



From top: The Villa Cimbrone in Ravello, a vanilla cupcake, a great white shark, Dirty Dancing, a fruit cocktail, a pair of Jimmy Choo shoes, the Water Cube aquatics centre in Beijing, timekeeping and Princess Diana.

The prized possession you value above all others... My health. As an athlete you're used to looking after yourself. I retired in February, but I'm only 24 and I'm determined to stay fit.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I honestly don't have any. Everything happens for a reason.

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

I love Italy so I'd wake up somewhere really romantic like the Villa Cimbrone in Ravello with my fiancé, the swimmer Harry Needs. We'd have breakfast looking over the Amalfi coast, then head to a beach in Puglia. At lunchtime, we'd meet up with our families for pasta and salad in Rome. In the afternoon, I'd relax at my parents' holiday home in southern Spain, then zoom over to Beijing for a dip in the Olympic pool in the Water Cube where I won my golds – just to have that amazing experience once again. In the evening, I'd throw a big barbecue for all my mates at my house in Manchester, then I'd end the day with Harry at a spa hotel in the Maldives, having a massage. I don't drink much alcohol, so afterwards I'd have a fruit cocktail on the beach while looking at the beautiful night sky.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Vanilla cupcakes. I can't go past a cake shop without wanting one.

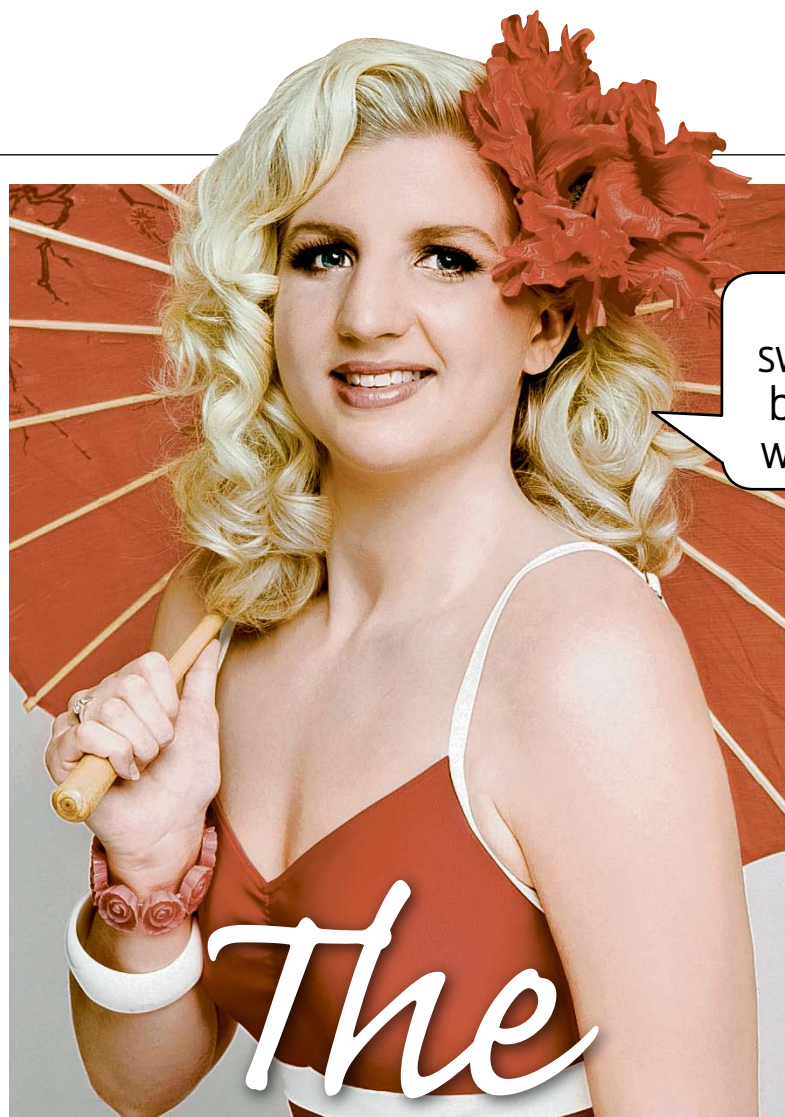
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... I like soppy, girly beach reads, like Jill Mansell's *A Walk In The Park*. Her books are full of romance and have strong female characters, which I like.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd go for a swim way out in the sea, which I've never done before because I'm terrified of what's underneath me. If I'm invisible nothing will see me – not even a great white shark!

