

*'I'm a fool for expensive face creams'*



**FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

**FAY WELDON**

**...is an author.** She started her working life in advertising and went on to become an internationally renowned novelist and playwright. Her novel *The Life And Loves Of A She Devil* was adapted recently on Radio 4. She was awarded a CBE in 2001. She lives in the West Country and is Professor of Creative Writing at Bath Spa University.

**What are you working on at the moment?** A novel called *After The War*, which is a sequel to the one just out called *Before The War*.

**When were you at your happiest?** Happiness seems to me to be an act of will, and so there's no time like the present.

**What is your greatest fear?** Getting thin.

**What is your earliest memory?** It's of my mother doing cartwheels on the lawn in Christchurch, New Zealand, when I was nearly three. I remember the bright summer day and the astonishing sight of her legs hurtling through the air. It was so strange, and rather wonderful.

**What do you most dislike about yourself?** I don't think I dislike anything about myself - if I did I would feel the need to do something to make it better or bring it to heel.

**Who has been your greatest influence?** My mother Margaret who was a writer. She let me read at meals, and was always telling me that the only way a woman could respectably earn a living was to write books.

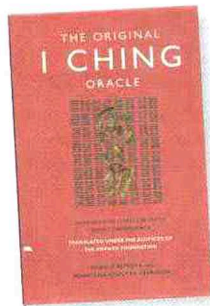
**What is your most treasured possession?** A pink and mauve Missoni coat I've had for 35 years, which still keeps me warm and looks lovely, if a little bit frayed around the edges.

**What trait do you most deplore in others?** Self-righteousness - but what one most deplores in others is probably what one is most guilty of oneself, so I do try to be kind.

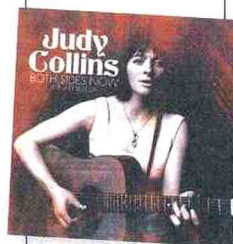
**What do you most dislike about your appearance?** Not being 18.

**What is your favourite book?** *The I Ching*, an ancient Chinese book of oracles. It appeals to me as a novelist because it's all about how good fortune turns into bad and back again, as happens in real life.

**What is your favourite film?** *The Wizard Of Oz*.



**Fay's favourites:** *I Ching*, a book of oracles, *The Wizard Of Oz*, Judy Collins singing *Both Sides Now*, and oysters - for the eyes



**And your favourite record?** Judy Collins's version of *Both Sides Now*. 'Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels...' - it's folksy and tender and very 1960s.

**What is your favourite meal?** Oysters, and being full of zinc they're very good for one's eyes.

**Who would you most like to come to dinner?** Hans Christian Andersen, much more than a mere fairy-tale writer, but also such a difficult and demanding guest that Mrs Charles Dickens refused to have him back to stay. I'd just like to see how difficult he was. Bernice Rubens, a novelist friend of mine who sadly died a dozen years ago, would be a good foil for him, and to make up the table I'd have Larry David and Dorothy Parker. It should be a most lively meal.

**What is the nastiest thing anyone has said to you?** I think the most annoying thing is when men say 'Is it your time of the month?' It's nasty because it seeks to deprive you of your will or any control over your moods.

**Do you believe in aliens?** Yes sometimes, when I'm on the phone to a call centre. But I guess they're really human underneath and are only pretending.

**What is your secret vice?** Expensive face creams. I'm just a fool for them.

**Do you write thank-you notes?** No, I leave that to my husband.

**Which phrase do you most overuse?** 'But why don't you...?'

**What single thing would improve the quality of your life?** Another grandchild... and actually there's another one on the way, and it's due in May.

**Tell us something we don't know about you.** I failed an English literature exam when I was 15, what would now be called a GCSE.

**What would you like your epitaph to read?** 'If in doubt - do!'

◆ *Before The War*, by Fay Weldon, is published by Head of Zeus, £18.99, hardback.