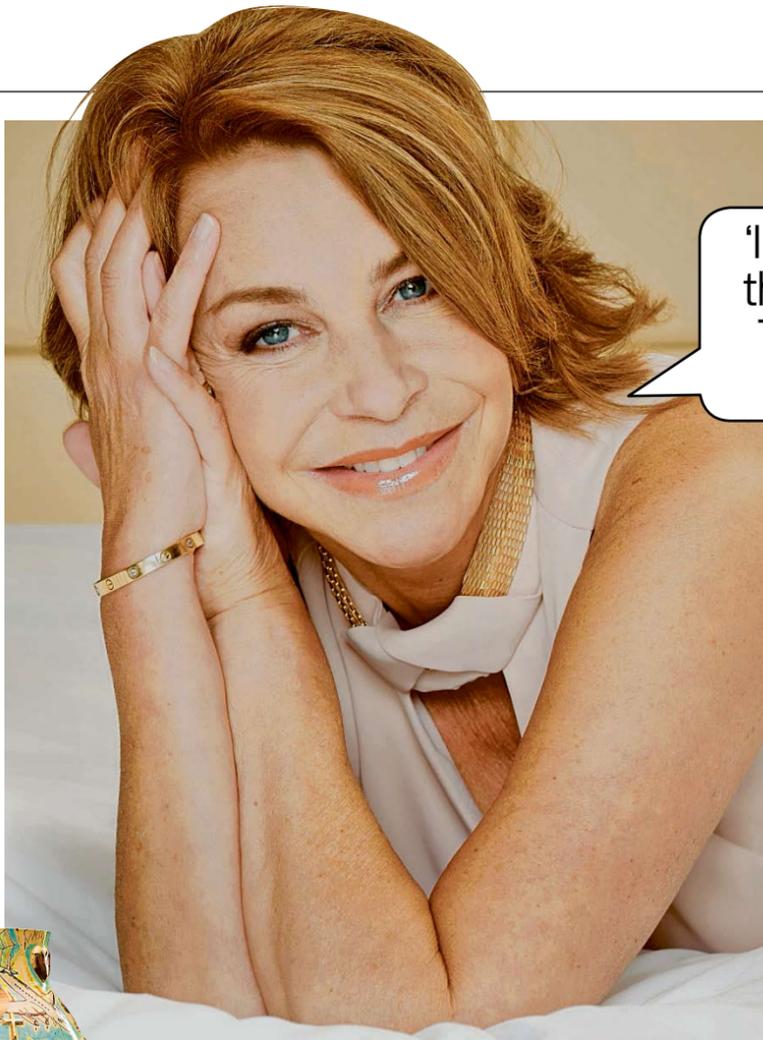


The DEFINITE ARTICLE

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



'I wish people wouldn't think of me as a victim. They're very kind, but my life isn't ruined'

The prized possession you value above all others... The CD of a song called Cinderella, which was written about me by Pete Townshend in 2005. I've known him since 1979 when I was in the film Quadrophenia and he wrote it to say he was thinking about me for the hell I was going through [in 2004, Leslie was nearly paralysed when she caught the superbug MSSA in hospital]. I was blown away.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not focusing on my education. I was so set on being an actress I left school without any qualifications at 16. Now my boys [Joe, 26, and Max, 23] tease me when they try to explain things.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Shopping. I can't resist popping in to browse.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Bridget Jones's Diary. I knew Helen Fielding when I was 19 and the book was so reminiscent of my loneliness during my 20s.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd listen to Web

Right: Anne Boleyn. Above right: Dan Baldwin's vase at The Groucho Club. Far right: log cabins in Zermatt



inventor Tim Berners-Lee's private chats to hear what he feels about the internet being used for things such as terrorism.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal a vase by the artist Dan Baldwin which is on display at Soho's Groucho Club.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Traffic jams on motorways. It's a waste of life!

The film you can watch time and time again... Anne Of The Thousand Days from 1969, with Richard Burton as Henry VIII and Genevieve Bujold as a very fiery Anne Boleyn.

The person who has influenced you most... Goldie Hawn. Everyone writes her off as a dumb, ditzy blonde, but she has a great career and a lovely family.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Anne Boleyn. I'd want all the gossip about Henry.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Respect your body and watch what you put in it.



The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Politics. I watch political programmes but I shout at the telly a lot, so maybe I should get out more!

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The ability to dance. I trained as a dancer and I miss the sense of freedom. I'd love to have had a go at Strictly. I dance around our home with Lee [her husband, ex-footballer Lee Chapman], but he has to hang onto me or I'll fall.

The unending quest that drives you on... To stay fit. I have to exercise for three hours a day. I'm still improving and I can walk without a stick now.

The poem that touches your soul... I'm not really into poetry, but the song The Impossible Dream makes me cry.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm a victim. People are kind and sympathetic, but my life isn't ruined. I have an amazing husband and two wonderful boys.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... What happened to me in 2004 was devastating.

The song that means most to you... Don't Get Me Wrong by The Pretenders. It was a hit in 1986 when I met Lee. I used to put it on the stereo in my Mercedes at full blast and sing it to him.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd wake up with Lee in a log cabin to the sound of birdsong in Zermatt, Switzerland and have a cup of Yorkshire Gold tea. I'd be instantly dressed with my hair done and my favourite fragrance, Jo Malone's Tuberoso Angelica, applied! I'd go to the gym – my legs will stop working if I don't exercise. Then the Queen would text and ask me to pop over to the Palace for coffee with Kate and the grandchildren. During coffee, the director Sam Mendes would call and insist I play the baddie in the next Bond film. It's a dream of mine to say, 'Not so fast, Mr Bond!' I'd meet Lee and our boys for lunch at our two favourite pubs near our home in South West London – roast venison at The Harwood Arms, then Eton mess at The Sands End. I'd then curl up in a pine forest in Scotland and doze off to

the sound of a cuckoo. In the evening Gaz Coombes, who was in Supergrass, would play for me and my friends in Ibiza, then we'd eat at La Paloma restaurant there. And Lee would make everyone laugh with his usually terrible jokes. Definitely a fantasy day!

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Apart from having my kids, it's the moment I managed to balance on my own for the first time after the infection. It only lasted three seconds, but it showed that my body was getting better.

The saddest time that shook your world... When the surgeon doing my emergency operation said to Lee and me, 'You two had better say goodbye'. Lee's face was full of love, but gripped by fear. There was a two-hour window before the infection would hit my brain.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be active enough to play with my future grandchildren.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Make sure you can face yourself in the mirror and accept what you do.

The order of service at your funeral... I'd like it to be on a beach and for Lou Reed's Perfect Day to be played. I want people to dress for a party.

The way you want to be remembered... As a loving wife, a good mother and a half-decent actress.

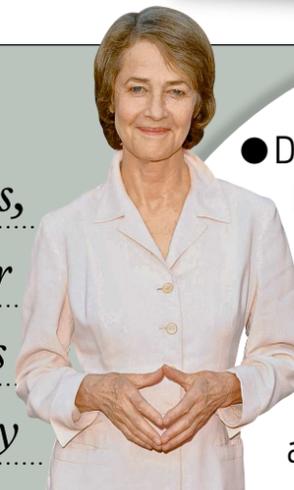
The Plug... Leslie is part of VisABLE, an agency that casts actors with disabilities in everyday roles. visiblepeople.com. ■
As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: SCOPE, GETTY, ALAMY, REX FEATURES

PS...

Charlotte Rampling stars in 45 Years, the story of a marriage in crisis, in cinemas Friday. Lisa Stansfield's new album Live In Manchester is out on the same day. And Our Country's Good, about the convicts taken to Australia in 1788, is at the National Theatre from Wednesday



NEXT WEEK

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- Meet the finalists of the Daily Mail Nation Garden Competition
- PLUS Britain's biggest and best TV listings guide