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... People who make me late. Good timekeeping is ingrained in me.

The film you can watch time and time again... Dirty Dancing is the best film ever! My sisters [Chloe, 29, and Laura, 26] got me into it. I know it off by heart. It's a perfect cast and story and I was in love with Patrick Swayze for years.

The person who has influenced you most... My mum Kay. She gave up so much of her life, even her job at an accountancy firm, so she could drive me to training and competitions. I couldn't have succeeded without her.



The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: Olympic swimmer Rebecca Adlington

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Princess Diana. She was the fairytale princess – so beautiful and kind. I'd love to talk to her about her life and what she went through.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Care for your loved ones.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I love illusionists like Derren Brown and Dynamo. The child in me likes to believe that magic is real.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My mum's engagement ring. Mum said she'd give it to me, but when my dad Steve gave her a new ring two years ago for their 30th anniversary she had the old one made into earrings. It was her decision but I was so sad – and she regrets it now.

The unending quest that drives you on... To help the Amateur Swimming Association's campaign to train every child in this country to swim 25m.

'I've never been for a swim way out in the sea because I'm terrified of what's underneath me!'

The poem that touches your soul...

Poetry hasn't really come into my life but my coach, Bill Furniss, had a saying that's become my poetic mantra, 'Pain is just weakness leaving the body'.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm intimidating and unapproachable. You have to be focused to swim well but I'm friendly and open out of the pool.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Seeing my sister Laura fall seriously ill in 2005 with encephalitis – a brain virus. Doctors told my parents to prepare for her to die but she pulled through. Nearly losing her made me appreciate life.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal a wardrobe of Jimmy Choo shoes.

The song that means most to you... Saturday Night At The Movies by The Drifters. Whenever I hear it, I smile and it makes me dance.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Swimming the 800 metres freestyle in the 2008 Olympics in a world-record time of 8 minutes 14.10 seconds to win the gold.

The saddest time that shook your world... Seeing my grandfather Ron die from lung cancer in 2007. He was in his mid-70s, but he had a very aggressive form of cancer and died quickly. Seeing my dad so upset was really hard.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I'd love to be a mum one day with three or four kids.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Live each day as if it's your last.

The order of service at your funeral... I'm not religious, but I hope people can tell a few funny stories about me and play (I've Had) The Time of My Life from Dirty Dancing.

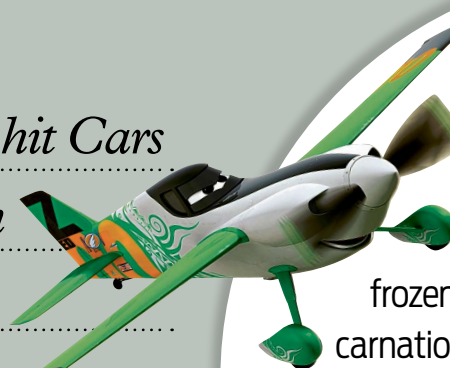
The way you want to be remembered... As a caring daughter, sister, wife and mother, who helped and inspired others and had a good laugh!

The Plug... Rebecca is encouraging people to take the Quorn Make One Change Challenge. Visit www.quorn.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Take the children to see Disney's *Planes*, a 3D spin-off of the hit *Cars* films. Richard Wilson's in the French farce, *A Little Hotel On The Side*, at the Theatre Royal Bath, from Thursday. And Glen Campbell's new album *See You There* is out on Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Behind the scenes on Caroline Quentin's bittersweet new sitcom
- Try one of our fruity frozen desserts
- Monty Don's carnations will tickle you pink
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings