The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's novelist Fay Weldon's turn

'Volcanoes intrigue me, to the extent that I check online every morning on the progress of Bardarbunga in Iceland'

The prized possession you value above all others... A book called The Story Of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf, about a gentle bull who'd rather smell flowers than fight. My father Frank gave it to me for my fifth birthday and it's the only possession I have from my childhood. He died from a stroke when I was 16l.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Canapés at parties. They spoil your dinner and it's easy to eat too many.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Brave New World by Aldous Huxley. I read it aged 19 and it showed a world dependent on drugs, which is what we've become, not least with statins.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd love to walk alongside a hurricane without getting hurt. Extreme weather fascinates me.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Choosing to play hockey at school instead of netball when I was 11. Hockey was full of brutish, angry girls; netball was for smart, skinny ones.

The film you can watch time and time again... Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. It's magical and brings back such happy memories of watching it with my boys [now aged 30-55] when they were growing up.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Think for yourself, and never believe what you're told.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Because they're utterly uncontrollable, volcanoes intrigue me, to the extent that every morning I check online to see the progress of Iceland's Bardarbunga volcano.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Meeting my second husband, Ron Weldon, in 1961. Suddenly I was the wife of an artist, mixing with writers and creative types. It was the beginning of a new life.

The poem that touches your soul... London by William Blake. It's about the tragedy of city life, and it makes me cry.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... Serious people think I'm frivolous, frivolous people think I'm a serious, mean, man-hating feminist. I'm neither.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Magpies in our garden in Dorset. They're thugs that scare off all the sweet songbirds.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A blonde-haired doll called Panama Polly, which my mother gave me when I was four. It went missing during a house move about five years go.

The person who has influenced you most... My mother Margaret. She was an intelligent, brave feminist whose strength of character rubbed off on me. She died ten years ago aged 94. I still miss her.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... William Blake. I'd want to talk about the inspiration for his greatest poems.

The unending quest that drives you on... To write a sentence that says exactly what I intended it to say. I'm 83 now but I write every day and it's a constant challenge to think of the right words.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd make all the cash machines dish out as much money as possible.

The song that means most to you... Little Wheel Spin And Spin from the 1960s, by Native American singer Buffy Sainte-Marie. It's simple yet profound.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... My [third] husband Nick and I would start with breakfast at the Hotel Continental in Oslo. I'd have fresh figs, mango juice, scrambled eggs, home-baked bread and croissants, with lots of very strong coffee. After that I'd buy the finest bed linen at Liberty in London, then spend a fortune on the most delicate, fancy lingerie at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York. Lunch would be at The Ivy in London, where I'd have a vodka martini then fish and chips. Afterwards we'd tour Rome's ancient ruins with my four sons and six grandchildren, aged from 6-22, then eat ice cream in St Mark's Square, Venice. At dusk I'd walk by the sea at Renvyle on the west coast of Ireland, where the singing of the seals sounds like mermaids. Dinner would be moussaka and chips in a taverna on Crete, where we'd all drink the local rosé and do some Greek dancing. My day would end back at home, reading a book in a deep hot bath. Bliss!

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Getting my CBE from the Queen in 2001. She said, 'You're the one who writes television plays' and I replied, 'I write anything they pay me to, Ma'am!' It made her smile.

The saddest time that shook your world... My elder sister Jane's death in 1969 from cancer when she was just 39. We were very close – it felt as though half of me died with her.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I'd love to be a ruthless businessman like Alan Sugar.

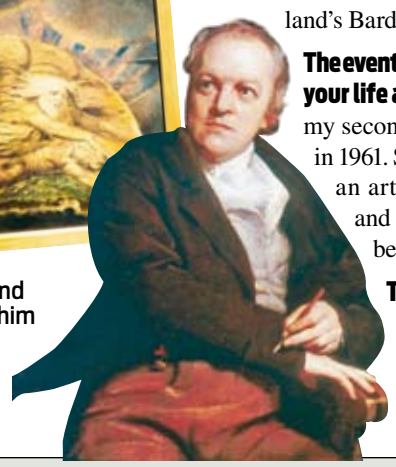
The philosophy that underpins your life... What goes around, comes around.

The order of service at your funeral... I'd have a cardboard coffin and be taken out to the Radio 4 theme tune Sailing By [played before the Shipping Forecast], and buried in the graveyard of a pretty church I go to near home.

The way you want to be remembered... Oh, didn't she die?!

The Plug... Fay's new book Mischief, an anthology of her short stories with a new sci-fi novella The Ted Dreams, is published by Head of Zeus in February. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



William Blake and his painting Elohim Creating Adam. Above right: a magpie. Far right: a volcano

PHOTOGRAPHS: XXXX