



From top: Cottages on stilts on Cocoa Island in the Maldives, King Henry VIII, Mahatma Gandhi, ice cream, The Rose Tattoo, Shakespeare Wallah, an Oscar and Frank Sinatra

The prized possession you value above all others... A gold locket from the early 1900s that my mother wore for most of her life. It became mine when she died in her 60s. I wear it every day to remind me of her.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I wish I'd started acting in films earlier. I was 31 by the time I made Shakespeare Wallah in 1964. I feel as though I lost so many years.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...

I would have my entire family with me all day – my husband, my three daughters and three grandchildren. We'd wake up on Cocoa Island in the Maldives in a series of hotel cottages on stilts in the Indian Ocean and spend a few hours swimming and snorkelling. We'd stop off in Kerala in southern India later in the morning for a walk before arriving in Florence in Italy for a gorgeous lunch of artichoke hearts, pasta and some osso bucco [braised veal shanks] and a big ice cream for each of the kids. We'd go on a safari in Kenya in the evening, then we'd end the day in Barcelona having tapas, including a platter of thin meat slices, grilled sardines and octopus with deep-fried pimientos de padron [peppers].

The temptation you wish you could resist... I love potatoes, but it's not good for you to eat too many. I'm 79 now, but I still like to keep trim.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Pride And Prejudice by Jane Austen. It's so beautifully written, with such comedy, drama and romance.

The priority activity if you were the invisible woman for a day... I'd systematically destroy all nuclear weapons.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Dishonesty.

The film you can watch time and time again... The Rose Tattoo from 1955 with Burt Lancaster and the Italian actress Anna Magnani. I saw it the night before an exam at RADA in the late 50s and her performance was so inspiring.

The person who has influenced you most... Mahatma Gandhi. I went to one of his prayer meetings in Delhi in January 1948, when I was 15. He sang hymns and talked of equality and oneness. He was so charismatic and his teachings had a big impact on me, especially his beliefs in non-violence. A few days after that meeting, he was shot dead. It was so utterly tragic and sad.



'When I was 15 I went to one of Gandhi's prayer meetings. He sang hymns and talked of oneness. Five days later he was shot dead'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: actress and cook Madhur Jaffrey

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...

Henry VIII, and I'd say, 'How dare you be so horrible to your wives!' I'm not sure how the meeting would go.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Be true to yourself.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... All aspects of design.

I'm endlessly fascinated with how beautiful things are made, from a simple chair or table to great architecture.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A pottery elephant which I bought in Mexico in the 1960s. I loved it but it broke one day and I've missed it ever since.

The unending quest that drives you on... To do everything to the best of my ability. I want my work to be excellent.

The poem that touches your soul... John Milton's On His Blindness. He'd gone blind, yet he saw things most sighted people couldn't.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm a cook who never acted.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Meeting the film producer Ismail Merchant in 1959. I was in a bunch of young, ambitious actors with dreams of making films and he made it all happen.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd sneak a basketful of Alphonso mangoes from India into America [she lives in New York]. Importing fresh produce is banned here, but they're the best mangoes in the world.

The song that means most to you... Frank Sinatra's Strangers In The Night reminds me of my youth. A time of excitement and so much dreaming.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The birth of my first grandson, Robi, who's 20 now. It was so special because my daughter Meera allowed me to watch the entire birth. To witness the creation of a life – a gift from God – was truly magical.

The saddest time that shook your world... When India was partitioned in 1947. There was mayhem and violence all over the country. My father had to arm himself and go out on patrol in our neighbourhood.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To win the Best Actress Oscar for a role in a great film.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Look for the positive in everything you do – and do it with passion.

The order of service at your funeral... I want whatever's cheapest and most convenient. Just put me in a simple pine box and cremate me, then scatter my ashes in our garden in New York. Afterwards, my friends and family can gather and drink a large Scotch for me.

The way you want to be remembered... I honestly don't care.

The Plug... My new cookery book, Madhur Jaffrey's Curry Nation, is published by Ebury, priced £20. Visit www.eburypublishing.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Beyoncé voices Queen Tara in magical new 3D animated adventure

Epic, in cinemas from Wednesday. Charlie And The Chocolate Factory

– The Musical is at London's Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. And 90s

rockers Texas return with new album The Conversation, out Monday

NEXT WEEK

- Meet the Queen's keepers – a fascinating look at the oldest (and oddest) jobs in the land
- Having a Coronation party? Let Jamie Oliver show you how
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide