The prized possession you value above all others... My copy of the 18-volume Complete Oxford English Dictionary, Winston Churchill's son Randolph gave it to me on my 21st birthday.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... Telling a lie on oath in court [during his libel trial against The Guardian in 1997], which was a catastrophe for my life and career.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd take the sleeper train from Euston to Rannoch in the Scottish Highlands, then hike to the top of Tom's Hill with my best friend Malcolm [Baron Pearson of Rannoch], where we'd enjoy a picnic of venison sausage sandwiches and Chablis. In the afternoon I'd relax on Sorrento Beach in Perth, Australia, with my wife Elizabeth and children Alexandra, Victoria, William and Petra. I'd go surfing, then we'd all have a beach barbecue. I'd stop off at the Ritz in Paris for a glass of Dom Pérignon before returning to Rannoch for Scottish mussels, then bed.

The temptation you wish you could resist... A second helping of comfort food, like steak and kidney pudding.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Other Men's Flowers, an anthology of poems selected by Lord Wavell, a field marshal during World War II.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd visit Heaven with an angel to see what it's like.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... People playing loud music from cars or music systems on the beach.

The film you can watch time and time again... The Magnificent Seven. It's a morality tale and a brilliant Western.

The person who has influenced you most... My great-uncle Max Aitken, the 1st Lord Beaverbrook – the only person other than Churchill to be in the Cabinet during both world wars. He opened my eyes to politics, English and journalism.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Henry VII, to talk about how he brought up his son Henry VIII. I'd like to know if he thought he'd failed.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... If you're kind, people will be kind to you, but if you're ruthless it will rebound.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I love steam trains. I'm envious of Michael Portillo for becoming the TV face of trainspotting!

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A large collection of family letters and ones written by myself throughout my school days, including my first love letters. They were stolen from my home in London.

The unending quest that drives you on... To find peace with God. I don't think you can find perfect peace anywhere on this side of the grave, but stumbling along the road of life itself is a good journey.

The poem that touches your soul... Tenennyson's Ulysses. It's about a man who is getting older, yet still feels he has the energy for great new voyages. It resonates so much because, although I'm 70 now, I still feel the desire to do more.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To help reduce the re-offending rate of ex-prisoners. Seven out of ten go back within two years.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.

The order of service at your funeral... The Garden Where The Praties Grow, sung by the Irish tenor John McCormack. I caught TB when I was four and I was sent to a special hospital in Dublin for three and a half years. I couldn't walk and was kept in a thing called a 'frame' which was like an iron lung. At Christmas McCormack would come and sing for us children – a great joy.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The moment, aged eight, when I knew I could run and dance like other children after so long in hospital.

The saddest time that shook your life... The death of my father William in 1964 from a heart attack. He was 58 and I was 21. He was a wonderful father and a rock in my life. I was devastated.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I would turn myself in and perverting the course of justice.

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