



MY HAVEN – EARL SPENCER

The peer, historian and brother to Princess Diana, 50, in his study at Althorp in Northamptonshire

1 PICTURE PERFECT

I grew up here at Althorp – my family’s historic home for the past 500 years – which I now look after and enjoy with Karen, my Canadian wife, and our children. There are about 650 paintings on the walls here and about 25 of them were acquired by me such as this Edward Burra watercolour, which I bought with my first pay cheque in 1987. It’s a design for an opera set and it’s proved to be a wise investment because works by Burra have since become hugely sought after.

2 FATHER AT WAR

My father ‘Johnnie’ took part in the final year of the Second World War in Europe as a 20-year-old lieutenant in the Royal Scots Greys in command of four tanks. He landed in Normandy the day after D-Day and was mentioned in dispatches after one action in which his unit liberated a small French town. His regiment was later sent deep into Germany and he acquired a number of ‘souvenirs’ from the troops he captured, including this SS officer’s dagger, a memento to me of his wartime exploits.

3 CHILDHOOD HERO

As a boy I collected toy soldiers, and pride of place went to this lead figure of Prince Rupert of the Rhine which cost £6, a fortune at the time! Then I saw the film Cromwell starring a young Tim Dalton as the dashing prince – a Cavalier general – and that sowed a deep interest in the English Civil War. Several years ago I wrote a biography of Rupert and, about the same time, I found my old model soldier in the attic. I was never very good at painting my soldiers though, so he’s still the original metallic grey.

4 CHART-TOPPER

One summer while I was at university I worked in the A&R department ‘talent spotting’ for a record company called Carrere. One of the acts we came across was Phyllis Nelson whose song Move Closer topped the charts in 1985, and they gave me this gold disc as a thank you for my small part in her success. Phyllis then performed on top of Carrere’s LA offices and beamed it by satellite to London for my 21st birthday party. She was a lovely lady, but sadly she died of cancer aged 47 in 1998.

5 MY INSPIRATION

I was entered for a history prize at Eton judged by the historian Barry Coward who helped ignite my passion for the subject, in particular the Stuart period. Up until then I’d never thought of myself as particularly academic – I’d simply been relatively efficient at passing exams. But Barry told me I had an aptitude for history that deserved to be nurtured. He wrote this book, one of our history textbooks, and his praise gave me great confidence and inspired me to become a historian.

6 DINNER GUEST

I treasure this statue of a cavalry officer on a horse that was given to my parents on their marriage by my father’s regiment. It was on our dining room table when I was a child and I must have looked at it countless times over the years. It’s a nice memento to have around because it’s part of the family history and a reminder of my parents, who have both passed away. My father would have liked me to have joined the services but I became a journalist for NBC in America instead.

As told to York Membery. Killers Of The King: The Men Who Dared To Execute Charles I by Charles Spencer is published by Bloomsbury at £20. Order for £17 until 20 December at mailbookshop.co.uk or call 0808 272 0808.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOEL ANDERSON, REX, GETTY

LOOK WHO'S 25

It's Taylor Swift's birthday this week, but how does she look compared with her peers?



SPOOKY The last Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost was sold in London 90 years ago this week – it’s now the world’s most valuable car