



The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The Joseph Rodgers clasp knife that my grandfather gave me when I was seven. I grew up in central Africa and I watched him kill pigs with it. It was stolen from me on the school playground.

The unending quest that drives you on... Creating fiction and making it believable. To me, my characters are more real than most people I meet.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no time travel restrictions... Breakfast looking at Table Mountain from my Cape Town home, fishing for trout on the river Test at Kimbridge in Hampshire, lunch at Annabel's club in Mayfair, clay pigeon shooting, writing, then one of my famous barbecues with some good mates. Under the covers with my wife Niso-Jon before 11pm. Bliss!

The temptation you wish you could resist... Playing chess against my computer. I know it's a waste of time, but it's addictive. I say it keeps my mind sharp – but where the hell did I put my keys?

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Robert Graves' *I, Claudius*. I am fascinated by the Caesars.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd listen to the people who look after my properties around the world discussing me.

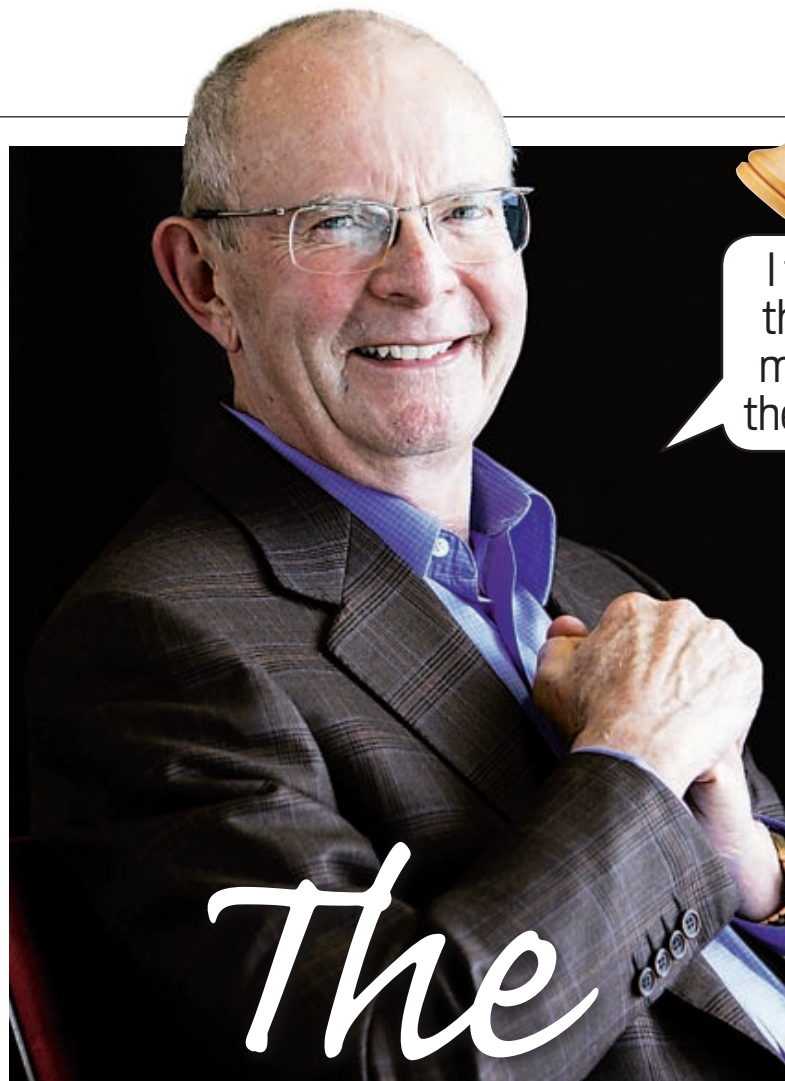
The way fame and fortune has changed you, for better and worse... It has given me self-confidence and I can hold up my head high in any company. Nothing bad about it.

The film you can watch time and time again... *Lawrence Of Arabia*. Peter O'Toole was splendid.

The person who has influenced you most... My father. He was strict, but fair, wise and brave. I saw him face down and shoot dead a charging lion when I was eight. He told the most wonderful stories.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Frederick Courtenay Selous, a great British explorer of Africa in the 19th century. He died a hero aged 70, shot by a sniper in the First World War in East Africa.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Scream, puke copiously, defecate at will and break things. It will get you the attention you need.



I think playing chess on the computer keeps my mind sharp – but where the hell did I put my keys?

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week, Wilbur Smith gets a grilling

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I am a closet bird-watcher. I can identify Southern African species, but it irks me I can barely tell a jay from a blackbird in the UK.

The prized possession you value above all others... My .375 calibre rifle built by Holland & Holland to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee. It's twice saved my life, against a lion then a buffalo.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... That my father and I

could have been true friends. We were getting there. On my 50th birthday he called me an idiot for the three millionth time. I said, 'Dad, you can't call me that any more. I've proved you wrong. An idiot doesn't write ten best-sellers.' He grinned, replied, 'I guess you have', then gave me a hug. Dad didn't hug much. It was one of the most memorable moments in our relationship.

The poem that touches your soul... Rudyard Kipling's *If*. My mother cro-

ched it and hung it above my bed when I was ten.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... There are people out there with an eye on my hard-earned cash who think that I am a pushover. I am not!

The event that altered the course of your life and character... The 1964 telefax from William Heinemann Publishers offering me an advance of £1,000 to publish my first novel *When The Lion Feeds*.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd knock off Paul Gauguin's *Hail Mary* from the Metropolitan Museum of Art then hang it in my bedroom and gloat.

The song that means most to you... Like every other man over 50 it has to be *My Way* by Frank Sinatra. It's the oldies' battle hymn.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The moment I clapped eyes on my little lady, Niso-Jon, the lights came on. Eleven years later, they are still burning brightly.

The saddest time that shook your world... The death of my father in 1987. He was 80 and too young. I was in my mid-50s and my world changed when he died. I wept at his graveside.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To sink a long putt on the last hole to take the British Open away from Lee Westwood.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Kipling's *If*: 'If you can meet with triumph and disaster, and treat those two imposters just the same.'

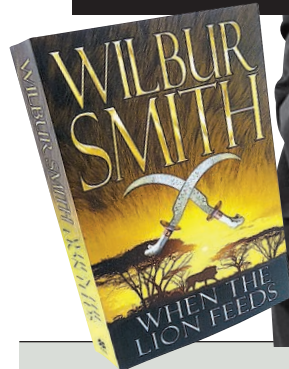
The order of service at your funeral... When I vacate this sack of old bones I won't care what you do with it. Bury or burn it but don't make much fuss.

The way you want to be remembered... As somebody who never did harm to anybody, until they threw the first punch. As somebody who gave pleasure to millions and had a wonderful time doing it.

The plug... Those In Peril by Wilbur Smith, Macmillan, £18.99. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

From top: Wilbur loves Table Mountain, bird-watching, golf, Rudyard Kipling's *If*, Robert Graves' *I, Claudius*, Lawrence of Arabia and Frank Sinatra's *My Way*. Top right, he is addicted to chess



PS...

Natalie Portman stars in medieval romp Your Highness.

Harold Pinter's Moonlight is revived at London's Donmar

Warehouse. And a 40th anniversary edition of Simon &

Garfunkel's Bridge Over Troubled Water is out on Monday



NEXT WEEK

- This is a Next Week copy on the style sheet
- This is a swathe of dummy copy like this
- The easy way to cook up an Easter feast
- Monty Don on the first tulips of spring
- PLUS Don't miss Britain's biggest and most detailed TV listings guide