



From top: A condor, *The Warden* by Anthony Trollope, salmon fishing equipment, Mrs Beeton, the Fourth Plinth at Trafalgar Square, technology, a Bellini and Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like It Hot*

The prized possession you value above all others... A picture my son Danny, who's 39 now, painted when he was nine. He drew me surrounded by hundreds of people clapping and a list of the amazing things I'd done, like 'cooked a thousand roast chickens'.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... That I didn't achieve anything while my father, Sam, was alive. I was 20 when he died of cancer and I hadn't found a direction in life.

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

I'd begin with a barbecue breakfast in the Andes in Peru looking down on the condors. Then I'd go horse riding through a bluebell field in the English countryside with my daughter Li-Da, who's also 39. I'd then board the Orient Express from London to Venice and head to the terrace of the Cipriani Hotel for a Bellini cocktail and gamberetti prawns for lunch. I'd have a siesta in a hammock in a wood in the South of France, then return to my house in Oxfordshire to cook a roast chicken dinner with all the trimmings for the whole family, including Danny and his children Malachi, three, Scarlett, one, and his new baby Winston. We'd have some nice Rioja red wine and a trifle.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Talking too much.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... *The Warden* by Anthony Trollope. I love his work, he's the most wonderful observer of life.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd sit in the cockpit of a jumbo jet during a long-haul flight to see what the crew do.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Chewing gum. It's so disgusting.

The film you can watch time and time again... *Some Like It Hot*. The scene when Marilyn Monroe has a party on the train always makes me giggle.

The person who has influenced you most... Sir Peter Parker, who was chairman of British Rail [from 1976-83]. He invited me onto the board in my mid-30s and encouraged me to tackle equality issues. He was a dear friend who gave great advice.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... The Victorian cookery writer Mrs Beeton. She wrote *Mrs Beeton's Book Of Household Management* and is the godmother of recipes.



'I thought nothing could be more boring than salmon fishing, but I caught one on my first morning and I was hooked for life'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's cookery legend Prue Leith's turn

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Never be bored.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Salmon fishing. I was introduced to it 30 years ago in Scotland. I thought nothing could be more boring, but I caught a fish on my first morning and I was hooked for life!

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My knees! I'm 73 now and I had both kneecaps and the ends of my femurs replaced last July.

The unending quest that drives you on... To master technology. As soon as I crack something, another thing is invented that I'm told I must have.

The poem that touches your soul... Alice Oswald's *Dart*. It's about the River Dart in Devon and you can feel the rhythm of the river in her verse.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm scary! People think I'm brusque and imperious, but I'm not like that at all.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Buying my house in Oxfordshire in 1976. Until then I was living in London and working day and night. Buying it forced me to be more organised, which helped me in my career.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd remove Robert Mugabe from power and incarcerate him. He's as mad as a hatter.

The song that means most to you... The old folk song *Foggy, Foggy Dew*, which my mother Margaret used to sing to me as a child in South Africa, where I grew up. These days I sing it to my grandchildren. Mum died two years ago – she was 97.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The day as Chair of the Royal Society of Arts when we succeeded in getting new sculptures on the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square. It took five years to get permission.

The saddest time that shook your world... My husband Rayne's death in 2002 when he was 80. He was 20 years older than me and had emphysema. He was a marvellous man and my mentor.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To write a seriously good trilogy of novels that are adapted into a wonderful costume drama.

The philosophy that underpins your life... JFDI – Just F***** Do It!

The order of service at your funeral... To be honest, I'm not bothered. I'm not a believer in God but I'd like Mozart's *Requiem* and the song *Jabulani* by the South African male choir *Ladysmith Black Mambazo* to remind me of Africa. I want my ashes scattered in the pond in our garden, which is where we put Rayne's.

The way you want to be remembered... As friendly, straightforward and loving. And as someone who got a lot done – *despite* having no qualifications!

The Plug... My autobiography, *Relish – My Life On A Plate*, is out now in paperback published by Quercus, priced £8.99. Visit www.prue-leith.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

*It's divided the critics – now see Brad Pitt's *World War Z* for yourself, in cinemas from Friday. Patricia Hodge, Caroline Quentin and Rory Bremner star in *Relative Values* at Bath's Theatre Royal. And *Glee*'s Matthew Morrison has a new album, *Where It All Began*, out Monday*



NEXT WEEK

- Kate Humble on her wildest show yet
- Jamie Oliver's sensational seasonal salads
- Monty Don creates a perfect pond for a tiny garden
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings