

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / The Happy Pod: Spreading joy: Finland's most positive person

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On the way in the happy pod, our computer games help to improve a national football side and let a couple to fall in love. And we meet the happiest person in the happiest country in the world. This is Andrew Peach in London. Hi, this is Matt in Boston. It's time to make some noise. This is the happy pod. Hello, I'm Deepa Vishwanath from Bengaluru, India and you're listening to the happy pod. This is Ella from Helsinki and you are listening to the happy pod. Also this week, what sort of animal is Frank? Oh, he was huge. He was lovely and he was huge. His feet were like elephant feet. And I was like, where did you come from, buddy?

The medical benefits of Tai Chi. Groups of people in parks or in little squares, all gathering together and doing this exercise to traditional Chinese music. And what it is, it's a standing exercise. So yeah, it's stand, twist, stretch. Helping more people make music. You go into a cave that's 5,000 years old and there's not much left. But what you do find left over is a painting on the wall of how to find food and a flute on the floor underneath the painting and a book inspired by the birds that flew into Daniella's house. It's always been a childhood dream of mine to write a children's book. And I just had this inspiration of writing a book based on a young girl who befriends a white pigeon and she finds this unlikely friendship with those stories on the way in the happy pot. If you're a regular listener, you'll know that Finland is the happiest country in the world. Every year there's a vote to find the Nordic nation's most positive Finn. And this year's winner is the TV presenter Ella Cannonon. She's been talking to Anna Murphy. I enjoy very much other people's company. I think we are here for each other. I also love very simple things. I love good conversations. I love good food. And I am just extremely happy to be alive. I think every day is a possibility for an adventure. And of course I have negative thoughts as well and I have bad days and I have worries and so on. That's human. But I think that it's not that I'm always happy and glad and I'm always smiling. Positivity is not about faking a smile. If we are who we are and if we let it show, I think people really recognise the authentic happiness and positivity.

And did you enter the competition? What's the process behind being deemed the happiest person? The award has been given since 1993. There's a preliminary jury who select and choose the people who nominated and then Finnish people can vote. So then eventually people gave me votes and I was given the award. And what was that moment like?

I was very surprised and I felt very grateful and I also was quite moved because I was thinking,

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this is the wish of the Finnish people and if they voted me as the happiest person, then I have done something right. We've talked on the happy pod previously about Finland being the happiest country. Why do you think that is?

Finland has good social security system, good healthcare system. We enjoy being in the nature. We have a lot of lakes and forests. Simple things that make us very, very happy.

So like us, your talk show is trying to promote happy stories.

So you're clearly in the same mindset as our team here at the happy pod.

Why do you think it's important to talk about positive stories and share happy news?

There is more negativity and negative stories in the world at the moment.

Every day we hear tragic stories about wars and human rights not being respected and really one could get anxious and certainly many people are anxious about the world situation.

And I always think that it's important to think that we are here for each other and nobody is alone and sharing positive thoughts in these times. If we can in somehow bring some light

and some moments of happiness in people's life with our show or with greeting somebody with a smile or with helping each other in a way, I think it just makes everyday life easier.

And only with good energy we go forward that I think your podcast is extremely important because it gives us the chance to just step out of the horrible world for some moments.

And I always think that there are beautiful things in the world.

So just to remind ourselves of those is also very important.

Congratulations to Ella in Helsinki, honorary member of the happy pod team.

A new study from the Chinese city of Shanghai suggests Tai Chi can slow down the symptoms of Parkinson's. This research claims those who practice Tai Chi twice a week had fewer complications and a better overall standard of life. It's one of a number of studies that's promoted the use of exercise for Parkinson's patients. I spoke to our China media analyst Kerry Allen about the study and just how common Tai Chi is in China.

Oh it's so common. I actually used to live in Shanghai myself and I used to see early in the morning we're talking six or seven a.m. groups of people in parks or in little squares all gathering together and doing this exercise to to my ears to traditional Chinese music.

And what it is it's a standing exercise. It involves a lot of twisting in very very slow

and lots of stretching. So yeah it's stand twist stretch. It's a really almost like standing yoga exercise. It's really peaceful to watch and yeah it brings all people together. It brings older

people together so that they can all stay fit. Anyone can do it. And I've always imagined that the principal benefits of Tai Chi were mental in terms of giving you a you know a little bit of Zen time especially at the start of the day. But this study we're talking about. Don in Shanghai suggests actually there are quite a lot of physical benefits to it as well. Yes absolutely. So this

this study looked at groups of Parkinson's patients over a period of five years. We're talking

control groups with more than a hundred people in and one group carried out Tai Chi. The other didn't. And what it did was it found that the disease progressed much more slowly in Tai Chi

groups in terms of their symptoms their movement their balance. It found the groups had less falls they had less back pain and dizziness. And also it found that their sleep and quality of life just continuously improved. So it's been credited with a lot of benefits to those who took parts health.

Although one thing I should mention is that this was an observational study. So it was carried out just watching groups of people. And so there have been questions about

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is Tai Chi going to be the answer to Parkinson's but other professors have said other exercises as well like ballet have had similar effects. And she had to be taught it because I can see on the health pages of our website BBC.com slash news we put some images of simple Tai Chi positions. Is it as simple as trying to replicate them? Well I think there are so many people in China who do know something about it. I mean to me it all looks quite straightforward. It looks simply a lot of bending and stretching but obviously nowadays we're living in an era where you can watch videos on YouTube. So in effect anybody can do it if they've got access to the internet. Next to the spinach fields of British Columbia in Canada and a large tortoise who needs a new home. Frank the tank is a Salkata tortoise about the size of a wheelbarrow. Hundreds of people have offered to take Frank on but not many can provide the conditions he needs as Harry Bly has been finding out. Now I guess I can add to my resume a tortoise wrangler. This is Shelly Smith. She's a dog trainer living on a farm just outside the city of Richmond in British Columbia. Oh he was huge. He was lovely and he was huge. His feet were like elephant feet. They were actually incredibly soft as well which was weird. Earlier in October a few days before Thanksgiving in Canada Shelly was taking her dogs on a walk and stumbled across what she thought was

a large rock in one of the spinach fields. I thought well that's odd it's never been there before and I didn't pay much attention to it and later on I was outside and I just happened to look up and the rock was moving. Some nearby workers had seen this large rock moving closer to the road they were repairing. They all went to investigate. It was a tortoise and I was like where did you come from buddy? I mean he was massive and the funny thing is as the workman and I were talking he was looking up at us like following along within the conversation. Like as I was talking he was looking at me then the other gentleman was talking he looked over to him. It was hilarious. It was like he was really trying to pay attention to what was going on. Shelly called the local animal shelter thinking this was a wild turtle. The operator asked Shelly how large an animal this was and it was just before Thanksgiving so I said oh think that you are roasting a turkey for 24 people and you've got to put that turkey on a giant platter and he said sweetheart you don't have a turtle you got a tortoise. And that's where Dr Adrian Walton became involved. He's a local veterinarian with decades of experience with tortoises. They tried everything to find an owner so eventually they shipped him out to me and so I was doing just doing a physical exam. Frank is an African Sulkata tortoise native to the Sahara. They can grow to be as heavy as 90 kilograms and can live up to around 150 years. Already hundreds of people had signed up to adopt

Frank but as Adrian explains many aren't equipped for such an undertaking. He needs a large area to

graze during the warmer months of the year and then he needs a decent size enclosure like a garage where he can spend the winters. I always have to remind people these guys dig. You will need to have secure facilities for Frank the Tank. He lives up to his name. It's not known if Frank was abandoned or escaped from his enclosure though no one has claimed him despite local media attention.

Adrian says during his career tortoises like Frank have found roaming every few years and need rehoming and British Columbia is no place for a tortoise like Frank. Put it this way we just hit temperatures this week that would have killed him so it was a very close call.

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Frank is now safe being fostered by an experienced tortoise owner until he finds his forever home. Let's talk about the challenge of creating music now because getting beyond your bedroom can be hard with practice rooms studio time and equipment all so expensive but Matt MacArthur of the record company in the US city of Boston is trying to change that. Anybody that wants to whether you're a 12 year old experimenting with music making for the first time or whether your mid career and you know doing music for a living the space is here for you and as a result we get this really beautiful melting pot of so many people this intergenerational group all making music for different reasons bumping into each other at the coffee pot and building connections and relationships with one another. You know of course making music is a vulnerable sort of process and so to make a space where people feel comfortable doing that is not an easy thing. Forgive me if I'm sounding vulgar by bringing in money. The typical price of studio time in Boston is something like \$100 an hour. You're only charging around \$10 an hour. How are you keeping afloat? So it ranges from \$10 an hour to \$33 an hour and the answer to how we stay afloat we serve an incredible number of artists and music makers on a monthly basis so in the month of August we hosted almost 1,100 reservations for almost 4,000 unique humans and so as a result even those low rates do make quite a dent in our operating expenses. So do they appreciate you Matt? What sort of reaction do you get from your clients? Well they don't appreciate me. I'm in an office doing spreadsheets. It's pretty invisible. They definitely appreciate the quality of the facility compared to the level of affordability which is really really disproportionate. It is a commercial quality facility. We see all kinds of effusive customer feedback about how if not for this space someone would have been maybe only able to get in the studio one day this year but instead they've been able to be in the studio every month or every week and certainly those individuals as well that might not have been able to afford it at all are now having their first in studio experiences. What does music mean for you? Music is a really deep long-standing human pursuit. It is in our bones quite literally. You know you go into a cave that's 5,000 years old and there's not much left but what you do find left over is a painting on the wall of how to find food and a flute on the floor underneath the painting. What we like to think is that by making an environment like this people can get back to making music for the reasons that we used to make music and so I think that power to bring people together that magical moment where you realize you've created something from nothing maybe you just played a drumbeat that you haven't heard before or maybe you wrote a lyric that you don't think you've ever expressed or that teaches you something about yourself. This is powerful stuff and we need to keep making space for everyone to participate in that magic. Matt McArthur in Boston talking to Jackie.

Still to come the Swedish couple who fell in love chasing virtual creatures.

I started playing again because Hilma was playing and I was a bit interested in her so then I wanted to download the game again and how bees are fighting back.

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Maybe you're among the millions of people who play the computer game football manager.

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If you're not this is a game where you simulate being the head coach of any football team of your choosing. What if you could use the skills you build up to help a real national team? Well that's what Jack Coles has done. He's the head of data analysis at Coventry City Football Club in the UK and has been helping the small West African nation of Guinea-Bissau by using the game's database of player nationalities. It just got me thinking there must be some low-ranked FIFA nation that could take advantage of dual heritage players from a high-ranked country which is essentially not using a lot of the players that they had, right? So there was always going to be a secondary group of players you could select from. So I did some analysis and fell upon Guinea-Bissau

essentially because the African continent seemed to be the easiest to qualify to the World Cup through. And so Guinea-Bissau was the best country to take advantage of these dual heritage. And then I just thought, well, rather than playing football manager, so I just get in touch with the Guinea-Bissau national team and see if I can make a go of it. This is excellent. So in other words, the research you're doing to play a video game might actually help the national football side of Guinea-Bissau broaden the field of players they can choose from. Broadly speaking, yes. I should address the fact that obviously Guinea-Bissau have their own scouts and staff that to some extent aware of a lot of these players. It is just a case of convincing. But yeah, I managed to uncover a few players that they weren't aware of. And football manager was one of many

databases and sort of information sources that I had. But yeah, it's been great fun to be honest. It's probably one of the more interesting professional elements of what I do. So yeah.

To imagine the phone call though, I'm trying to imagine the first conversation where you ring up and say I've been playing football manager. I can help improve the quality of your national side. The guy I speak to Eric is the technical director. He's French primarily, but I think he just couldn't work out who I was, what I was doing, why I was ringing. And I said, you know, this is going to sound strange, but have you ever considered these guys? And I think as soon as they got around the fact that it was weird, they were quite happy to work with me. So quite appreciative. And the team has got better as a result of some of the recent signings. And is it possible to sort of say what they might be able to achieve now that perhaps they wouldn't have before?

My pitch to the FA was they had a kind of top 30 FIFA ranked nation, laying dormant basically. So yeah, I hope it's up and up really. And they're participating in the African Cup of Nations in January so we can see how they progress.

Staying with gaming cast your mind back to 2016 or thereabouts in a game that got millions of people

out of their homes catching virtual creatures. While Pokemon Go's viral moment may have passed, hundreds of thousands of people still play it around the world each day. And this is a story of how it led to modern day romance. Andrew Rogers has this report.

I'm Albin and I'm a huge Pokemon Go fan. I'm Hilma. I'm a big Pokemon Go player currently studying fashion. And we met through Pokemon Go. The game uses augmented reality. So you complete missions and catch collectible virtual creatures by heading out into the real world. Information is overlaid on a version of Google Maps. So right now in this park, those landmarks from London that you might have seen on the back of a postcard become those poker stops. I think we both started out in 2016 when it just launched. And then last year

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I started playing again because Hilma was playing and I was a bit interested in her. So then I went to download the game again. Yeah, we knew each other a bit. Like we are in the same class, but we didn't really talk to each other that much. And then Pokemon is what really like made us talk more and get closer. Our first date was a Pokemon Go date. And it must have been a pretty good first date, surely? Yeah, it was super good. Lots of Chinese. And the date was

okay too. Yes, yes. How many dates have been Pokemon Go based since then? Oh, lots. Endless. Endless.

I want to ask you about the badges that you've got. Okay, I got, so I got one really fancy pin badge here says Pokemon Go Fest 2023 from here in London. The reason I came here to London basically and then I got one team instinct badge. And that's your team? That's my team. The only team.

Are you on the same team? Yeah, I had to change team when we started. Like after the first date, then I had to like, oh no, she's in the yellow team, in team instinct. And I was in the blue team. So then I had to pay money to... You have to pay to change as well. You have to pay to change. Yeah, I think it was a nice like... Romantic gesture. Is that what sealed the deal really? Yeah, really. A lot of people might not necessarily think people who work in fashion would be big gamers. What's it like kind of breaking some of those stereotypes a bit? I think a lot of people look down on it in fashion, like that you're a gamer and I guess like nerdy stuff and fashion stuff is very like opposite to each other. But that's what also makes it good to mix them together. That's what makes it fashion though. That's what makes it fashion. Like that's what makes it cool because it's so uncool. Like gaming is the most fashion thing you can do. And obviously I don't want to put pressure on your relationship. But if there was a wedding, how would Pokemon Go get into it? Probably the cake, I think. A Pikachu in a wedding dress. I think it would be more subtle hints to it. Not like the whole theme being Pokemon. But if people were playing Pokemon Go during the ceremony, you wouldn't like it. Oh no, not at all. It's welcomed. Now when bees and other pollinators are in the news, it's often because they're under threat. Maybe they're fighting back though. The Asian Hornets is increasingly being found in European countries. Its arrival is considered a big problem. They've been observed attacking and tearing apart honeybees. But a new study conducted in Spain has observed another type of bee, the bumblebee, deploying its own fighting tactics. Here's Dr. Thomas O'Shea Weller from the University of Exeter in the UK. Initially, or even quite early on, in the areas of higher levels of hornets, we did notice that the hornets were paying attention and hovering around the front of the bee colonies and quite often attacking bees, so trying to predate upon bumblebees. But where things became kind of turned on their heads, so to speak, and what we didn't really necessarily expect is what happened when the hornets actually tried to grab and catch the bees is that the bees simply stopped flying and dropped straight to the ground, bit like a brick. Now, this invariably would then pull down the hornet that's trying to grapple the bee with it to a point that it sort of slam dunked against the floor, and that usually then allowed the bee to escape. But even if the hornet was able to hold on during this whole process, when they landed on the ground, the bees then turned onto their back and put their sting sort of upwards, stinging towards the hornet while pushing the hornet away with their legs, and they'd sort of tussle like this for a few moments until

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eventually the hornet sort of couldn't be bothered anymore, gave up and started trying to catch another insect. And when you were carrying out this study and you started to observe this behavior, did you think, yeah, go little bee, this is great, were you surprised? What was your response when you saw what was going on? Well, personally, I thought it was hilarious because the hornets will just keep attempting, you know, they won't give up, they'll keep trying to grab these bees and the bees will keep escaping and kind of leaving the hornets sort of looking around and seeming a little bit upset and dejected. So it was quite a weird thing to watch, but yeah, incredibly entertaining. And I was completely surprised and pretty happy really that the bumblebees weren't getting decimated by the hornets. We all thought this was very exciting because we hear a lot about all the different threats facing pollinators and bees in particular. Do bees seem to be able to respond to new threats? Are we seeing any changes in behavior? I think, yeah, so it's a very interesting question and there definitely is scope for adaptability. But I also think it's quite interesting to note that with the bumblebee, it might really just be a sort of evolutionary mismatch in that there happens to be an existing behavior that works well in the environment the bumblebees have evolved in. And it also happens to work quite well for this new species that's coming in over the horizon. Now, you know, the birds and the bees go together. So if a pigeon flew into your house, what would you do? I'm not sure many of us would befriend the pigeon and then write a children's book about it. But that's what Daniella did and she got in touch with us to share the story of Piper. Myself and my partner recently moved to house and I decided to unpack some of my dad's things. My dad passed away October 2020. I put his photo and my grand's photo on the window sill, went downstairs for 10 minutes.

I came back up and this beautiful white pigeon was just standing inside my house on the window sill. Now, a lot of people's reaction would be there's a pigeon in my house. I'd quite like the pigeon to leave, partly because he'd be surprised. Also, there are superstitions about birds flying into houses, which are very potent in some countries. But what was your reaction?

So we weren't initially scared, but he's so determined every single day he would find a way into my office and eventually I think I just got used to him. I just relented and now I'm like, yeah, come in. Tell me how you've taken your partnership with Piper and used that in your work? He's become quite popular on social media. I posted about him and people were telling me what white pigeons signify. So there's a lot there to do with new starts, messages from loved ones, dreams coming true. And there was one particular piece that I read, which is about igniting your own dreams and going back to your own passions. And it's always been a childhood dream of mine to write a children's book from a very young age. And for some reason, I just I hadn't done it. And he'd be watching me work every day through the window for hours. And I just had this inspiration of writing a book based on a young girl who befriends a white pigeon. She's lost her dad similar to myself. And she finds this unlikely friendship with a pigeon. And the message of the book really is that if we have happy, beautiful memories that we can treasure and cherish, then is anything ever really gone forever? And that all came from Piper.

And what happens next with Piper? What's the plan for you and him next?

Well, we have a book launch and the book is officially released on the 17th of November.

And then we're planning on going on a book tour around the UK and maybe internationally. But Piper will be coming with. And that's all from us for now. Thanks to Deepa, Ella, Matt, Jack,

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Hilma, Albin, Thomas, Daniela, a pigeon called Piper and a tortoise called Frank for taking part. Remember, if you'd like to be part of next week's podcast, we'd love to hear a story from your part of the world, which will make us smile. Drop us an email or a voice note, globalpodcastatbbc.co.uk,

globalpodcastatbbc.co.uk. This edition was mixed by Pat Sissons, the producers were Anna Murphy and Jacob Evans. The editor is Karen Martin. I'm Andrew Peach. Thanks for listening.

Happy Pod. Back next week.

Oh, wow. Oh, my God. I'm so excited. Thank you.

That's the sound of Casey getting a random act of helpfulness. We just told him the helpful SoCal Honda dealers will be replacing his old manual wheelchair with a brand new power wheelchair. And we paid him for sharing that story on the radio. And we can help you too with a great deal on a reliable award-winning Honda, like the 2023 Accord. To find the helpful SoCal Honda dealer near you and to submit a random act of helpfulness for someone you know, visit SoCalHondaDealers.com.