The prized possession you value above all others... A marble Victorian clock left to me by my mother Lola when she died in 2001. It's my link with the past. 

The qualified regret you wish you could amend... That I didn't have three daughters! I have two lovely sons [William, 40, and James, 38] and a grandson [William's boy Alexander, seven months] but to walk a daughter down the aisle must be truly special.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd have breakfast at London's Connaught Hotel with the actress Annette Bening. I've never met her, but she's beautiful and bright and I'm sure she'd be great company. I'd have melon, cornflakes and scrambled eggs. After that, I'd arrive at a private box at Lord's to watch England bat against Australia and host a lunch with former captains. In the afternoon I'd meet my wife Mary for a matinée at the National Theatre, and then we'd head to the Hermitage museum in St Petersburg to see the great Russian paintings and Fabergé eggs. In the evening I'd conduct an auction at The Dorchester hotel and raise £2m for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. I'd end the day in Weston-super-Mare with dinner at Coffs, the best fish and chip shop in the world.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Affogato – homemade vanilla ice cream drenched in strong coffee. The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Advise & Consent from 1962 by Jeffrey Archer. It's about a Draegers officer in 1912 – it's a gasp-making masterpiece. The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd listen to Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry talk about Syria. I'd love to know what they're really planning. The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... The North Terminal at Gatwick airport! I hate the fact that you arrive at Gatwick and have to go straight to another airport via the transit train. The film you can watch time and time again... As I told you last week, Greta Garbo's 1931 epic, La Grande Illusion.

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's the turn of author Jeffrey Archer.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Thomas Jefferson, principal author of the Declaration of Independence. I'd love to discuss the drafting of it and how it has affected his country down the years. The piece of wisdom you would pass on... There's no short cut to success. The order of service at your funeral... There's no Anglican service with hymns such as To be in the Vineyard. The philosophy that underpins your life... As generous and loyal and as a shaman – that's Irish for 'storyteller'.

The song that means most to you... I Want To Hold Your Hand by The Beatles. It was at No 1 in 1963 when I met Mary at Oxford and we had our first dance to it. It always reminds me of her and such fun times.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... People assume I'm cynical, but I'm an enthusiast and can be incredibly naive. The event that altered the course of your life and character... Going to prison [he was jailed for four years in 2001 for perjury and perverting the course of justice]. It made me more aware of other people's problems and how lucky I am. The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal Caravaggio's Entombment Of Christ painting from the Vatican, and hang it in the National Gallery in London.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Running the 100 yards for Oxford at the Canadian Open Championships in Toronto in 1966. I came second, but ran my fastest time ever – 9.6 seconds – which was exhilarating. The saddest time that shook your world... I lost everything in 1974 after investing £500,000 in a fraudulent Canadian company, Agablast. I was 34 and facing ruin, but I started writing and paid off my debts within seven years. The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd have breakfast at London's Connaught Hotel with the actress Annette Bening. I've never met her, but she's beautiful and bright and I'm sure she'd be great company. I'd have melon, cornflakes and scrambled eggs. After that, I'd arrive at a private box at Lord's to watch England bat against Australia and host a lunch with former captains. In the afternoon I'd meet my wife Mary for a matinée at the National Theatre, and then we'd head to the Hermitage museum in St Petersburg to see the great Russian paintings and Fabergé eggs. In the evening I'd conduct an auction at The Dorchester hotel and raise £2m for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. I'd end the day in Weston-super-Mare with dinner at Coffs, the best fish and chip shop in the world.

The poem that touches your soul... A Pilgrim and Jerusalem and readings from the Psalms for perjury and perverting the course of justice]. It made me more aware of other people's problems and how lucky I am. The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal Caravaggio's Entombment Of Christ painting from the Vatican, and hang it in the National Gallery in London.

The philosophy that underpins your life... As generous and loyal and as a shaman – that's Irish for 'storyteller'. The Plug... Best Kept Secret, the third instalment in my Clifton Chronicles series, is published in paperback by Macmillan on Thursday, £7.99, www.jeffreyarcher.co.uk.

As told to Rob McGibbon

NEXT WEEK

● Face to face with TV's most handsome posh boy
● Chef Gino D'Acampo reveals Italy's sensual foodie secrets
● And don't miss Britain's brightest and best TV listings

Will Young sets off on a national tour with hit West End musical Cabaret. Heartwarming coming-of-age drama The Way Way Back – starring Toni Collette – hits cinemas on Wednesday. And Studio Zoo, folkster Newton Faulkner's new album, is out Monday.