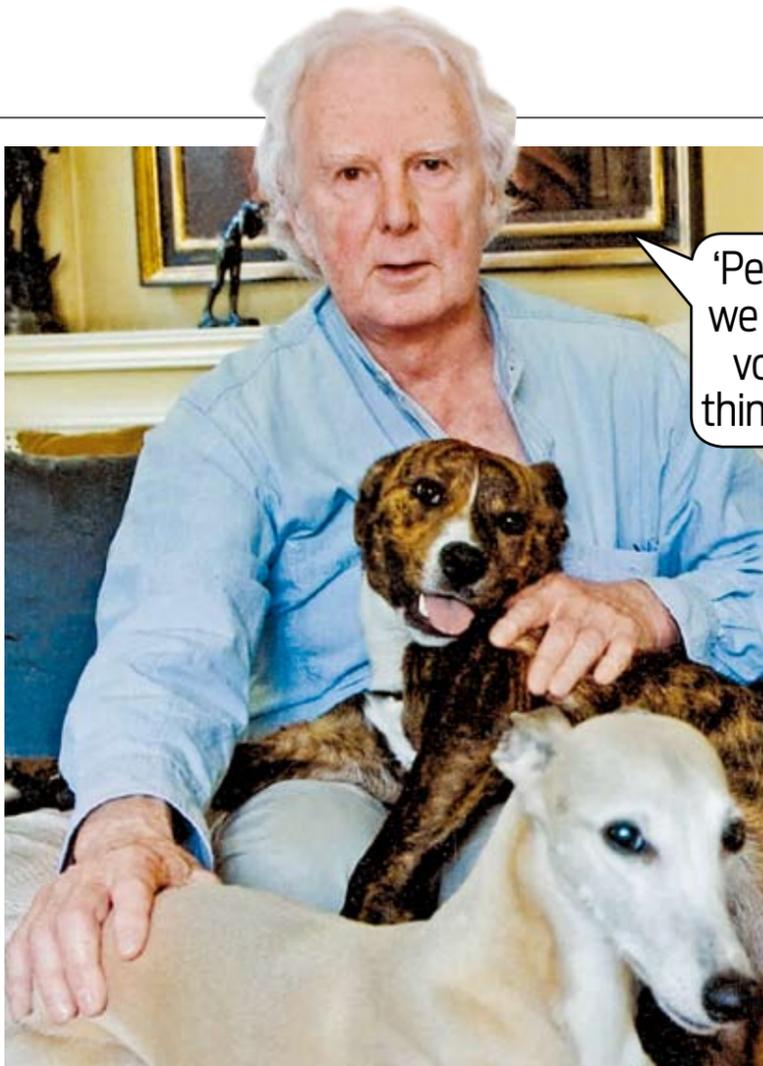


The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's art critic Brian Sewell's turn



'People think I'm posh but we were poor and I got my voice from my mother. I think of myself as classless'

Brian with his Staffordshire-bull terrier cross Lottie and his late whippet Jack

The prized possession you value above all others... My dogs – a border terrier called Gretel and Lottie the Staffordshire-bull terrier cross. I've always had dogs and I'd be suicidal without them.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... The lack of sympathy I showed my mother, Jessica, in her later years. She had a spine affliction, but I thought she was playing up so I wasn't as understanding as I might have been. I'm 82 now and I've inherited the condition so I know what she was going through. Mother died at 96 from old age in 1996.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Fresh coffee. I drink at least two litres every day. I know when I've overdone it because my hands start to shake.

The film you can watch time and time again... Lawrence Of Arabia with Peter O'Toole. It's as near to a work of art as a film can be.



Left: Peter O'Toole in Lawrence Of Arabia. Above right: The Wind In The Willows. Far right: A gulet on the south-west coast of Turkey

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd go to the House of Commons and light a huge bomb that would wipe out the leaders of all parties. I feel very let down by them.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Wind In The Willows by Kenneth Grahame. My mother gave it to me for my seventh birthday and I still have that edition.

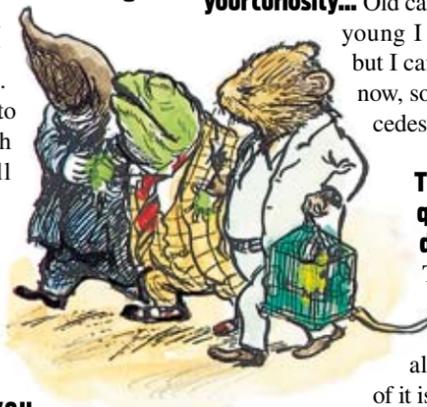
The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Cruelty to animals.

The person who has influenced you most... My mother. I was illegitimate, which was a real stain on a woman in the 30s. She took me to the National Gallery from the age of four and taught me to look at art.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Alexander the Great. He was an extraordinary general to have conquered so much. I'd ask him what finally compelled him to stop fighting.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... The same thing my Catholic priest told me when I was 14. 'Bring everything to the bar of your own judgement.' Question everything.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Old cars. When I was young I had Daimlers but I can't afford them now, so I drive a Mercedes A-Class.



The unending quest that drives you on... To understand art. Despite writing about it all my life, much of it is incomprehensible. I'd pitch much of what's been made recently into the Thames.

The poem that touches your soul... The Hound Of Heaven by Francis Thompson. It moved me when I first read it as a boy and it moves me still.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm posh. I was a poor b*****d but got my voice from my mother. I think of myself as classless, so it's irritating to have assumptions made about me.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Doing National Service. It taught me that if I had to, I could kill.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd poison every Chinese ivory trader.

The song that means most to you... Four Last Songs by Richard Strauss. They perfectly reflect my romantic feeling towards life.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A painting of a nude man by the Scottish painter William Bell Scott from 1828. I kept it in a drawer for 40 years. Last year I noticed it had gone. It must have been stolen.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd wake up at 4am on the south-west coast of Turkey in a gulet – a Turkish sailing boat. I'd sit reading and listening to Schubert and Strauss until my companions emerged, then I'd go swimming. We'd breakfast on fresh Turkish bread with runny honey and coffee, then swim to the shore and explore the Roman ruin of Xanthus. We'd be picked up from the beach by hot air balloon and land in the gardens of the Vatican and go to the Sistine Chapel. There, I'd lie on a bed on top of a moveable scaffold and be

wheeled around the chapel by handsome young men, looking at Michelangelo's frescoes. Occasionally, one of the young men would climb up to serve me chilled water and Italian delicacies. I'd have dinner at Bibendum in London – a dozen Scottish rock oysters and a whole crab – and end the day on that bed in the Sistine Chapel. In fact, I would happily expire there.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... My first journey to Italy in 1955, at 24. Five friends and I drove there and I'm thankful I experienced Europe before mass tourism took it over.

The saddest time that shook your world... Listening to Chamberlain declare war with Germany in 1939.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To write a book about Michelangelo that explains the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel.

The philosophy that underpins your life... To help anyone whenever I can.

The order of service at your funeral... I'm leaving my body to science, and if there's anything left, they can burn it, mix the ashes with bird food and scatter them on the steps of the National Gallery.

The way you want to be remembered... As someone who made the lives of a few animals a little bit better.

The Plug... My book Sleeping With Dogs: A Peripheral Autobiography is published by Quartet, priced £12.50. Visit www.quartetbooks.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Cameron Diaz is out for revenge in *The Other Woman* – in cinemas on Wednesday. *Sunny Afternoon*, the story of *The Kinks* by Ray Davies, is at London's Hampstead Theatre. And *Crowded House*'s Neil Finn kicks off a UK tour in Glasgow on Wednesday



NEXT WEEK

- Don't miss Sarah Beeny's indispensable guide to basic DIY jobs – FREE with the magazine
- Jamie Oliver shares his four favourite recipes
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide