

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

*We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's veteran actor Bernard Cribbins*

**The prized possession you value above all others...** My TV! I spend too long watching it. Sport is my big thing. I'm a fisherman and even like watching fishing.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Not learning to play the guitar properly. I used to play a few folk songs and some blues, but I broke my wrist in 1975 and haven't played well since.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Milk chocolate. Mars, Snickers, Kit Kat: you name it, I'll probably eat it.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** Tarka The Otter by Henry Williamson. I read it aged 12 and loved the adventure. It set off my interest in fishing.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd watch a heart transplant operation. I had a triple bypass in 1998 and it saved my life. I'm 85 now and still going strong. Those surgeons are truly amazing.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Drivers who tailgate. It's inconsiderate and unsettling.

Right: Debbie Reynolds and Gene Kelly in *Singin' In The Rain*. Above right: a guitar. Far right: Bernard and a pal land a pike



**The film you can watch time and time again...** *Singin' In The Rain* from 1952 with Gene Kelly, Debbie Reynolds and Donald O'Connor. The song 'Make 'Em Laugh' is genius.

**The person who has influenced you most...** A theatre director called Douglas Emery, who 'discovered' me in a little play when I was 12 and told my parents I might have some talent. He was kind and caring and set me on my way.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** The actor Johnny Weissmuller. I loved him as Tarzan when I was a boy. I'd like to know how he got along with Cheetah, his chimpanzee sidekick!

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Listen to your mum. She knows best!

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** For 50 years I've been growing little trees and giving them to friends. One pal's garden has a Cribbins Copse, containing birch, oak, ash and walnut trees.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To keep working. I love



'For 50 years I've been growing little trees and giving them to friends – one pal's garden now contains a Cribbins Copse'

the variety of my job – movies, stage, TV, singing – and don't want to stop.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have gain...** My knees! I've had them both replaced. They work well but I can't kneel without feeling the metal.

**The poem that touches your soul...** Rudyard Kipling's *Tommy*. It's a bitter poem about the way some soldiers weren't respected when they came back from WWI. It angers and saddens me.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That actors are permanently jolly and don't have a proper job. Like anyone else I have my downs, and acting can be tough – I was doing a 70-hour week when I was 14.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Marrying my wife Gill on Saturday 27 August, 1955. She was an actress so she knows my trade well and has always been there for me and organised me. She's made me a better person. She's wonderful!

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd fix the Lottery when it's a mega jackpot. I'd keep half for us, then spread the rest to people who need it.

**The song that means most to you...** I'm choosing, very selfishly, one of my own: *The Hole In The Ground*. It got to No 9 in 1962 and Noël Coward even chose it for his *Desert Island Discs* in 1963. It brings back so many happy memories.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** Gill and I would have breakfast looking at the sea from the Mount Lavinia hotel, near Colombo in Sri Lanka. I'd have fresh pineapple with lime juice and some fine local tea. We'd then fly to Port Douglas in the north of Australia, where I'd catch a barramundi fish, which we'd have for lunch with chips at a café on the jetty. We'd pay a quick visit to the top of Mount Everest to enjoy the view without having to do the climb! Supper would be at a little Italian restaurant in Covent Garden. I'd have veal with prosciutto, then spaghetti with garlic sauce.

We'd see *Guys & Dolls* at the National Theatre – with me in it! I had the best time ever playing Nathan Detroit there in 1983. I'd watch a bit of TV at home in Surrey before crashing out.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** Completing my first parachute jump during my National Service when I was 18. It was exhilarating, but also a great relief to get to the ground.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** Watching my father die. He was 67 when he had a stroke. I was holding his hand when he disappeared.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** I'd love to be in a Western. I could be the old chap driving the wagon with the mules.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Do as you would be done by.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I'm a lapsed Catholic, so I'd probably have a church service – as I may be clutching at straws at the end! I'd like a friend to read Joyce Grenfell's poem *If I Should Go*, for the line, 'Parting is hell, but life goes on, so sing as well'. I'd want some classic guitar music from Big Bill Broonzy and Eric Clapton, and I'd like my ashes sprinkled on the Thames near the National Theatre – so they'd end up in the sea where I've enjoyed fishing.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As a good actor.

**The Plug...** Catch Bernard in *Old Jack's Boat* daily at 12.40pm on CBeebies. ■  
*As told to Rob McGibbon*



PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID LEVENE, REX, ALLSTAR

## PS...

*Nicole Kidman and Colin Firth star in thriller *Before I Go To Sleep* – in cinemas from Friday. Satire *King Charles III* is at London's Wyndham's Theatre from Tuesday. And the first of five UK shows from Tony Bennett is at the Royal Festival Hall on Thursday*



## NEXT WEEK

● As *Downton Abbey* returns, exclusive pictures and secrets from behind the scenes ● Plus, how to throw your very own *Downton* dinner party ● And Britain's best TV guide