

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's actress Rula Lenska's turn



'People think I'm tough. I'm good at the "Don't mess with me" face but in reality I'm a great softie'

The prized possession you value above all others... A tiny 2in by 2in book given to my mother, Bisia, by her sister Lula for her 23rd birthday when they were in Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany. Lula had made it and added a story about St Peter writing Mamma's name at the gates of Heaven. It's the most moving piece of memorabilia. She gave it to me 15 years ago and I was so touched I cried. Sadly, Lula died in September aged 90.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day.... I'd be a fly on the wall on a submarine in crisis. I'd love to see how the men react under pressure.

Below: Peter Ustinov in Quo Vadis. Above right: Buddha. Far right: Rula (left) in Rock Follies in 1977



The biggest regret you wish you could amend... That my mother was not with us when our family gathered at our ancestral seat in Poland. She'd died four months earlier in 1996. Mamma lived at that stately home until the Nazis invaded. We scattered her ashes beneath her favourite tree there.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Smoking. I gave up a year ago, but I still feel strong urges.

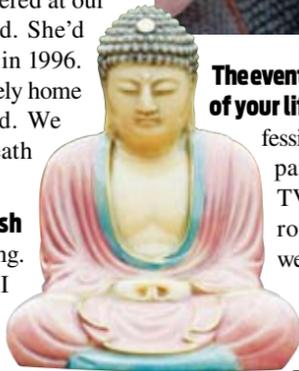
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Princess Of Siberia by Christine Sutherland, about a Russian woman trying to find her husband who's been sent to Siberia. It's so reminiscent of what my family went through during the war.

The film you can watch time and time again... Quo Vadis. It's a bit dated but I love Peter Ustinov as Nero.

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

The person who has influenced you most... My mother. She came from an aristocratic background then lost it all and had to restart in England. But she never carried any bitterness.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Cleopatra. I'd love to see just how beautiful she was.



The event that altered the course of your life and character...

Professionally, it was getting the part in Rock Follies, the TV drama about a female rock band in the 70s. I went from being a jobbing actress to getting recognised in the street. Personally, it was visiting Tibet in 1991. I became a quasi-Buddhist. I chant every day.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... All alternative medicine, from acupuncture to massage.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Do as you would be done by.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My hearing. I need hearing aids for both ears now.

The unending quest that drives you on... To have balance and harmony.

The poem that touches your soul... Chief Seattle's speech in 1854, when the native Americans surrendered land to white settlers. It's about how Man should live in harmony with nature.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd park on double yellow lines in London.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm tough. I give the impression of being in control and I'm good at the 'Don't mess with me' face. But I'm a great softie.

The song that means most to you... Send In The Clowns sung by Glynis Johns. The words imply that however perfect things are in a relationship, the person you're with is in another place, physically and mentally. It reminds me of my marriage to Dennis Waterman.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd begin with a safari on elephant-back in Chitwan park in Nepal. I'd then fly over Mount Everest to have a full English breakfast in Kathmandu. After that, I'd arrive in Monkey Mia on the west coast of Australia with my daughter Lara, 32, and my grandson, Ethan, two and a half. My mother would be back with us and we'd swim with dolphins, then have a fish barbecue. I'd have coffee in Piazza del Popolo in Rome, before seeing Verdi's Nabucco at the Sydney Opera House. I'd have dinner in first class on a flight back to London with a few Wyborowa or Zubrowka vodkas and end the day at home in London with a hot water bottle, a book and a cuddle with my cat.

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: DEBRA HURFORD BROWN/CAMERA PRESS; ALAMY; GETTY; REX; ALLSTAR

PS...

Hilary Swank and Tommy Lee Jones star in Western The Homesman from Friday. Jemma Redgrave is in Oscar Wilde's An Ideal Husband at Chichester Festival Theatre from Friday. And Katherine Jenkins' album Home Sweet Home is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Royal cake maker Fiona Cairns kicks Christmas off with her Stir Up Sunday recipes
- Monty Don on how to grow perfect parsnips
- PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings guide