn – Monty Don tells you how
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide