The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it’s broadcaster Joan Bakewell’s turn.

The prized possession you value above all others… My Victorian house in north London. I bought it in 1963 for £12,000 and it’s probably worth £4m now, but I have no intention of leaving. My children [Harriet, 52, and Matthew, 49] grew up here – it’s where I’ve nested.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend… Never learning to sing. I’ve belonged to many choirs over the years but have been told to keep quiet during certain songs because I’m out of tune!

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions… I’d start with poached egg, croissants, freshly squeezed orange juice and coffee at the Wolseley in London, where I’d probably bump into old friends. Then I’d swim in crystal-clear waters at a stunning island hotel in the Maldives, and have lots of fresh seafood for lunch, followed by a snooze on the beach. In the afternoon I’d visit Florence and look at Botticelli’s painting La Primavera, before escaping to the hills overlooking the city for a chocolate ice cream. Later I’d fly to Tokyo in Japan with my children and six grandchildren [aged 14-22] for a huge Japanese meal with lots of local beer and sake. Then I’d watch Eugene Onegin at London’s Royal Opera House, with a glass of Bollinger in the interval, before ending the day catching up with the BBC news.

The temptation you wish you could resist… Dark chocolate in all its forms.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance… Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte. It’s an inspirational story that every woman should read.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise… The planners and developers destroying London’s skyline, especially around St Paul’s Cathedral.

The film you can watch time and time again… Some Like It Hot.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day… I’d go to the savannahs of Africa and wander among the great beasts such as giraffes, lions and wildebeests.

The figure from history for whom you’d most like to buy a pie and a pint… Adam Smith [the 18th-century economist and philosopher]. He helped found capitalism – I’d like him to know what ruin it’s brought to people.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child… Do no harm.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity… I’m interested in the life of Johnny Cash – his music, drugs and demons. He was a fascinating man.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again… My grandmother Charlotte’s Victorian gold watch. I lost it while hiking on Dartmoor in the 50s and was distraught.

The unending quest that drives you… To lose half a stone!

The poem that touches your soul… Ilhaca by Constantine P Cavafy. It reminds me that daily life, not what may be at the end of it, is the reward.

The philosophy that underpins your life… Take each day as it comes and don’t waste it.

The order of service at your funeral… I’d like some poems read and a piece played from Rossini’s opera Stabat Mater, then for everyone to sing Jerusalem. I’d like to be buried in Cambridge and have a lovely picnic by the river, then scatter my ashes on the water.

The way you want to be remembered… As a terrific granny!

The Plug… My novel She’s Leaving Home is available now (Virago).

As told Rob McGibbon

Tony Curtis and Marilyn Monroe in Some Like It Hot

Below: A giraffe. Bottom right: Punting in Cambridge

Jessica Brown Findlay – Downton’s Lady Sybil – hit the big screen in A New York Winter’s Tale – in cinemas from Friday. And The Full Monty musical arrives at London’s Noel Coward Theatre on Thursday – the same day Beyoncé’s UK dates begin in Glasgow.

NEXTE WEEK

• Part two of our fascinating series on the history of WWII in extraordinary objects • Tenor Alfie Boe on his guest slot in Mr Selfridge • Try our tangy lemon chicken and lemon meringue pie recipes • PLUS Britain’s most detailed TV listings