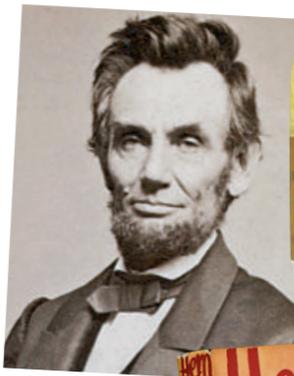
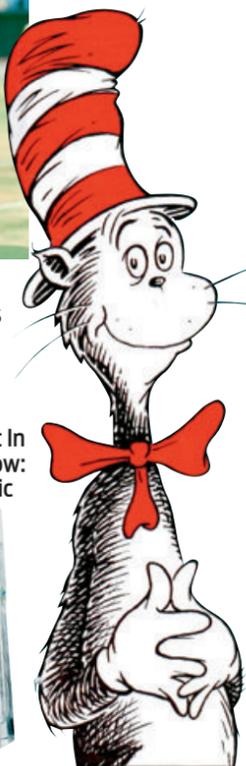
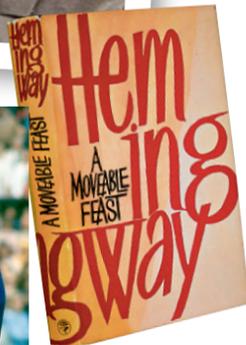




Above: Key West, Florida.
Right: Cristal champagne.
Below: Abraham Lincoln



Above right: Hemingway's A Moveable Feast. Above: Billie Jean King. Right: Dr Seuss's Cat In The Hat. Below: a gin and tonic



The prized possession you value above all others... A poem I wrote when I was eight about Abraham Lincoln. It's the only piece of memorabilia I have from my childhood, so it's precious.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... That I didn't study languages.

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

I'd wake up at my home in Miami with Staci [her wife, Staci Ann Gruber] and we'd watch the sunrise over the ocean from the balcony. I'd have two fried eggs with buttered white toast, crispy bacon and a glass of fresh orange juice. Then I'd fly us in a twin-engine Euro-copter over the sea to Key West. We'd be joined by a bunch of friends and scuba-dive. We'd have lunch back at Key West – I'd have steak with a baked potato. We'd spend the rest of the day in London. I'd check into a suite overlooking the Thames at The Savoy, then head to the V&A for an exhibition. We'd wander through the city looking in old bookshops before heading back to the hotel at sunset. I'd begin the evening with a cold gin and tonic in the American Bar. Dinner would be at The Savoy Grill, then we'd see a play in the West End. The day would end relaxing in the room with our British bulldog Tram in his own luxury Savoy basket!

The temptation you wish you could resist... Fine wine and champagne, like a great Montrachet or Cristal.

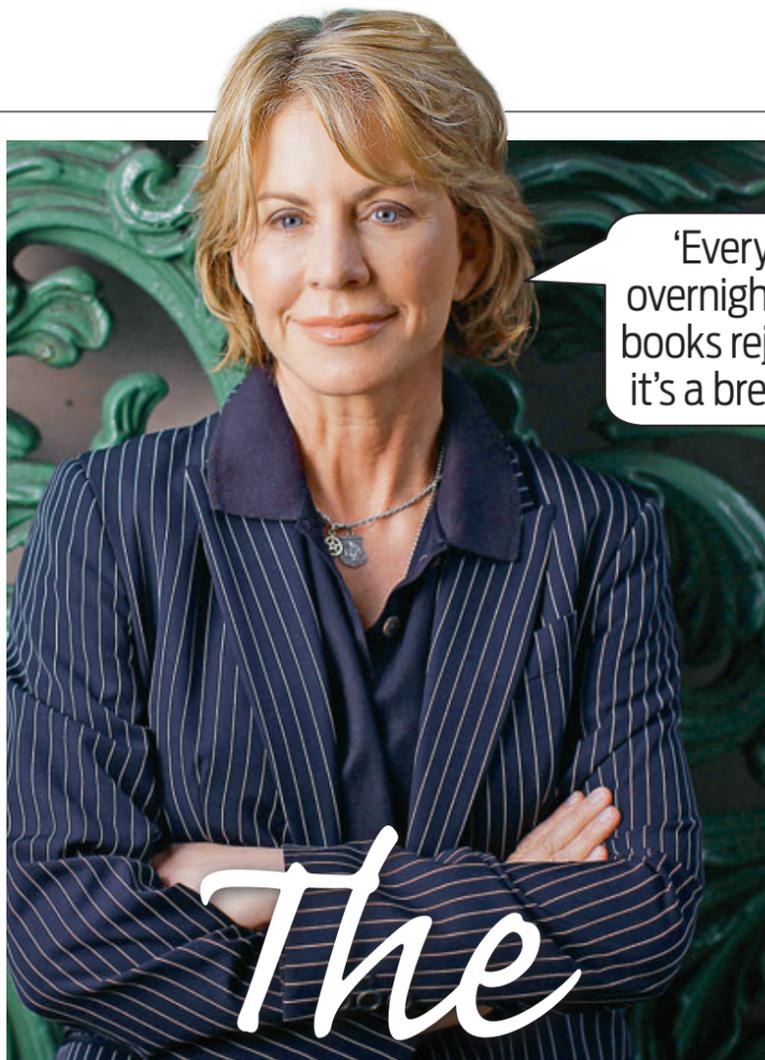
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... A Moveable Feast by Ernest Hemingway. He describes what it's like to be a writer so well.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd hang out in the locker rooms at Wimbledon to see how the great tennis players behave before a match.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Cruelty to animals in any form.

The film you can watch time and time again... A Fish Called Wanda. I never tire of laughing at it. It's a great romp and I love its absurdity.

The person who has influenced you most... Billie Jean King. She was a hero of mine when I was growing up and I'm lucky to have been her friend for 20 years. I started to talk publicly about my relationship with Staci because of her amazing example.



'Everybody thinks I was an overnight success, but I had four books rejected first. People think it's a breeze for me – but it isn't'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's novelist Patricia Cornwell's turn

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Agatha Christie. I'd be fascinated to talk about her writing process.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... You'll never be good at anything unless you're bad at it first.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... The Cat In The Hat author Dr Seuss. I love his whimsy and have a wall full of his drawings.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... Some hand-sewn books I made from the age of five containing my first short stories. They got thrown out when we moved house when I was 17 and I was heartbroken.

The unending quest that drives you on... To get better at what I do.

The poem that touches your soul... The Waste Land by T S Eliot. It has a naked truth about the world.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I was an overnight success. I had four books rejected before I got accepted. There seems to be a feeling it was a breeze for me and it all comes easily. It doesn't!

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Winning the John Creasy Memorial Award for Best First Crime Novel in 1990 for Post-mortem – my career took off instantly.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd murder evil dictators and terrorists.

The song that means most to you... Pachelbel's Canon. It touches my soul.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Meeting Staci in 2004. She was a neuroscientist at Harvard who was helping me with research. The moment she walked into the room I knew I had to get to know her.

The saddest time that shook your world... I vividly remember the Christmas Day when I was five when I knew my father was leaving. I was all set to open my presents when there was an altercation between Mum, who's 87 now, and Dad. Then I saw him with suitcases. I wrapped myself around his legs and screamed, "Daddy don't go!" but he shook me loose and left.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To have movies made of my books.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Never abuse your power.

The order of service at your funeral... I wouldn't want a formal church service, I'd want something relaxed. I'd like them to play Pachelbel's Canon and Funeral For A Friend by Elton John.

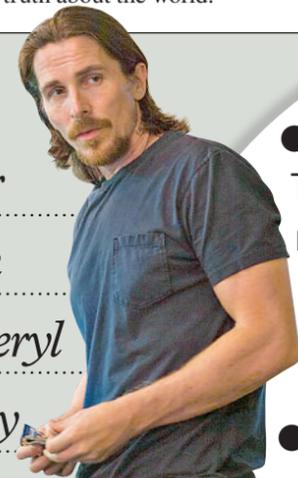
The way you want to be remembered... As a decent person, and the author who created the forensic thriller genre.

The Plug... Patricia's new novel Dust is out now. Twitter @Ipcornwell, www.patriciacornwell.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Is Out Of The Furnace Christian Bale's grittiest film yet? See for yourself when it opens on Wednesday. Tim Pigott-Smith stars in black comedy Stroke Of Luck at London's Park Theatre. And Sheryl Crow's first country music album, Feels Like Home, is out Monday.



NEXT WEEK

- The Hairy Bikers' tastiest Thai recipes
- As The Bridge reaches its thrilling finale, we go behind the scenes on the show
- Classic cheese dishes with a Jamie Oliver twist
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings