



From top: Henry VII, Rannoch Moor in the Scottish Highlands, steak and kidney pudding, a bottle of Dom Pérignon champagne, a steam train, The Magnificent Seven, and an angel

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 Petrina. 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.

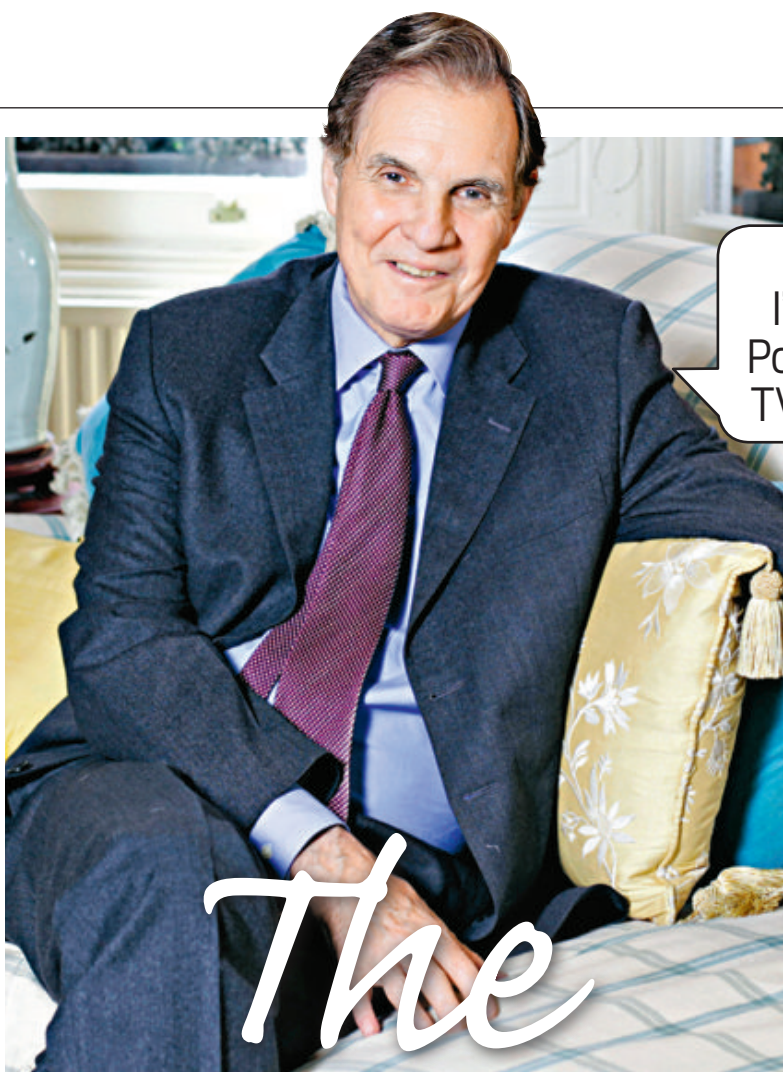
The film you can watch time and time again... The Magnificent Seven. It's a morality tale and a brilliant Western.

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!



'I love steam trains. I'm envious of Michael Portillo for becoming the TV face of trainspotting!'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: former politician Jonathan Aitken

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... Tennyson'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 misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That because I went to prison I am a 'bad' person. I've had people shout at me on the escalator in the Tube, 'You ***** crook'. It can be deeply wounding.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Being sent to prison [he was sentenced to 18 months and served seven in 1999 for perjury and perverting the course of justice]. I'm now more fulfilled because of it.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I couldn't be tempted. One crime was enough!

The song that means most to you...

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 world... 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 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... I'll have a service at St Matthew's Westminster with the hymns Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer, Glorious Things Of Thee Are Spoken, Amazing Grace and Psalm 90, then I want to be buried alongside my parents in the churchyard in Playford, Suffolk.

The way you want to be remembered... I know I'll be remembered as the Cabinet minister who went to jail, but if possible I would like a 'PS' – afterwards he helped the lives of ex-offenders.

The Plug... My new book Margaret Thatcher: Power And Personality will be published by Bloomsbury this autumn. Visit www.bloomsbury.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Anna Friel plays 'King of Soho' Paul Raymond's wife in The Look Of Love – in cinemas now. Zoë Wanamaker and Samantha Bond team up in Passion Play at London's Duke Of York's theatre. And Deep Purple's new album Now What?! is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

● Jamie Oliver on Food Revolution Day – his latest mission to change the way we eat ● Caroline Quentin's magical trip round Britain's national parks ● PLUS Britain's best TV listings