

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week: *War Horse* author Michael Morpurgo



'I can't resist pork pies. I eat them secretly so my wife doesn't catch me. At my age I should be chewing on celery'

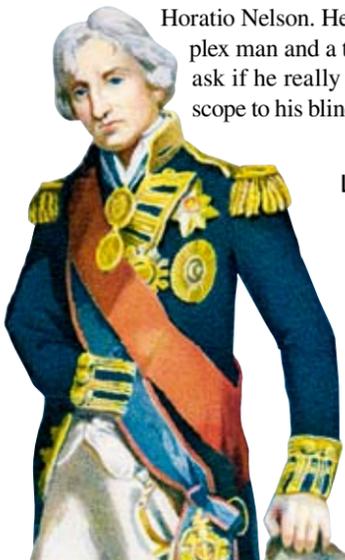
The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not playing rugby for England. I played for my school and Hertfordshire County when I was 16. But as I got older I discovered that many others were stronger and faster than me.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Pork pies. I'll buy some, then eat them secretly so my wife Clare doesn't catch me. I'm 70, so I should be chewing on celery, not eating pork pies.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... *The Man Who Planted Trees* by the French writer Jean Giono. It's a simple, powerful story that shows how every life can make a difference.

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

Horatio Nelson. He was a complex man and a true hero. I'd ask if he really put the telescope to his blind eye.



Left: Horatio Nelson.
Above right: A pair of red 'Stratford' shoes from Church's.
Far right: hares boxing

The prized possession you value above all others... A pair of bright red 'Stratford' Church's shoes, which were part of a special range made for the Olympics. They make me feel light-hearted and fun.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd walk in the African savannah alongside a herd of elephants. They're my favourite animal.

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

The film you can watch time and time again... *Jour de Fête* with Jacques Tati from 1949. I've seen it many times but it still makes me laugh.

The person who has influenced you most... Robert Louis Stevenson. Reading *Treasure Island* when I was ten made me realise I could be transported to other worlds by a book.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Do as you would be done by, it's at the heart of everything.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Classic cars. I love their look and smell and their romance.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The ability to sleep through the night. I generally go to sleep and wake up three hours later. Deep sleep is for the young and content.



The unending quest that drives you on...

To keep having new experiences. I don't want to become a boring old goat.

The poem that touches your soul...

The Christmas Truce by Carol Ann Duffy. It's about the unofficial truce on the Western Front in WWI. It's so moving.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That because I've written about animals, I must be an animal lover. I live on a farm and I like animals, but not *all* of them!

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Meeting Clare when I was 19 and on holiday in Corfu. I was heading for the Army, but her principles changed the way I thought. Eventually I quit Sandhurst and became a teacher and then I started writing. We've been married for 51 years.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal the Alfred Jewel from the Ashmolean museum in Oxford. It's an Anglo-Saxon artefact and it's beautiful.

The song that means most to you...

The Year Turns Round, which was written by John Tams for the National Theatre's adaptation of *War Horse*. It's so stirring to see the whole cast singing it.

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

I'd wake up with Clare at Samson Hill Cottage B&B on the Scilly Isles. I'd have granola, scrambled eggs, bacon and coffee, followed by a walk in the snow in the Engadine Valley, Switzerland, watching the dipper birds on the river. Lunch would be grilled fish and a glass of prosecco at Trattoria Altanella in Venice and we'd be joined by our eight grandchildren, who are aged six months to 27. I'd walk up the Pyrenees to Lescun, where you have Spain and France on either side. Tea would be at our home in Devon with a pot of lapsang souchong and lemon drizzle cake. For dinner, Clare and I would go to the Hotel de la Marine at Barneville-Carteret, Normandy. I'd have lobster and a nice bottle of Château de Beaucastel 2009 white wine. We'd finish the day back on the Scilly Isles with a moonlit walk on the beach.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... When I saw two large brown hares boxing each other in a ploughed field in Essex when I was nine. It was a beautiful, fleeting moment that has always stayed with me because it triggered my love for the countryside.

The saddest time that shook your world... The day my mother died 15 years ago. She was 75 and had been ill for some time, but it was still unexpected. It doesn't matter how old you are when you lose your mother, it still leaves you feeling insecure and alone.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I'd love to go down deep into the ocean in a submarine.

The philosophy that underpins your life... *People matter*. My late godmother Mary taught me that you have to value every human being.

The order of service at your funeral... I'd love Thomas Tallis's *Spem in Alium*, which is heavenly, and friends can sing or play some pieces of classical music. I want my ashes to be scattered on the River Torridge in Devon or on the sea by the Isles of Scilly.

The way you want to be remembered... With affection by friends and family. I'd love my books to be remembered, but it's fine if they forget my name.

The Plug... Michael Morpurgo presents *In Flanders Fields*, a celebration of songs, stories and poetry from WWI, on 25 August at Kings Place, London. Visit www.kingsplace.co.uk

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: EVENING; CORBIS; ALLSTAR; REX

PS...

The chimps take charge in Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes, in cinemas Thursday. Helen McCrory is Medea in the ancient Greek tragedy at London's National Theatre. And Morrissey's new album World Peace Is None Of Your Business is out Tuesday



NEXT WEEK

- Don't miss the breathtaking unseen colour pictures from World War One in our second special issue
- How to make the most of delicious summer berries
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide