

# The life and impact of Professor Felicia Huppert. A eulogy, reflections, and a celebration of a life well lived

*'Pause for a moment, experiencing fully with all your senses.  
Allow yourself to face difficult thoughts and feelings while savouring joyous ones.  
Invite kindness towards yourself and others' - Felicia Huppert*

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## 1. Introduction

On Tuesday 6th August 2024, Professor Felicia Adina Huppert died in Sydney, Australia, peacefully and on her own terms following metastatic breast cancer. This article provides a summary of a series of interviews conducted prior to her death. The focus is a celebration of her life and contribution to Positive Psychology and Wellbeing Science as seen through her eyes and in her words.

## 2. Interviews

In contemplation of Felicia's imminent death and by way of background, Aaron and Robert (Bob) approached Felicia for a series of interviews to capture her life's work, insights and reflections. Felicia expressed deep interest and reported being excited and inspired by the consideration and opportunity to share some of her thoughts and reflections; in her words this was an "unbelievably generous gift" and "it was fun doing it!". Bob interviewed Felicia on several occasions between 11<sup>th</sup> June and August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. These interviews began while Felicia was in hospital and concerned that she would not be able to return to her home, with the last one conducted in her home just a few days before her death. The following are excerpts of the

transcripts from these interviews, some of which have been slightly edited to improve readability.

### **Interview 1 – June 11, 2024**

#### ***Purpose and questions***

##### Bob

The purpose of these interviews is to go through a celebration of your life drawing attention to your work and you as a person; to thank you, to highlight the huge contributions that you've made; to celebrate you as a person and all the people you've touched and provided support and wisdom to, people like me, Aaron and many others.

##### Felicia

Sounds wonderful. Honestly, I was so touched when you suggested it.

##### Bob

The concept is to paint a picture of a life well lived. The questions will be along the following lines, and you can add or change any of these:

- What have been the highlights of your career?
- What are you most proud of?
- What has had the most impact beyond citations and publications?
- What have you learned from wellbeing science that has most touched your life?
- What do you hope for the future of wellbeing science and for humanity?
- If we should be doing much more of something, what would that be?
- Any regrets?
- What are the biggest challenges going forward, for wellbeing science and for positive psychology?
- Any advice for scholars learning and aiming to contribute to the field of wellbeing science or positive psychology?
- And anything else that you'd like to add?

#### ***Felicia's career highlights and work***

##### Bob

So, what are you most proud of? What have been the highlights?

##### Felicia

It's been wonderful, being part of the positive psychology movement from its beginning alongside quite a few other people that have been part of what didn't have a name before 1998, when Marty Seligman coined the name. Many of us had already been working in this very broad field (when the positive psychology terminology came along) and then we had a big umbrella that could embrace the things that we were doing, and many more. So, I want to start by paying tribute to people who did brilliant work in this field before it had a name. Ed Diener, I think most of all, was absolutely extraordinary in the scope, the breadth, the excellent research that he undertook for many, many years before positive psychology was named. And then there's someone whose name often isn't mentioned. Michael Argyle, from the UK, was doing very good research on happiness. He's not nearly sufficiently recognized for the work he did (Argyle, 1987). And many others were already working in this sort of general area. Carol Ryff is one with her psychological wellbeing measure (Ryff, 1989). What was interesting is that of the six dimensions that she talks about, she specifically excludes hedonic aspects of wellbeing. So, it really is very much about eudaimonic wellbeing. Other notable names of

course are people like Richard Ryan and Ed Deci who did all that brilliant work on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the idea of basic psychological needs, which they linked so brilliantly in so many studies. Many people have extended their work to show that if you have those basic psychological needs in place for autonomy, competence and relatedness, your wellbeing is going to be high, and if any one of those is missing, it's less so. I'm sure I'm missing some important names here, but these are some of the people who were already accomplished and working in the field before the positive psychology movement was launched.

### Bob

How did you get into positive psychology?

### Felicia

I'd been working for many years on aging, and memory/amnesia in particular. And then I got this job in the Department of Psychiatry at Cambridge working with a very distinguished psychiatrist called Sir Martin Roth, who was very interested in dementia in particular (see Kerr & Kay, 2007), and we did incredible studies. For example, there was a longitudinal study of everybody aged 65+ in certain areas around Cambridge (the Medical Research Council Multi-Centre Study of Cognitive Function and Ageing [MRC CFAS]: see Huppert et al., 2000). These were not convenience samples, not student samples, but representative population samples. The extraordinary thing was that we recruited through General Practitioners (GPs), and I think we had a sample in the end of about 11,000, there was a 92% response rate<sup>1</sup> (Fleming et al., 2007). Can you imagine these days getting anything even approximating that?

We were doing very detailed longitudinal studies of memory and cognitive function, looking at who became demented, depressed, and other age-related disorders (Brayne et al., 1992; Huppert et al., 1986; Huppert et al., 2000; Paykel et al., 1994; Paykel et al., 1998). But from quite early on, I was very interested not just in people having age-related problems, but in who aged well and what might be some of the factors that contribute to aging well. For instance, there was a scale that was widely used in those days called the Hassles and Uplifts Scale (Kanner et al., 1981). And nearly everything that was published was about how hassles relate to depression or stress, but nobody was looking at the uplift side of it. So more and more, I became interested in studying the positives. Who were those older people doing well later in life? I started working on what we called positive aging, did a lot of lectures and got into my work on positive aging (Girling et al., 1995; Huppert & Whittington, 1995; Llewellyn et al., 2008). I think that was how Marty Seligman came across my work.

I was fortunate to be one of the people in the very early 2000s who used to go regularly to positive psychology meetings in Washington. They were held at the Clifton Institute, and they were so inspiring, they were just fantastic. It was very exciting to be part of that, and to see the people that Marty himself directly mentored and supported, of whom I guess the most notable is Barbara Fredrickson. She's done some outstanding research and all of the work supporting the Broaden and Build Theory is just superb (Fredrickson, 2004). The idea is that negative emotions narrow your perception and your memory, whereas positive emotions broaden it. And some of the studies were just fantastic. If I remember correctly, there's one looking at

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<sup>1</sup> Author note: The sample of the CC75C cohort study at year 0 was  $n = 2,609$  and 82% were followed up ( $n = 2,165$ ) the following year (as described in Fleming et al., 2007).

differentiating between black and white faces (Johnson & Fredrickson, 2005) and differentiation was very strong for people who were experiencing a negative emotion, but when they were experiencing a positive emotion - these were induced emotions - there was much less differentiation. I think it was lovely to understand that work in its very early stages.

Bob

Positive emotion broadens our perspective and improves our problem solving and creative capacity.

Felicia

Absolutely.

Bob

And negative emotion narrows perspective and narrows the resources available to us.

Felicia

Exactly. And as I said, Barb Frederickson's research supporting that was really terrific.

Bob

So, you go to Washington, meet some of the people, including Barbara. Where from there? The publishing of the Flourishing Study 2008, 2009?

Felicia

Well, interestingly, I remember vividly Chris Peterson at one of those early positive psychology meetings saying that we needed an anti-DSM for positive experience symptoms, whatever you want to call it, and I thought that made total sense. But what happened was Chris came up with the Values in Action (VIA) as the answer (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). I thought that was a very funny answer. So that left open a door and I thought that we did need the anti-DSM, if you like, version of the positives, so that we should just do it. That's what I did with Timothy So. We went through the DSM, looking only at the common mental disorders, the ones that any one of us can have, in particular depression and anxiety, and looked at the list of criteria and list of symptoms (with depression, there were things like 'sense of hopelessness') and wrote down in every case the opposite (see Huppert & So, 2009).

Bob

So, you took the DSM definitions and then defined the opposite of those - like an antonym?

Felicia

Yes, in effect. And we wanted to do it completely systematically, with as little as possible subjectiveness. And on the basis of that, for depression and anxiety, we came up with 10 criteria or 10 features, if you like, that were the opposite of the ones in the DSM - I can't list them off the top of my head. Then we thought, well, it'd be really interesting to see how these are distributed in a representative sample. We looked at various databases, and it turned out, perhaps not surprisingly, that the European Social Survey ([www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)) had the best representation of these 10 items. That wasn't perfect because some of them were not as we would've worded them necessarily, but approximations to these 10 features. The European Social Survey is a brilliantly designed study. It's based in London but has about 30 countries involved. And the process of getting translations across these different languages, and not just literal translations, but meaningful translations, means that it takes years to prepare a module for the European Social Survey. They have basic items that they repeat every time they do it, I think every two or three years. Of course, there's 30 or so countries involved, and then they invite people like me to submit specific modules for the survey itself.

The European Social Survey decided they would like a wellbeing module in the survey, and I worked with some very lovely collaborators around Europe. I led the group that over the course of a few years developed a module that could be used across all these countries. And so that was the one that had the closest fitting information to the 10 features that Timothy and I had established. And I think the data was very interesting because you could look at two things. We looked at the individual items and the individual features, but we also had established a cutoff point between flourishing and not flourishing and looked at how that varied across countries and how it related to things like life satisfaction, which was the simplistic measure that nearly all the surveys used. What's very interesting is that countries with identical scores on life satisfaction can be incredibly different on the individual items, the pattern of items, and on the overall flourishing measure as well. I remember, for example, that France has always been an outlier, always a surprise because conditions in France are often regarded as very positive for wellbeing: relatively short working hours, good food, good lifestyle, and all of that. But the French always end up doing less well on life satisfaction than you would expect. And what we found looking at the pattern across these features was that the French are very, very low on optimism, and that in itself almost explains why they're an outlier. On the other hand, I remember the Spanish were very high on self-esteem. And again, you can see how this may relate to different cultural patterns and so on. So, I think that was a worthwhile thing to do.

That work has now been extended because although Timothy and I did this in a very rigorous way, we were quite disappointed in some respects with the results because we truly believed, as Ryan and Deci (2001) show, that autonomy is a very important aspect of wellbeing. But autonomy didn't come out as one of the 10. The reason is that there's nothing in the DSM which is the opposite of autonomy when you look at the definitions of depression and anxiety. We felt like we had been rigorous, but there were things missing. And so more recently, I've done a piece of work with Herbert Marsh, a very brilliant psychometrician from Australia, who worked in Oxford for a while in the Department of Education there, I think, but then went back to Australia. He and I, and a couple of other lovely colleagues, thought about what might have been missing from that original list.

We did interviews with people in the field, researchers, I think some clinicians as well, and listed some of the things that they thought were missing, and then we looked at whether there were existing measures of these things and created a very big dataset with the original 10 plus more. It turned out we identified an additional five that we thought should be in the big dataset (Marsh et al., 2020). Again, I'm not going to necessarily remember the five, but things like self-acceptance, autonomy, obviously mindfulness. My hope had been that when we put all of these into a big psychometric analysis, they would boil down to a smaller handful of things that were absolutely key. And I remember Herb Marsh coming into my office one day at the Australian Catholic University and saying, "you are going to be so disappointed, Felicia." I asked, why? He said that each of these 15 has an independent contribution to wellbeing. And yes, in itself this was very interesting. But my heart sank because if you can ask one question about life satisfaction versus 15 questions, or ideally three questions for each of 15 concepts, what are people going to do? So, we published this paper, and it's called the Wellbeing Profile (WB Pro: Marsh et al., 2020). We also did a machine learning version of it to try and reduce the number of items in the hope that it would be more amenable for people to

use in surveys. We came down to a 15-item version, just one item for each of the 15, plus a five-item version. And these five items on their own accounted for something like 93% of the variability of the whole 48 items that were originally in the scale.

Bob

It was just individual.

Felicia

Yes, just individuals represented. I would've quite liked to use an Australian sample, but it was much cheaper to get an American sample. It was nice that there were these five items that represented it, but those five may be different in different samples; and that needs to be replicated. It hasn't been done yet, but what has been done is that the WB Pro scale has now been translated into quite a lot of languages. So, I think that although people aren't using it in big surveys, researchers are interested in using it. And I hope that it'll soon be used more.

Bob

What was motivating you to do that?

Felicia

The fact that the original anti-DSM work left out something that we knew was important, autonomy, and so we began to worry about what else we may have left out.

Bob

And autonomy was found to be a factor in the Wellbeing Profile?

Felicia

Oh yes, we put it in, because it was clearly missing, but we put in other things too.

Bob

And what's your perspective on this term anti-DSM?

Felicia

I don't actually like the term anti-DSM, but what I do like is the idea that we were trying to do something completely systematic and rigorous, rather than so many other people in the field (who say) "here's our favorite list of things". We were trying to reduce that subjectivity.

Bob

So, while we're on the topic of lists of measures, what is your perspective of PERMA? (Seligman, 2011).

Felicia

Well, it's obviously had a big impact, and it's better to be measuring PERMA than not to be measuring anything other than life satisfaction, for instance. But in Marty's earlier book *Authentic Happiness* (Seligman, 2002), there were only three dimensions of wellbeing. There were meaning, engagement and positive emotions. He added two (relationships and accomplishment) in his revised book *Flourish* (Seligman, 2011). I say at least if people are measuring PERMA, they are measuring more than they otherwise would. So, it's something.

### *Felicia's contributions*

Felicia

Bob, before we get off the detailed stuff, I think there was another question about my contribution. So, what has been my contribution? I think of two bits. One is the population perspective. So much of psychological science has been done on convenience and student samples or whatever. But I've long had this understanding that it's really important to have representative population samples, and I have no doubt that a lot of this comes from my brother-in-law, who is very famous for his work on 'social determinants of health'. He's an

epidemiologist, Michael Marmot, and listening to him decades ago talk about epidemiology, why it matters, and why we should take the bigger perspective has definitely influenced my work (Marmot, 2005). He now talks about the social determinants of health and wellbeing. I also want to say that so much of positive psychology is about the individual. The vast majority of studies that have been done are about individuals and their characteristics or improvements using a particular method for individuals. But when you understand that there are huge social determinants of health and wellbeing, you actually want to also be looking at wellbeing as a systemic issue. It's not just the wellbeing of individuals that matters, it's the wellbeing of families and communities and organizations and institutions, couples and so on.

In a positive psychology meeting in France in 2016, a group of us happened to meet afterwards at the airport and said we were so dissatisfied because there was barely a mention of anything beyond the individual at this whole meeting, and that's not okay. We asked ourselves: what can we do about it? We decided that at the next positive psychology meeting in Montreal the next year (2017), we would run a workshop trying to broaden out the concept to this much more systemic approach. We were given a slot, and we thought nobody would turn up because it was in a parallel session with some really impressive, well-known people. However, it was standing room only in our session! So, there was clearly a hunger for people to expand beyond the individual. After that Montreal meeting, we thought: what do we do next? Well, maybe we had better write a book!

So, seven of us got together and wrote the book 'Creating the world we want to live in' (Grenville-Cleave et al., 2021). In that book, we make it very clear that there's a set of concentric circles where the individuals are in the center, and then interrelationships and then community and organizations. I'm going out right to the planetary level; to the environment. And what we know is that the way an individual is, whether they have positive or negative attitudes, influences the next level beyond them, and that in turn influences other levels and so on. So, you can actually get positive or negative feedback loops, and they go in both directions - we have a diagram showing that. The other thing we were very clear about is that we need to move from "me" to "we", and we need to move from "short-term thinking" to "long-term thinking". It's all very well saying what's good for me right now, but we also need to know what's good for me in the longer term, what's good for us right now. But the important thing is what's good for us and future generations in the longer term. I think that's a very big theme that we want to be moving towards, and we have tried to do so in that book.

Bob

What would your hope be for that book?

Felicia

That we just get more people thinking in this much more systemic way, not focusing only on the individual, but recognizing those important interactions within the individual in the context.

Bob

So short-term vs long-term, and "me vs we".

Felicia

Yes. And then within the book, we also did something that is a bit unusual in terms of highlighting the important processes. Usually there's a list. Timothy So and I had a list of 10 things, PERMA is a list, Ryff's psychological wellbeing is a list; there are lists. But what we felt

is that there's actually two different levels of things that are important. One is the conditions that support wellbeing and those are, for instance, the idea of the basic psychological needs. So, if you have autonomy, competence, relatedness you're more likely to have wellbeing. We've added a couple as well, which is firstly the ability to see the positives and not just the negatives, in other words, for instance, find strengths in yourself and other organizations, so not just look at the negatives despite our negativity bias. Secondly, we've added a sense of meaning. So those five conditions (autonomy, competence, relatedness, the ability to see the positives and not just the negatives, and sense of meaning) are very much related to whether we have wellbeing.

However, as well as these conditions, there are core skills, we call them core capabilities, that make it more likely that these conditions will come about. That's at a different level, and there are three of them. Number one: 'open mind', which means a mind is open to whatever is there, it's about curiosity. It's about noticing, it's about awareness, it's about mindfulness. Number two: 'open heart', which is about kindness and compassion. And lastly number three: 'clear thinking', which is also very, very important. For example, let's say that just with awareness and compassion, you see someone utterly exhausted, they've been running for three hours, and they're absolutely at the end of their tether. You go up to them in a marathon race and say "oh, you poor thing, you must be feeling absolutely terrible." Well, that's not a wise comment. You need to think clearly about what the wise comment would be in that situation. And the wise comment would be something like, "fantastic, you've got this far, really well done, not too far to go!" Something like that. So, you need all three. You need awareness (open mind), you need kindness and compassion (open heart), but you also need clarity (clear thinking) to make wise comments.

#### Bob

So, as far as your contributions to wellbeing science and positive psychology, you have listed the book, the European study – what else?

#### Felicia

In the book, we look at how these ideas apply across many, many domains of life, early years and education and health and economics and environment, trying to use these ideas at both individual and systemic level. I'd love to think that people are interested in that, and that some of that thinking pervades more of the positive psychology research. Beyond that, there are practical applications of all of this. So, some years ago, a group came together called the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 'WEALL', which is a beautiful abbreviation. WEALL recognizes that universally, the measure of success and progress is GDP or some version of it. But what on earth does economic growth have to do with the wellbeing of citizens, institutions, organizations and the environment? Now, you're not going to give that up altogether, but we need an additional measure of a wellbeing economy. Is this economy good for wellbeing, not just is it good for growth? Because of course you can increase GDP if you build more prisons, or if there are huge bushfires and you have to rebuild things. GDP goes up in all those cases, but it's definitely not good for people or the planet.

So, I very much like the idea that we can apply some of our thinking to these bigger movements, if you like. There are currently six countries which have described themselves as wellbeing economies: Finland, Iceland, Scotland, Wales, New Zealand and Canada, and they really are trying in their budgets, in their thinking, to work out what is good for their wellbeing and how they can increase it. A part of this is measurement. You have to be able to measure

wellbeing, just like measuring GDP, and there are still many discussions about the best way to measure it. But as well as measuring it, you need to know what it is you really would like to change, and it's things like inequity and racism that need to be changed. I feel that all of this contributes to this bigger picture about how to make the world better. Australia has expressed interest in a wellbeing economy but is quite a bit slower in getting there. There have been a couple of fantastic conferences here, and also some submissions to Treasury about how we could measure it and improve it, and we just want to keep working on that front.

### *Felicia's vision for a wellbeing economy*

Bob

What would your vision be for a wellbeing economy? What would it look like?

Felicia

Well, what I touched upon is much greater equity between people. Clearly you don't want people in poverty and illness, all sorts of disadvantage. So, it would be improving the lot of ordinary people.

Bob

The Scandinavian countries like Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and so forth, always report high on the world happiness scales as the happiest places in the world. What's behind that? What's different about them?

Felicia

It differs to some degree by country, because for instance, even though in Iceland they had a very high score on wellbeing measures, in other sorts of surveys, they had one of the highest rates of alcohol consumption among young people, and that was a real concern. So, they thought carefully about how to reduce alcohol consumption among young people. They decided to put a much higher tax on alcohol so young people couldn't really afford it anymore and they also educated parents, teachers, and young people themselves. Within a very short time, Iceland had lowered the rate of alcoholism among young people. So, the reported happiness is partly because these countries have some basic good values and that they take seriously the need to change when they see that need.

Felicia

At one stage, Bob, I was thinking about a list of what I would like to see in the future. Can we just go there for a minute?

Bob

Sure, let's get Felicia's prescription of a wellbeing society.

Felicia

It starts with the core capabilities; we need to teach those very early to people. We need to teach them about awareness; we need to teach them about kindness and compassion; and we need to teach them clear thinking. These days, clear thinking is almost the most important because when you look at what's happening with social media, people aren't even thinking sensibly at all. They're just taking as given what an influencer tells them. How do we get people to think clearly, or build critical thinking skills? They're related. How do you get people to understand that they must always have healthy skepticism about what they hear or see and make sure that the information that they're following or passing on comes from a trusted source? You've got to get in very early with those sorts of ideas. I really would love to see that properly done in education. There's often lip service paid to critical thinking, but I don't know of any really good studies that have taken young people and taught them these skills, whether

it's through specific critical thinking teaching or whether it's through subject matter. I don't know of any studies that have shown how that's been done and ended up with good outcomes.

Bob

You're also referring to evidence-based thinking in your critical thinking so that we learn to base our thinking on facts and data.

Felicia

Absolutely. And sorry, what I said isn't entirely true because there was that study in Uganda where they did a randomized control trial of young children across many schools (Nsangi et al., 2017). One group were given training and health related, if you like, critical thinking. So, these kids were taught to think about "how do you know if a claim is true or not true?". They had just nine lessons based on comic books and things like that. And what's so lovely is listening to some of the recordings of how these ten-year-olds understand. Hearing a ten-year-old basically say that they have to do a randomized control trial, not in those words, but in their own words; it was just fantastic. What they found in this very large study, which was done together with a group from Norway, is that the schools that taught those skills, when they were tested on a good test for critical thinking, 62% of the kids passed the test compared to 43% of the kids who were not in that group, so the teaching made a huge difference.

Now, we don't know whether that critical thinking would generalize beyond health to other spheres, but one would hope so, and it'd be lovely to see a study that tested that. So, the first thing is teaching these clear-thinking skills at an early age, but also the open-minded, open-heart skills. And particularly, isn't it so interesting that the recognition that what we do for others has a greater effect on our wellbeing than what we do for ourselves, and there's a lot of evidence for that. Young people don't know that. It started, I think with that study, it was in 2008, a lovely little study. I think it came out in the journal *Science* (Dunn et al., 2008). A Canadian woman had undergraduates divided into two groups. Each group was given a small sum of money to spend, half of them were instructed to spend it on themselves, and half were instructed to spend it on someone else. Happiness and some other things were measured before and after, and what was interesting was that both groups showed an improvement. So, their happiness increased whether they spent it on themselves or on others, but the group that spent it on others showed a greater increase in happiness. And the bit about the study that I love is that there was a debrief afterwards and the students were told what the study was about, and they were asked to predict which group would do better, which group would come out with higher wellbeing. Both groups said, oh, well, it'll be the ones who spend it on themselves. Isn't that extraordinary? And so young people don't know that what you do for others has a bigger impact on your wellbeing than what you do for yourself.

Bob

Similar to David Cooperrider's concept of mirror flourishing (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012).

Felicia

Yes, beautiful. We need more education of that kind, and we certainly need to make this shift from 'me to we' from 'short-term thinking to longer-term thinking', and we need to apply it across all the systems. So yes, the wellbeing, flourishing of an individual is important, but let's also look at the wellbeing or flourishing of the family unit, of the local community, organizations, institutions and so on out to the environment. I would love to see people taking more of that seriously and applying these ideas right out across that whole spectrum.

I really do want to pay tribute to people who have already been doing some of that work. Notably people like Isaac Prilleltensky and his work on community (Prilleltensky, 2001; 2006) and the work of positive organizational scholars who are very interested in how wellbeing works at the level of organizations (Cameron & Dutton, 2003). But I think a question that has not been established for sure yet is, in order to establish if a team is flourishing, for example, is it enough that every individual is flourishing, or is there another level that needs to be measured, which is about team flourishing? And what is it that makes a team flourish, which may be something else from just what's happening within the individuals. Some newer researchers are currently looking at that sort of thing. Seriously, I think that's so important.

Bob

So, on your list Felicia, you've had: open mind, open heart; clear thinking, critical thinking; me vs we; short vs long-term; importance of a systems perspective; individual v team flourishing, the multilevel aspect.

Felicia

Multilevel aspect, exactly that. And then another one, I could say maybe the final one. I think that every government should emulate what they've done in Wales where they have a Future Generations Commissioner. This commissioner's job is to scrutinize every government policy to ensure that that policy is going to benefit future generations, and when policies don't, they have to be changed. I can't understand why no other country, to my knowledge, has this. It sounds so simple, but why they are not doing it yet?

### *Felicia's career regrets*

Bob

Moving on a bit, any regrets?

Felicia

I think my biggest regret is that I came into this field relatively late in my career. I just wish that I'd been in a position as a young person starting there. There's so much to explore, to do, and to implement.

Bob

Just so interesting because you think you came in late, yet you are one of the pioneers.

Felicia

Yes.

Bob

Any other regrets?

Felicia

Not that I can think of!

### *Felicia the humanist*

Bob

You call yourself a humanist, so I wondered whether from your perspective as a humanist, how that relates to your perceptions and thoughts around wellbeing?

Felicia

I don't know how to answer that, except to say it's almost that if you care about wellbeing, then you care about everybody's wellbeing. And that a humanist is someone who cares about the wellbeing of everyone. Forget what race they are, what gender, what religion, they just care. It's people that matter; it's humans and human systems that matter. It's not that I want

my group to flourish, and I don't care about other groups. I want humans to flourish, and when they don't, it doesn't matter who they are, it causes pain. It doesn't matter who they are, if they're suffering.

Bob

That's really important. I think there is a strong connection between the humanist traditions and the concepts of wellbeing.

Felicia

Yes. I haven't thought about that, but there has to be.

### *Felicia on mindfulness and meditation*

Bob

I do want to get your perspective on mindfulness, the importance of mindfulness and what you see mindfulness is and what it isn't.

Felicia

So, mindfulness, the way I see it, is something extraordinarily simple and basic. It's about awareness; awareness of what's going on right now inside you and around you. And in a sense, there's nothing more basic than awareness. If you are unaware, then all sorts of issues can follow, but once you are aware of what's going on, then you can make conscious choices and conscious decisions about what to do next. And there's that beautiful quote, isn't there? From "*Man's Search for Meaning*" by Victor Frankl: "Between stimulus and a response, there's space. And in that space lies our freedom." (Frankl, 1985, p. 86). If you are really aware of the stimulus, what's going on, there's this little gap where if you pause, you can then act wisely rather than acting in some automatic way. I just think that with mindfulness, you've got the awareness and there's a little gap, and then you can act with wisdom.

Bob

So, are you saying that mindfulness or awareness is a pathway to wisdom, therefore in the absence of mindfulness, it's very difficult to be wise?

Felicia

Absolutely. There's often a confusion between mindfulness and meditation, for instance.

Bob

Okay let's talk about that.

Felicia

You can meditate without being mindful. I've come across people who meditate on a candle flame, they just stare at this candle flame, and somehow that seems to have, they say some beneficial qualities, but that's a meditation, it's not a mindful meditation. And you can also be mindful without meditating. I mean, at any moment in the day, you can just stop and notice. The noises, the pressure on your feet, smells. But particularly when you're developing a mindfulness practice, it's very helpful to do mindfulness meditations, to do specific training in those. And they can be quite short. There's some evidence that up to 10 minutes a day of mindfulness meditation can make a difference to wellbeing. So, they're not quite the same thing. But mindfulness is just, to me, so basic.

Bob

And if you were recommending to someone how to start, what would your recommendation be?

Felicia

Oh gosh; it's an interesting one. Look, I came to the view that mindfulness was important entirely through the science. Between 2006 and 2008, the UK Government Office of Science

did a two-year project called the 'Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing' (Kirkwood et al., 2008). And they do these foresight projects regularly. And I think it was because they recognized that the UK's biggest assets were not agriculture or technology or goods or anything like that. The UK's biggest asset is its people. And so, in order for the UK to flourish, people have to flourish. And over these two years, they brought together over 400 international experts to talk about mental capital and wellbeing. And they wrote 89 'State of the Science' reviews. I was called the wellbeing expert, and one of my jobs was to try and summarize this massive amount of information. And so, in a paper that came out in 2009, I was trying to summarize some of the things that seemed to have a really big effect, and I kept coming across this thing called 'mindfulness'. I'd never heard of it before, but already back then, 2006-2009, there were enough studies around showing that people who were practicing mindfulness were doing better in many respects in terms of health, mental health perception, and so forth and so on. And so, I worked with others to develop mindfulness programs for schools, for instance, or mindfulness programs in hospitals. And then one day the penny dropped, and I thought maybe I should learn it. So, I went to my local Buddhist center in Cambridge and said, oh, I believe you have mindfulness courses. And they said, yes, but the next one is fully subscribed, and you'd have to wait three months. And I said, oh, no, I want to do something sooner than that. And they said, oh, we've got a meditation course starting next week. And I thought, meditation, mindfulness, what's the difference? So I signed up for the meditation course, went along to the first session, and it was so terrible! The person didn't know anything about how to teach, and it just wasn't any good. And at the end of the session, I went back to the office and said, I'd like my money back, and I want to put this towards the next MBSR, (mindfulness-based stress reduction) course that I can do. Because those (MBSR courses) had been studied and I knew that the people who taught them were very carefully trained. And so, I thought, yes, I'll go to a course where I know the people are really well trained, where there's a fantastic curriculum. One day I turned up at one of the lectures of the MBSR course and bumped into the woman who had taught that first meditation class. And she recognized me, and she said, oh, you came to one of my classes, didn't you? I was very embarrassed. I said, yes. And she said, oh, I'm a much better teacher now, I have qualified as an MBSR teacher. I thought that was quite funny. It was very interesting in the first session, people were asked, why were they here? For a lot of people, it was for health problems, mental health problems, relational problems, and I felt a bit silly when I said, "I just want to be a better person". But it was life changing. That course was absolutely life changing.

Bob

In what way?

Felicia

Well, in teaching me a series of practices, in teaching me an approach to greater appreciation and more thoughtful responses. A couple of years later I did a Mindful Self-Compassion course, by Kristen Neff and Chris Germer (Germer & Neff, 2013). There was one trainer at that stage only in Australia, and he was running a course and that was fantastic too. That took it a step further through mindful self-compassion.

Bob

What's the difference between mindfulness and mindful compassion?

Felicia

Look, in a sense, self-compassion is already part of mindfulness because when you are aware, when you are paying attention to something, when you're focusing on it, you're doing it with an attitude of gentleness and kindness. But the self-compassion component was taking it

slightly to a deeper level so that when you find yourself criticizing yourself, being hard on yourself, it gives you the skills to work with that.

Bob

And do you practice mindfulness daily?

Felicia

I did before I came into hospital.

Bob

And what would your daily practice be when you were well?

Felicia

I've tried to do a mindfulness practice first thing in the morning, after waking. I would get on my little stool - I've got a little bench that I sit on in the bedroom. I have sun that comes into my bedroom, and so for anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes, sometimes longer, I would just sit and meditate. I guess occasionally a guided meditation where I'm listening to someone else, but more often just for my own free-floating meditation with the specific intention, that today should be a good day, or I should continue to practice mindfulness and kindness, compassion. I must say, on days where I didn't do it, I don't feel the day went as well.

Bob

And are there times in the day where you center yourself, drop anchor, come back to it?

Felicia

Yes, though not specifically programmed. But yes, for sure, like "Oh wait, I've just done this thing and I haven't even been noticing. Let me just step back and notice, look, the beautiful clouds that were passing and I didn't even see them the first time", that sort of thing.

### *Felicia on flourishing, languishing and common mental disorders continuum*

Bob

Okay, so Felicia, you mentioned you wanted to talk about Corey Keyes's work?

Felicia

Yes, in the context of epidemiology and population studies. One way I've tried to depict the relationship between common mental disorders of depression and anxiety and flourishing, is the use of a bell curve with the common mental disorders at one end, on the left-hand side, and flourishing at the right-hand side, and in between the lovely term languishing that Corey Keyes made popular (Keyes, 2002). And the idea is that at any one time we are at a certain point along that continuum, but we move up and down the spectrum at different times. Sometimes our depression and anxiety is so bad that we meet criteria for diagnosis. Other times we are not bad, but not too good, languishing at things, not going great, and sometimes we're flourishing. But this idea of a single continuum has been quite controversial because according to Corey Keyes, there is a dual continuum model (Keyes, 2002). So, one continuum is 'mental illness' to 'no mental illness', and then perpendicular to that is 'languishing' to 'flourishing'. The idea is that you can have a mental illness, but still be flourishing. And he's completely right when it comes to chronic mental health conditions. Like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or autism spectrum disorders, personality disorders, and the like where it's with you all the time. You have this chronic condition, but at some time you're doing really well, you can be flourishing; this fits very well for the two-continuum model. However, for the common mental disorders, and I really have to stress 'common', such as the depression and anxiety disorders, I believe they are much better represented by a single continuum

because it isn't possible to meet DSM criteria for depression or anxiety and at the same time to be flourishing; it simply isn't possible. And so, our unidimensional model applies just to the common mental disorders (Huppert & So, 2013), it doesn't apply to all mental disorders. The important thing about the unidimensional model is that what's on the horizontal axis is the balance of risk and protective factors. There are certain risk factors that push you towards the diagnostic end and certain protective factors that push you towards the flourishing end, and the question is how to create more of the protective factors and spend more of our time at the flourishing end? I think from that perspective, the unidimensional model is very helpful, and it fits with the work of a brilliant epidemiologist called Geoffrey Rose who uses a unidimensional model for common conditions, whether it's heart conditions, alcoholism, and whatever at one end (i.e., there's a problem), and at the other end there's good health (Rose, 2001). The key is finding a lot of the factors that shift the population from one to the other, as well as the individual of course, but he's very interested in how you get the whole population shifting.

### **Interviews 2 and 3 – June 23, June 29, 2024**

#### *Felicia on what she would have liked to have done more research on*

##### Bob

Earlier you said there are some things you wish you had more time to accomplish. What would you have done more of?

##### Felicia

More research and given more talks.

##### Bob

In what areas?

##### Felicia

I think, again, taking the population and epidemiological perspective rather than just the individual. I feel that even though we tried in our book to extend this to the organization and all these other levels, the systems level, it isn't easy. I don't think it's easy to see how to do that; working at the individual level is so much easier.

##### Bob

It's really difficult to do collective or group studies because among other things, collecting the data is so much more challenging.

##### Felicia

Collecting the data is, but that's the next step, the real step is intervention. How do you make things better at the system level? I don't have a good grasp on that. I mean, partly because I know very little organisational psychology or about the family as a system. My hope would've been to attract more people into those fields. How do you create positive family systems, workplaces or of course communities are important research questions. I should really know more about Isaac Prilleltensky's work on community wellbeing (Prilleltensky, 2001; 2006).

##### Bob

So, what do you think is keeping people focused on the individual, as opposed to the system and group?

##### Felicia

Well, as we both agree, it's so much easier. It's very lucrative. You could go on doing individual work forever. There are always people wanting to pay you for this good direction,

good advice. But I, at least, feel I didn't get my head around sufficiently those higher levels or at the planetary level, at the environmental level. Beyond understanding that when you base your messages on fear, people are likely to turn away. Whereas when you base them on hope, they're much more likely to get engaged. So yes, I mean there's that level of understanding, but how really do you develop a positive psychology of an environmental engagement at a high level? I didn't address that. I would've loved to do that or maybe work with people who already had a good understanding of that level.

Bob

When you say environmental, do you mean environmental in a holistic sense or environmental as in the climate, nature?

Felicia

I was thinking the latter, climate change and all the things we desperately need to put into place as soon as possible, and how to get governments thinking that way too. We did touch on that because when I was saying that one of the things I would absolutely love to see is every government having a commissioner for future generations, and then we need to think through what that commissioner needs to understand, needs to know, and how to go about creating it. I think there was the example in Wales that they were going to put in some new super-highway and someone else pointed out that the repercussions of this new highway were going to be devastating to the environment and hence to future generations.

There was recently a Wellbeing Economy Forum (2024: [www.wellbeingeconomyforum.com](http://www.wellbeingeconomyforum.com)) just two weeks ago in Iceland with the new Prime Minister and six other ministers present, and the President was there, as well as a host of great people from around the world, including our own Katherine Trebeck. Katherine is a wonderful person who was the co-founder of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance. She's an Aussie but worked for something like 14 years in Scotland helping the Scottish government with their wellbeing policy, and she's now back in Canberra. Apparently, the forum was an enormous success. Working at that scale with the right people is, I think, where we need to head both in relation to wellbeing generally, wellbeing economy ideas, and also compassion. And I think we need an organization like the Global Compassion Coalition, under Rick Hanson and Matt Hawkins, to flourish and have an influence on every aspect of policy ([www.globalcompassioncoalition.org](http://www.globalcompassioncoalition.org)). Maybe we need a Commissioner for Compassion? This isn't as appealing though. I think maybe a Commissioner for Future Generations has a role to play. We do need to know that all policies are based on compassion and the greater good, and to have real concern about equity and making sure that things are good, not only for a segment of the population, but right across the population.

### *Felicia on wellbeing systems and moving beyond the individual*

Bob

Systems seemed to have captured your imagination and your focus. What is it about systems theory that's created the interest for you?

Felicia

I don't have a deep understanding of systems theory, but it is simply the recognition that we've got to go to those other levels if we're going to truly have an impact. It isn't the responsibility of individuals entirely to look after their own wellbeing, yet that's a part of it.

But there's a necessity for the system to be such that it encourages people to look after their own wellbeing. It must encourage organizations and institutions and all these other groups to create the conditions whereby there is going to be more wellbeing for everybody. And I think that ties in so much with the ideas around a wellbeing economy, and maybe brings those ideas together. There was a blueprint for how to create a wellbeing economy and Katherine Trebeck also wrote a fantastic document about how to create wellbeing among young people, a kind of blueprint to do that at the level of an economy. I think we need much more of that big sky daring kind of approach, to living in a world that creates the conditions that support the wellbeing of everybody, and all creatures, and all levels of the system.

Bob

So, as you think about that, if you think about a study that you would design and would love someone to go do, what would that be?

Felicia

Gosh. These things are not so easy to study. I think at the very basic level, at the most modest level, if we start at our first institution, which is the family, to do studies that put in place, "what does it look like when a family is thriving and flourishing?" And "how can we help more families do that?" I mean, there are some wonderful parenting programs, but again, I think they tend to be focused on the individual. And that's good because we do need to help people learn the attitudes and skills that will help them respond in more positive ways to their children, their partners, the group as a whole, other groups they come in contact with. So that's important too, but it is very important then to also work out what a flourishing family looks like and how to create those. It would be lovely to do a study on that. It would have to be large, longitudinal, and randomized. You'd have to compare it with some other technique, and you would need lots of families in the study, and you'd have to show that it's enduring, so the longitudinal component is very important.

Bob

So would the research question be "what are the elements of a positive family?"

Felicia

Yes, positive family flourishing. We know what some of them are going to be, for example, one is a family culture where people genuinely listen to each other. That's where you'd have to start. Where the family members have an awareness of their own experience and as a result, don't so easily get triggered or react to annoying things, which always happens in families. Of course, you can get irritated by what happens in families, but to reduce the probability of just reacting or being triggered to responding in a more thoughtful and helpful way to any difficulties that you're seeing and how jointly to do that is important, and within a family people can support each other to do that. I think at the moment there are good individual parenting and positive parenting programs, but I think they are still very individual focused once again, and just to expand it to that next level would be one small step. Then people such as yourself who truly understand organizations, to looking at how you might measure the flourishing of an organization separately from the flourishing of the individuals in it, and also how do you identify a set of practices that can be rolled out in an organization to ensure that flourishing happens more often. I am out of my depth when it comes to doing this work, but I'd love to see it done.

Bob

How would you extend the work that you've done into the population? What study needs to be done to carry on your work?

Felicia

Well, wherever possible, don't use convenience samples. It's fine at the beginning of a research project to use a convenience sample to try out a 'proof of concept' or something. But then you really truly must try to get representative population samples so that you can really generalize your findings. That means, including research in a place like Australia where there's such a rich multicultural heritage, ensuring that you have enough people from different cultures. It may be that what works in one culture needs something different in another culture, that certain things don't work within certain cultures, and we're not going to know that unless we do big studies, and they're not easy to do. And I guess funding isn't going to be that easy to find.

Bob

Beyond the research questions for the work you did with Timothy So in 2008 thru to 2011, where would you go now?

Felicia

I think you'd have to start somewhere else. That was very much about measurement and measurements, which is great and incredibly important, but we're now talking about intervention. I think we've got to start qualitatively with interviewing large numbers of diverse families that are or are not flourishing, or do not flourish at certain times, and get insights from the people themselves about what that's about. We would also ask them what they think is needed in order to have the kind of family they would most like to have, where everybody is respected, listened to, and able to thrive. Some cultures might not even accept that as a premise, but we would listen to their ideas about what might be helpful. I think that's the starting point for some of these studies followed by some sort of analysis of all these ideas and see indeed, are there uniform patterns? Are there different patterns for different cultures? Then to actually start developing interventions that try these out. Always, against a sensible active control, which could be something like the standard positive parenting programs or something else, but the aim is to show that the family level is over and above the individual level.

Bob

This is very interesting as one could argue and investigate whether there is such a thing as family wellbeing Or is it just the summation of the wellbeing of the individuals within the family?

Felicia

Exactly.

Bob

It's intriguing if we can parse apart individual and group wellbeing, it really helps you with interventions because if you can just merely sum up the individual scores, then you can have interventions at the individual level. But if that's not true and instead once individuals get into a group, whether it's a family, a marriage, a team at work, a sports team, and a group wellbeing effect emerges, then the intervention has to happen at both levels.

Felicia

Exactly. So, it is the same set of questions. I was just starting with what I saw as smaller and easier. But yes, it's the same set of questions.

Bob

Yes, and I have a personal belief that groups, and specifically organizations, don't want to do that work because if a group effect emerges it would then put the responsibility back on them

to invest in and undertake group and system wide interventions, versus interventions at the individual level.

Felicia

And you find that in families: look, she's the difficult one; she's the one causing the problems; the rest of us are just fine; if only she could get her act together. But it never works like that. The family is truly a system.

### *Felicia on hedonic vs eudaimonic wellbeing, and wellbeing vs flourishing*

Bob

We see a constant discussion about the differences between hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing and the definition of flourishing. What are your thoughts on this? How do you define either wellbeing or flourishing? Are they the same thing?

Felicia

I do tend to use flourishing as the upper end of wellbeing. I like Cory Keyes's term of languishing as being sort of intermediate, and then the common mental disorders as the mental health problems. But look, to me you need both. You need the hedonic, you need to feel good, as well as to be good and function well. Yes, I think you need both. And so that's why, for me, the Ryff scale of psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989) isn't enough because it has none of the hedonic component. I think about feeling happy, contented, grateful, it's got none of that. It's entirely about the eudaimonic, such as mastery, relationships and things like that.

Bob

And competency, autonomy...

Felicia

Exactly. So, I do think you need both and PERMA's got that much right. It has them both, as did the work I did with Timothy So.

Bob

So why is there a constant debate between hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, and what they consist of?

Felicia

I don't know. I think academics want to carve their niche and make their claims, but even we ourselves have changed our minds. As I said, initially we came up with 10 things in a very objective way.

Bob

Your initial work or your work with the Wellbeing Pro instrument?

Felicia

The initial work in a very objective way, the opposite of the DSM symptoms were the features, but we were dissatisfied with that because it left important things out. So, it's now got this sort of broader approach and maybe we've left other things out, and some other people are aware of that, but look, it is still progressing. It's a relatively new field and it's still in flux. There's a lot of emphasis recently on the construct of awe. I think awe is a wonderful thing. But is awe necessary or is it just a lovely thing to have? I don't know if it's a necessary component of flourishing that you feel awe, but I guess I could see someone maybe making a case that it is. Or whether it's really important that you have a passion. I don't know. I mean, it's nice if you have a passion and you can create a life around making that passion come to fruition and so on, but do you have to have a passion or is it enough to just have a deep

interest? At the moment each person wants to carve their own niche and emphasize this or that or the other aspect.

***Felicia on topics in positive psychology – Formulas, strengths, bad and good studies, forgiveness, toxic positivity, intention of positive psychology***

*Formulas*

Bob

What is your perspective of formulas that say x% of our flourishing is based on our genetics, y% on our environment and circumstances, and z% on our intentional activities?<sup>2</sup>

Felicia

Well, we know that's wrong. The research was based on twin studies, and they're deeply flawed. They assume that twins, whether they're identical or non-identical in the same family, have the same environment. Well, yes, up to a point they do. I mean the same house, the same parents, the same dogs, the same neighborhood. But in the important things like how they relate to their parents, how they relate to friends, the experiences they have outside the home, they can be incredibly different. And they should be incredibly different because if one non-identical sibling is very sporty and outgoing, and the other is much more of an artistic, poetic sort of person, of course they should have different environments. It was this very simple-minded idea of "what is the environment", but they can have very different environments. Equally, the simplistic idea that identical twins reared apart must have very different environments. But the truth was that in many of the studies in Sweden, for instance, yes, they were reared apart, but they were reared by other members of the family whose way of responding and lifestyle and so on might actually be very similar or else they're reared by people who've been heavily vetted by the social services to provide a certain kind of childhood environment, and those might be very similar. So, the extent of environmental difference or similarity was exaggerated in these calculations. That was a simple formula, but it just basically does not work.

Bob

Are there other things, claims out there in positive psychology that annoy you or that are wrong or that need challenging?

*Strengths*

Felicia

Well, I've often wondered about strengths, and the idea that you should just focus on your strengths, whereas I still think there's something to be said in knowing your weaknesses and improving on your weaknesses. I know you're not supposed to be saying that in positive psychology because it's positive, but I don't see what's wrong with recognizing a weakness and working on it. So, I've always had doubts about strengths, and strengths theory.

Bob

Doubts about it in totality, or doubts about certain claims that are made.

Felicia

Look, I don't doubt that because, in the Western perspective especially, we are so self-critical, we tend to focus on our weaknesses more than on our strengths, and it's a good thing to also know and recognize our strengths and to utilize them. But to then do that totally at the expense of never improving in other things - I don't think so, I don't go along with that. I think both

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<sup>2</sup> Author's note, this question is based on the work of Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005.

are important and the most important thing is being aware of both – like saying “Yes, I’m actually quite good at that and I do enjoy it when I use that ability to introduce people to each other or whatever it is”. But it’s also perfectly okay to say, “I’m really lousy at this other thing, and that’s okay. I don’t need to feel ashamed of it. I’m not beating myself up about it. It’s just a recognition. But I can get better. I can get better at anything that I choose to focus on”.

Bob

And what about your strengths? Did you ever do the VIA assessment?

Felicia

Yes, I did, and all I can remember is my top strength was ‘appreciation of beauty and excellence’.

Bob

Why does that not surprise me?

Felicia

Well, it annoyed me because I thought that other things should have come up, things like courage and curiosity, creativity, things like that. But it was because of the way the questions were worded. I could see that I wasn’t doing as well as I should have been doing because of the way they were worded. It was quite obvious to me that I was going to come out on top on appreciation of beauty and excellence, just by the way it was worded.

Bob

What about Gallup?

Felicia

I have mixed feelings about Gallup. I like some of what they do, but accessing their data is expensive, that might’ve changed, maybe Gallup data is more accessible now.

### *Good and Bad Positive Psychology Studies*

Bob

What great studies on wellbeing or flourishing would you point to?

Felicia

There is a Harvard study.

Bob

The one on men?

Felicia

No. Oh no, that’s a dreadful study! A totally biased sample to begin with. Fortunate young, mainly white men, probably all white men at that stage getting into this top school. And then you study them. Well, what does that tell you about anybody else? And then they tried to enhance it by using some additional peculiar samples. But you cannot trust anything from that study because it was never a population study. It was very biased and specific, and at no point was it a representative sample.

There are much better studies, like the excellent work that’s been done in the UK and New Zealand, for instance. The UK birth cohort studies (1946 National Survey of Health & Development, 1958 National Child Development Study, & 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70)) were superb, they were genuine population samples of every child born in a certain week in 1946, 1958, and again 12 years later (Elliot & Shepherd, 2006; Power & Elliot, 2006; Wadsworth at al., 2006). And there are more recent representative samples that followed up for as long as was possible yielding much better data. In New Zealand, the famous ‘Dunedin Study’ was a superb population study again that looked at things like the relationship between genes and

mental health problems (Arseneault et al., 2000). And there was this famous finding that even if you have specific genes that we know are associated with depression, you don't necessarily become depressed unless the environment interacts with the genes, and you have four or more adverse life events. But if you didn't have four or more adverse life events and that gene, you didn't become depressed.

Bob

So, what else, beyond a strength-only focus, are you uncomfortable with?

*Forgiveness*

Felicia

Well, another one that I used to worry about is the importance of forgiveness. I don't think there's any evidence that our wellbeing depends on our ability to forgive people who've wronged us. It's a very Christian idea. I remember during 'The Troubles in Northern Ireland' hearing on the news that last night somebody knocked on such and such a door and it was opened, and they shot the father. And then within five minutes the mother is saying "but I forgive them". It's dreadful. But it was this idea that you have to forgive them in order to move on. I don't think you have to forgive; you have to accept. Many years ago, I was at a meeting of the conference 'Happiness and Its Causes', here in Sydney, and there were two parents. There was a man and a woman, not related to each other, and each of them had a child who'd been murdered. Each of them went out of their way to meet the murderer to try to understand what had happened and try to help the murderers also come to terms with what they'd done. But each one separately said, "I do not forgive him, I can accept, I've come to terms with it, but I do not forgive". And that's how I feel about it.

Bob

Well, I think I'd struggle to forgive, as a parent, if something happened to one of my kids.

Felicia

Yes. And this sort of blind thing, "you've got to forgive" is part of positive psychology. I'd like to see a study done where a forgiveness practice is compared with an acceptance practice. I'd be very surprised if you'd find much difference between them.

Bob

I assume the dependent variable would be their wellbeing.

Felicia

Yes, the wellbeing of the individual.

*Gratitude*

Bob

Fascinating. Okay what about gratitude?

Felicia

I think there's such a lot of evidence for the benefits of gratitude and appreciation, those sorts of things. I don't have any problems with any of that. I just think gratitude practices are one of the most fantastic things we can do for ourselves and others. If you want to express gratitude to someone and you feel okay about doing it in a letter or over the phone or in person or in any other way, go for it. That's good. But keep in mind that formulaic things like writing a gratitude letter and delivering it does not work across all cultures.

Bob

A lot of interventions are like that, i.e. don't work across all cultures.

Felicia

I think that's right. But even if you don't express gratitude, even the experience of gratitude has such a positive effect. I remember, a long time ago before I'd ever heard of Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) ... as I think you know I've got this pretty severe eye condition I've had since childhood - I only have peripheral vision; I have no central vision. Reading a book or signs or anything is completely impossible. And I remember thinking to myself one day, oh, poor eyes, I'm so grateful to you for trying your best to help me, and it's not your fault. You can't help me. It was a mixture of gratitude and compassion. I think my eyes were doing their very best, but they just didn't have the ability. That was actually a lovely moment when I realized that.

Bob

What did you realize?

Felicia

I realized that I couldn't blame my eyes. Something had happened. It wasn't their fault. I didn't say, "Eyes you're letting me down". It was my poor eyes. They're doing their best. It's not their fault.

Bob

And that expression of compassion led to?

Felicia

Oh, it just led to greater acceptance of what I was experiencing, of the hardship of not being able to see.

Bob

And how long have you not been able to see?

Felicia

Since age 10, but it initially was quite slow in progression. Although I couldn't see the blackboard in primary school, I could still read books and I think most books when I was at university. But then I stopped being able to read books and most other things and stop being able to see faces.

Bob

So, with such a challenge, how have you managed with all of your research?

Felicia

I think I became quite good at listening to teachers and lecturers, and the notes I made at university were always good; other people were always wanting to borrow my notes because the notes were good.

Bob

From listening.

Felicia

From listening. I used to take a lot in orally. I suppose that was a big help. Now technology has assisted, for example to read I enlarge things by 16 times on my computer monitor. So, there's only maybe half a dozen words on the screen, but I can read them that way or I can get it to read to me. Today there's so many ways around. I'm very dependent on Siri dictating messages and doing things for me. But it's a great time to have a disability when there is such good technology out there to support you. When something is a developmental disorder, you just get accustomed to it. I mean, my lovely ophthalmologist says that people who have nothing like as much macular degeneration as I do, simply cannot manage the things I can manage. But it's because I've been doing it over the years, over decades, I've been learning

how to adapt. Whereas for these people for whom it just comes on very suddenly, it's a terrible loss. They haven't had all those decades to adapt.

*Toxic positivity*

Bob

What do you think of the concept of toxic positivity?

Felicia

Oh, I think that exists.

Bob

What does it mean to you?

Felicia

You sometimes see someone saying, "oh yes, but put the best gloss on it". Or expecting you to be positive in spite of whatever has happened or how you're feeling. It's often an expectation from someone else wanting you to respond in a positive way, rather than staying with you in your pain or discomfort or whatever it is.

Bob

It's almost denying the other person the right to complain or to be negative in their pain?

Felicia

Absolutely that's a good way to put it.

Bob

Do you think we've gone overboard with positive psychology?

Felicia

Some people I think have, but it was never the intention of positive psychology, that you had to be positive at all costs. I don't think it was ever like that.

*Felicia on the intention of positive psychology*

Bob

What was the intention of positive psychology?

Felicia

Just to change the focus; to use a different lens and instead of always using the negativity lens, to recognize there was also a different lens, to shift the lens from the negativity bias. The fact that we have a negativity bias appears to be certainly true, but to overcome that and recognize that, yes there are negatives, there are sad, bad, experiences and so on, but there's also good ones and to spend more of our time looking at the good things, the positive things, and to recognize how helpful that is. The idea is that when we learn the attitudes, skills and practice for doing that, it improves our overall wellbeing, our resilience and our ability to manage when things are genuinely tough, rather than slide into a depression or anxiety because we don't have those abilities to refocus.

*Felicia on wellbeing as a state, trait or process?*

Bob

What a wonderful array of topics we're covering here. Let's try another, do you think wellbeing is a trait, a state or a process?

Felicia

All three. It certainly can be a state. This person is currently in a state of wellbeing, feeling contented, and because of something that they've done, or some things someone else has done.

So certainly, a state. It becomes a trait when you practice it. I guess it can become your go-to thing and so it's more like a trait. It's also very much a process. That is, in order to achieve wellbeing, there are things that you need to put in place, like acceptance of the fact that there isn't wellbeing all the time.

Bob

The temporality of wellbeing... if it's a trait, a state, and a process all at the same time, how do you research it?

Felicia

I didn't say all at the same time, I just said it can be each of those. So when you are learning positive psychology, you're going through a process where you retrain the way you approach the difficulties and the pleasantness of life, so that's a process and that means that you more often have periods of being in wellbeing, which you could say "that's a state wellbeing" and then in turn, if you continue to practice, then you could almost say "you have a trait". I mean, I don't know if it's helpful to use those words, particularly wellbeing as a trait.

Bob

The reason I asked is because many research proposals and articles make a point to conceptualize wellbeing, whether as a state, trait or process.

Felicia

Yes, I can see how that could be helpful and important. Look, people do define things differently and put their stamp on things, and maybe there's a genuine difference that needs to be made. I personally don't make it.

### *Felicia – General personal reflections*

Bob

As we're talking, is there anything coming to mind that you want to talk about?

Felicia

When we first began the interviews, I spent whole nights just thinking about it. Things that I should have added, things I should have qualified, and things that need checking and I haven't been doing that lately. I'm so in awe of the huge task you and Aaron have taken on to reread this, to make sense of it, to put it into a good flow. I am so incredibly grateful. Something that I mentioned before is that Julian (Felicia's son) has been reading "Glimpses" (a set of reflections on Felicia's life prepared by her family for her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday) to me. Very few are relevant to my work, but it's been fun to be reminded of some of those things.

My 60<sup>th</sup> was in the Blue Mountains (Australia) where we rented out this gorgeous place with lots of accommodation and a most beautiful central area with a deep fireplace, sitting all around and sharing beautiful meals. Everybody stayed together for a couple of days over a weekend. One of the highlights was that I got someone to come in and do drumming with us. He produced a drum for everybody, and there were about 60 people all doing this amazing drumming. It was just so fantastic. My uncle, who was probably then in his late eighties, was very skeptical when he saw these drums coming out. He had the time of his life and everybody adored him! It was a really great celebration.

But then I wanted to do something different for my 70<sup>th</sup> which we did near the Spit Bridge (Sydney, Australia), because that was where we first lived when we arrived in Australia, in Chinaman's Beach, and the Spit Bridge is just around the corner from Chinaman's Beach. Again, there were a lot of people there. I remember Rich Ryan was there, along with huge numbers of family and friends. I thought, you know what, we could do our own Desert Island

Discs (a British BBC radio program, broadcast since 1942, where each week a guest is asked to choose a set of music, a book and a luxury item they would take if they were castaway on an island, all the while discussing their life through these choices). So, Rowan (Felicia's son) interviewed me in a Desert Island Discs fashion, and we've recorded it, and it is fantastic, and I've been listening again to that.

Bob

Felicia, what was it about those two birthday celebrations that you remember was fantastic?

Felicia

I suppose each of them was a way of connecting with people in a very direct way. At a party, if I give a speech, it's not so much about me, it's about all the people there, but the drumming was a way of interconnecting everybody in this marvelous activity that we shared. And the little 'Glimpses' book was also a way of just saying, look, here's a little bit about me without needing to give a speech. And then at the 70<sup>th</sup>, the Desert Island Disc format was also a way of saying, here are some important things that happened in my life. But Rowan (Felicia's son) was just such a brilliant interviewer.

Bob

You're now getting close to 80 so what do you contemplate doing?

Felicia

So, for the 80<sup>th</sup>, what I would just want to do is focus on people, bring together all the wonderful people that I have met and know and love, and make sure they know each other. And it isn't about me. I don't want to hear speeches about me or anything. I just want them to know each other.

Bob

What would that look like?

Felicia

I guess it would be a party, but without seating, it would have to be more cocktail style. And I'd request people to speak to at least five people they don't know, something like that. But also, there are some people I really want to make sure meet a specific other person.

Bob

Whom would you like to meet who?

Felicia

Well, our family charity has funded something called 'Mum for Mum', which is an organization that helps young mothers in the first year of motherhood. I've long been wanting the founder of this to meet Nickolas Yu because Nickolas works with postpartum depression and things like that. I would have you meet my lovely lawyer friend, Michael Appleby, who has a Buddhist background. We've been trying to change the law to make that sector more compassionate and it's now happening with the Global Compassion Coalition, where there is now a subsection on the law that Michael is leading. And I would love you to meet Steve Pozel, who lives in the Blue Mountains, and used to be the director of the Australian Design Center. He has now become more and more interested in mindfulness; he runs courses on mindfulness in art. I've created the list of people who I want to meet each other, and I've given it to the boys (Felicia's sons).

Bob

Excellent. So, you've created the list of the people that you want there and the list of people that you want to meet other people?

Felicia

No, I haven't said who I want them to meet. I think that can happen organically. But these are good people. I would love them to know each other and share their friendship and wisdom I have so much valued<sup>3</sup>.

Bob

So, at your 80<sup>th</sup>, you were thinking about this social connection. And at your 70<sup>th</sup> with the Desert Island Discs, you talked about your favorite songs, music, and things like that. Has any of that changed over the last decade.

Felicia

Interestingly, I would agree with all my choices at the time, but I hadn't at the time heard the music 'Compassion'. It's a piece that was written by Nigel Westlake, who's one of Australia's top composers, and sung by Lior, this very beautiful singer-songwriter (Westlake & Lior, 2013). This was one of the things that I learned at the 'Happiness and its Causes' conference, many years ago. There was a discussion between this beautiful young man, Lior and this middle-aged composer, Nigel Westlake. What had happened was Nigel's son had been killed, and it was utterly devastating. He couldn't write anything for years, then he heard a piece by Lior which sparked something in him where he thought that maybe he could work with this person and get back his love of composition. So, the two of them started to work together and they wrote this beautiful piece called 'Compassion', and its alternate Hebrew and Arabic verses. Lior's idea was that one verse would be sung by an Israeli and the next verse by an Arab, integrating humanity. But Nigel said, "No, I want you to sing it all". So Lior sings both in Arabic and Hebrew, and he's got the most exquisite voice across a phenomenal range. I've listened to it many times, and seen it performed with the Sydney Symphony. So that would definitely be in there now. It's such an exquisite piece. And they've just collaborated on a new work that unfortunately I missed out on while I was in hospital. My passion, of course, is classical music and especially opera. Though it (my Desert Island Disc collection) did end with John Lennon's 'Imagine' (1971).

*Felicia – On her legacy*

Bob

Felicia, what would you hope your legacy to be?

Felicia

In a way, I'm not interested. I'm not sure I particularly want to have a legacy. I mean, if I've written interesting things, given talks that inspired people, helped people in some way to rethink things, that's lovely. I don't feel I need a legacy, and one thing that's interesting for me is that there are many different styles of lecturing. There are people who sort of harangue "this is how it is" and they can be very impressive, and there's others who are obviously brilliant in telling you how brilliant they are. I think most times I have never been that. It's always been: I found out this amazing stuff, I just want to share it with you; it's always been about sharing. If anything, that I've done is still significant, then I'm very happy for it to be shared, and if it's no longer significant, so what, things move on. I don't feel I need a capital "L" legacy.

Bob

What are the things that you feel were significant?

Felicia

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<sup>3</sup> Author note: Felicia didn't quite make it to her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, but her family have arranged a Celebration Event to be held in Sydney on 19<sup>th</sup> December which will provide this chance for interesting people to meet and connect. (Free) tickets must be obtained at <https://events.humanitix.com/celebration-of-felicia>. The event will also be streamed online.

I think we've talked about them quite a bit - about the importance of trying to measure things in a way that isn't just based on personal preference, but to try and define them objectively in some way. About the importance of the population perspective, the importance of longitudinal studies, and of evidence. I mean, just always thinking about "what is the evidence for this?".

Bob

So, the significant things you've done have produced the evidence.

Felicia

That's been a big part. Evidence plus some of the measures, I think, as well. But back in the 1970s when we had the CAMDEX (Cambridge Mental Dementia Examination: Roth et al., 1986; Roth et al., 1988), everyone was using it and now it's moved on, and people use other things and that's fine. I was a co-developer because I started out in aging.

## **Interview 4 – August 2**

### *Final Interview on the importance of Philosophers*

Bob

Felicia in a recent email, you expressed a desire to find a place to add something you feel would be helpful for psychologists and other behavioural scientists in the field of wellbeing and positive psychology to pay attention to, that is, the excellent work being undertaken by philosophers.

Felicia

Yes, first Anna Alexandrova from the University of Cambridge, who's done some thoughtful work on defining wellbeing, diverse groups, and including people with disability (Alexandrova, 2017). Second, Kristján Kristjánsson from the Jubilee Center for Character in Virtues in Birmingham, who's made major contributions to positive psychology within the field of education (Kristjánsson, 2010). Dan Haybron from St. Louis University, who received a major Templeton Award on happiness and wellbeing, which funded the Randomized Control Trial (RCT) I undertook with Nickolas and others on wellbeing and compassion training of nurses (Haybron, 2008). And then Simon Keller from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, with whom I was a co-author on the first paper published in mainstream philosophy on self-compassion (Keller & Huppert, 2021). I would also like to mention a brilliant and more readable book, 'The Good Ancestor' by Roman Krznaric (2021).

Bob

Please tell me about The Good Ancestor and why it is important to you.

Felicia

It's fantastic. The author has previously done fantastic work on empathy, for instance. But this book is all about how we can be good ancestors to future generations by taking a long-term perspective and what he calls "cathedral thinking", that is, starting projects that may not benefit us during our lifetimes, but are going to benefit others. One of the powerful things is his claim that humans have always done this. He gives amazing examples of long-term thinking that has benefited many future generations. He goes back, I think a thousand years in one case in Iran, but takes cases from around the world, for example the big stink in London, and how that led to the creation of the sewage system which is still being used today. What I love about the book, is that it is just so gripping, it's so easy to read and yes, I would love more people in our field to know about it.

Bob

Wonderful, what would you hope people might get out of it?

Felicia

Well, one of the big points I have made in these interviews is the need to be more future oriented, both environmentally and socially and to really think about future generations. It is not just the individual, organisation and system now, but about longer-term thinking. I just think this is such a wonderful example of long-term thinking across many areas. If we could have that kind of thinking within wellbeing and positive psychology, I think that would be a great asset.

Bob

So, what led you to think about philosophers?

Felicia

Oh, it's that I resumed reading *The Good Ancestor* recently and I'm just loving it.

Bob

Out of interest, what would be your top two books of all time?

Felicia

Oh, my goodness, I don't know if I want to answer that. I don't think I can, because I find that when I go back to books, they're very different to how I understood them the first time. Whether there's one that sustains all the different changes that I, or the world, has been through, I'm not sure. I don't think I can answer that.

Bob

Okay. Tell me about Anna Alexandrova who you mention.

Felicia

She's an incredibly vibrant young philosopher, originally from Russia but has been in Cambridge for many years. She's got such a breadth of thinking and such a huge perspective on wellbeing. She's in the Department of History and talks on philosophy of science, and she, like Dan Haybron, are among the philosophers who have dared take their ideas from evidence, from empiricism, because it was quite frowned upon at one stage. Philosophy is often not about science and evidence, philosophy is something else, but they've all recognised that the two can be integrated in important ways.

Bob

What about Kristján Kristjánsson?

Felicia

He is Icelandic but has been working in the Centre for Character and Virtues in Birmingham and really challenging some of the ways positive psychology is understood and applied to education.

Bob

In what ways is he challenging?

Felicia

I can't remember now the details, but I think on things like strengths theory, he very directly challenges some of those assumptions and whether they're necessarily the way things work.

Bob

Dan Haybron?

Felicia

I just think he's a good thinker. And Simon Keller was the philosopher on the Templeton Grant that we got, and he was an absolute delight to work with. He is someone who thinks so clearly, but he's also a very approachable and a great communicator. One of the outcomes of our project was that he got very interested in self-compassion as an idea. And there's been a lot

written in mainstream philosophy about compassion, but according to Simon, this had never been done before for self-compassion. He led on this lovely article that we wrote (Keller & Huppert, 2021).

Bob

You mentioned in your email that you think it would be very helpful for psychologists and behavioural scientists, and for wellbeing and positive psychology, to spend more time becoming familiar and understanding the work of the philosophers you have mentioned.

Felicia

Oh, look, many of us can think in various very shallow ways about the things that we are doing. One is obviously not taking in the bigger picture, not always looking at the context, for instance, which we've spoken about before. But also, because philosophers are trained to think deeply about things, I think it can sharpen our approach when we really listen to the good philosophers in this area.

Bob

What do you think comes through from philosophers about wellbeing that's different than the scientists?

Felicia

I think they start from the basics. What are the concepts and constructs? Who's defining them? Are there different ways to think about them? So rather than just doing another study on whatever it is, for example, gratitude in this group compared with this or that before and after an intervention event, the philosophers think more deeply about what gratitude is. What is gratitude? What is character? And they delve more deeply into the ideas behind it and how the thinking is developed.

Author note: This was the last interview conducted before Felicia's death; she was determined to get her points on the contributions of philosophers captured in these notes. Felicia was also open that this was the last time we would speak before her death and as such I asked her if there were any last thoughts she would like to add? Her response which she asked me to capture was simply a note of gratitude: "I just want to say thank you. It's been an extraordinary gift from Aaron, the journal, from you and for Nita's help and a lot of it was quite fun!".

### **3. Robert and Aaron's thoughts and reflections**

#### ***Bob's reflections***

Felicia was humble and modest, and this led her to resist discussions about her legacy. I was reminded recently that legacy is often about the many micro-moments of life when a person like Felicia had the opportunity to coach, guide, mentor, teach and just be present with. Given this, Felicia's legacy will be positive and enduring, and manifest through several pathways, including: the positive psychology and wellbeing science she contributed to; her immediate and extended family she has poured love into; the network of friends and colleagues who she has mentored, influenced, loved and shared life with; the content of these wonderful interviews where, despite being in pain and contemplating her end of life, she sought to share her wisdom, learnings, knowledge and hopes for the future of the world. Her loving kindness, compassion, caring, humility, appreciation of beauty, zest, curiosity and courage marked her life and will live on through the people she has touched, the knowledge she has created and the wisdom she has shared.

While her body has gone, her spirit will live on. In my last interview her curiosity as to what happened at the European Conference on Positive Psychology in Austria (2024) consumed her until she was able to have a lovely conversation with Aaron Jarden about what had been discussed at the conference. Moreover, Felicia left an agenda for further work, including: getting the work she and Nickolas Yu did on the impact of compassion, coaching, and mindfulness interventions with nurses published, so others can benefit from it; getting the Wellbeing Pro measure tested with Australian and other population sets; inspiring studies comparing forgiveness and acceptance; inspiring Nickolas to share his knowledge of positive parenting; inspiring more studies on collective wellbeing and her drive to have us think much more about “we” than “me” and to parse apart individual and collective wellbeing; and her hope to inspire more work towards an Australian wellbeing economy.

Finally, as I reflect on my many interactions with Felicia and specifically these interviews, my life has been enriched from her wisdom, mentoring, knowledge, compassion and most of all her ability to create a loving nonjudgmental presence when with her. Felicia contributed much as she travelled the world and right up until her passing, she was seeking to both learn and contribute more. My journey with Felicia was both scholarly and personal and, like many others who have noted, she made a positive difference in my life. She is a loss to us individually and collectively, but she will live on through us – that’s the greatest legacy she would have hoped for.

### *Aaron's reflections*

Felicia was one of my mentors, and a person who I hugely admired and respected. She was one of my heroes, a fierce woman, driven by values and morals and the will to do the right thing no matter what, and with a visionary approach to creating the world we want to live in and not afraid to pursue and voice this. Felicia taught me many lessons about quality of research and science in particular, for which I have always been incredibly grateful and honoured to have benefited from her time and wisdom. Also to always think bigger and take on real world problems. It is undeniable that she had an incredible impact on me, others and society. I would contend she was an exemplar of positive human flourishing.

One of the last impressions I have of Felicia is regarding the way she made me feel in our conversations. I think individuals can often forget what people say, and what they do, but you never really forget how people make you feel. In line with this my favourite quote of all time is by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm”. I have known Felicia for a long time and across this time, I can confidently say that every single conversation I had with Felicia was infused with a great sense of enthusiasm, regardless of the topic we discussed. This generally left me feeling enthusiastic and excited also. For example, earlier this year we had breakfast and Felicia had just come back from a walk around the park. After commenting on the quality of the status of the literature between nature and wellbeing (which she viewed as not particularly strong), she was wondering why people play music in parks on loudspeakers, interrupting the tranquillity others were seeking, when the whole point of a park is to get away from technology and into nature. It’s hard to express, but it was the vigour and enthusiasm when she was describing this circumstance that just made me just lean in and want for more. I will miss these insights and conversations.

### **4. Selected messages, acknowledgements, and memories**

The messages below were received by the authors prior to Felicia’s passing. For additional messages, acknowledgements and memories, or to add some of your own please see:

<https://www.kudoboard.com/boards/kVM40jSO/feliciahuppert>

- *The Australian Compassion Council Scholars Network.*

The members of the ACC Scholars Network wish to honour the significant contribution to research into compassion science made by its Director, Professor Felicia Huppert. The Network was established in 2018 and comprises researchers from across Australia. Over the years it has partnered with the University of Sydney's Body, Heart and Mind in Business Research Centre to hold annual conferences to support and encourage this research and its application in business, health, education, and other organisational and policy settings. Felicia's energy and world-class expertise has advanced compassion science in Australia in a way that simply wouldn't have happened without her directorship of this network. We are all immensely proud to have been her colleagues and to have shared her journey in compassion science, and we will be dedicating the upcoming special issue of the Australian Journal of Management on Compassion in Organisations in her memory. We believe that our fractured world is in desperate need of compassion and so we send Felicia our loving wishes with thanks for her being.

- *The Body, Heart and Mind (BHM) in Business Group.*

In the realm of wellbeing research, Felicia was not only a leading authority, but a beacon of wisdom and compassion. On behalf of all members of the Body, Heart & Mind (BHM) in Business Group, we want to say how incredibly honoured we feel to have had the opportunity to work closely with Felicia over the many years. As honorary professor of BHM, her critical mindset and unwavering dedication to advancing the science of wellbeing have left an indelible mark on all who had the privilege to work alongside her, guiding us toward a deeper understanding of the human experience. Helena and Anya, on behalf of the BHM in Business Group.

- *Paul Atkins, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, Australia.*

Felicia combines the very best of a fierce intellect, a kind heart and a wise soul. It saddens me greatly to hear of her being so ill and near to death. I will miss her. I too wish to send her and her family all my love for a peaceful and loving passing. Warm regards.

- *Darren Coppin, Azurum, Australia.*

You profoundly inspired and influenced me beyond what you have ever imagined. I was about to give up on my PhD when you rescued my enthusiasm, my ongoing work... Something garnered by you will have direct ripples in the decades of thousands of people effected beyond that. Thank you so much for your compassion, honesty, wicked humor, and generous spirit. I will be deeply happy if I can ever claim to have possessed a fraction of your personality, grace, humility, and impact.

- *Sue Emmett, Federation University, Australia.*

I would like to say a deep thank you to Felicia for her inspirational, selfless and crucial work she has carried out over so many years. She will be such a loss to so many, and I feel honoured to carry on her work because of the inspiration she has offered me. I am so very sad.

- *Amy Finlay-Jones, Curtin School of Population Health, Curtin University, Australia.*

I am so sorry to learn of Felicia's illness and will be holding her and her family in metta (loving kindness) and compassion through this difficult time. Felicia is such a bright spark and has been an inspiration for me across the course of my career. I am very grateful to have known her. Warm regards.

- *Dora Gudrun Gudmundsdottir, Director of Public Health, Iceland.*

When I was looking for a mentor I heard about this extraordinary woman, Professor Felicia Huppert, who was a pioneer in combining the field of psychology and public health, focusing on epidemiology of wellbeing and promotion of mental health. Therefore, I was so excited when Felicia accepted to become my mentor. In 2010, I moved with my whole family from Iceland to Cambridge. I didn't realise until later how extremely lucky I was, not only did I get the best mentor in the world for my work, but also one of my greatest friends, who opened her heart and home for me and my family. She has a special gift in connecting great people. She held the best parties where she invited people with different backgrounds who all shared the passion for making the world a better place.

- *Rick Hanson, Greater Good Science Center, University of California Berkeley, USA.*

I knew Felicia as a pivotal supporter of the emerging Global Compassion Coalition. I will never forget her remarkable combination of warmheartedness, candour, intellect, and polite yet fierce commitment to the welfare of others. She is a beautiful bright spirit and will be sorely missed.

- *Shannon Hoefen Cerasoli, MPA, Director Center for Self-Determination Theory, USA.*

Richard Ryan informed me about Felicia and I'm so sorry to hear this news. Rich has the fondest memories with her and of course, she has a remarkable legacy!

- *Todd Barrett Kashdan, The Well-Being Laboratory, George Mason University, USA.*

Dr. Felicia Huppert is a giant in wellbeing science. She is such an important figure because her emphasis on improving wellbeing and reducing disorders might differ depending on the part of the world. Unlike many of us, her work did not suffer from a lack of diversity in samples studied (the obsession with Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic areas). As such, her work will last the test of time.

I remember being on a bus sitting next to her in Australia, traveling from one positive psychology conference to the next. She asked me, "Why are you so playful on stage?", I explained my thoughts on pedagogy and the importance of attending to an audience's curiosity and vitality. We spoke for nearly an hour about educating the public about science on that trip. As we got off, she gently grabbed my arm to tell me her opinion changed. She was a serious woman who took science seriously and produced great science. On that bus, I realized how candid and open she is. How comfortable she is having uncomfortable conversations. By the end of that trip, we were no longer strangers. We were two very different personalities who really wanted to work together with big plans to do so. I regret it never happened. But she knows how much I respect her work, cite her work, love her work - because I told her. We should all be so fortunate to know the people we respect know this.

- *Simon Keller, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.*

I worked with Felicia as part of a grant on compassion and wellbeing, and over several years, from 2017-2021, we worked together on a paper about the virtue of self-compassion. Our paper was a contribution to moral philosophy, and was published in a philosophy journal, so it was outside her main areas of expertise. We also started out with quite different views and methodological approaches. Over the years, however, we conversed and argued, and she gently convinced me of the views that she knew were right all along. I visited her several times in Coogee (Australia) and was always grateful for her warmth and welcoming attitude, and for the meals we shared and the walks we took together by the beach. I never expected that she would take such an interest in me or my work, but she remembered everything we talked about, always asked after my family, and always had recommendations of things for me to do in Sydney based on what she remembered about

my interests. She was a sharp, versatile, resourceful thinker, and a deeply kind person - and always fun to be around.

- *Vanessa King, Action for Happiness, UK.*

One of my first meetings with Felicia (Feleecia as I learnt her name is pronounced) was in Beijing. It was 2010 and the first positive psychology conference in China. Felicia was a keynote speaker. I had just completed my Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) degree at UPenn and knew of her as the prominent Professor of Psychology at Cambridge University and the leading UK academic in the Science of Wellbeing. Far from being unapproachable, she was warm, friendly and open and curious about the world. I remember fondly sharing a delicious Chinese hotpot meal with her and Chris Peterson, Nansook Park and other MAPP colleagues and how engaging and enjoyable the conversation was. Felicia became a dear friend, colleague and co-author. Amongst her numerous, formidable professional talents and personal strengths, Felicia was a wonderful facilitator of connections between others. She loved bringing people together to expand mutual interests, share and develop ideas. She was a superb conversationalist too. I shall treasure memories of phone calls with her catching up both personally and on the latest research she'd conducted or had read, as well as novels, art and music; and exploring and developing ideas together. The field has lost a bright, leading light and an excellent scientist. Her contribution to the field includes comprehensive, robust measures of wellbeing and studies on mindfulness and compassion to name a few, all built on a background in neuroscience, gerontology and epidemiology. Her legacy will live on and continue to help move the science forward. Personally, I will miss her very much. I have lost a dear friend.

- *James Kirby, Compassionate Mind Research Group, University of Queensland, Australia.*

Felicia is just a total powerhouse, deeply committed to positive change, fun, intelligent, passionate and so supportive. My goodness what a sad, sad loss. Sending all my love to her and her family, best wishes.

- *Kristján Kristjánsson, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham, UK.*

Felicia has been a leading light in developing a credible positive psychological conception of wellbeing. I benefited enormously from various annual meetings with her in recent years when she visited Cambridge. A true force of nature and a trusted friend.

- *Lindsay G. Oades, Faculty of Education, The University of Melbourne, Australia.*

I have long admired Felicia and the range of important work over an extended period. Felicia had a sharp mind and a warm heart. It was just last week we used her helpful definition of wellbeing. I fondly remember Felicia meeting me many years ago on my visit to the University of Cambridge and the genuine interest she showed in me as an emerging researcher. Then back in Australia, once again she was encouraging me about work on mental health recovery, always looking to improve wellbeing in different contexts. We will miss Felicia.

- *Isaac Prilleltensky, University of Miami, USA.*

Felicia was a powerful force behind the development of wellbeing science. She played a vital role in understanding what makes people happy, healthy, and positive contributors to their families, work, and community. In our interactions, I was always in awe of her humility, humanity, intellect, compassion, and passion for improving lives and the world.

- *Lynne Reeder, Charter for Compassion, Federation University, Australia.*

Felicia's intelligent questioning and deep curiosity had such a positive impact on my life. She has both a powerful intellect and a compassionate mind and heart, and this integration

is so important in today's world. I will honour Felicia's life and my friendship with her by always asking the question that lies underneath. Thank you, Felicia, go gently. Much love.

- *Kai Ruggeri, Department of Health Policy & Management, Columbia University, USA.*

Felicia changed the world at a time the world needed to change. People who interacted with Felicia – personally or even just through her work – changed how we viewed the world. Without Felicia, researchers, governments, employers, and, most importantly, individuals, would still be decades behind where we are in our understanding of mental health, why we should care so much about it, and what truly improves wellbeing. She fought for people to care about wellbeing when no one did, fought with people who tried to stop her from making an impact, and then when mental health became popular to discuss, fought for the field to have higher standards. Though she was the consummate academic, her impact went far beyond; by teaching us that health and wellbeing are more than the absence of illness, she made life better for us. The presence of Felicia made that possible.

- *Martin E. P Seligman, University of Pennsylvania, USA.*

I treasure the memory of walking the path south from Bondi Beach for miles with Felicia discussing the future of positive psychology and of the psychology of physical health. So much insight, beauty and vitality packed into one small frame.

- *Katherine Trebeck, Wellbeing Economy Alliance.*

It is quite extraordinary to me that I have only met Felicia in person once, yet she feels like someone I have known for a long time. Her warmth, collegiality, support and thoughtfulness were clear from our first zoom call. Her instincts in introducing me to fantastic people and the immediate connection I felt with others who also count her as a friend speaks to Felicia's incredible innate insights about those who are blessed to know her. The world - and my little world - have been better because she was in it. With love and thanks.

- *Nickolas Yu, Humankind Meditation, Australia.*

Felicia was an inspiration, with a big heart and a beautiful mind. She lived not just for herself but for others, and for the world. Her legacy is the love and service that she lived. The world has lost a bright light. I have lost a dear friend. But I will cherish that I came to know this 'emissary of light' who gently (and at times, fiercely) shook the world with kindness.

- *André Ferster Marmot (Felicia's nephew) (Extracted from Felicia's Kudos memorial board).*

Sharp-tongued  
Dark-eyed  
Joyful-hearted  
Brave-souled  
Giver of perfect gifts we didn't know we needed  
Open-minded  
Always learning  
No fool suffering  
Hardly seeing  
Collector of aboriginal art  
Positive thinking  
Deeply loving  
Warmly welcoming  
Harbinger of mindfulness

Born in Samarkand in 45 in the shadow of the darkness  
Grown in Sydney 50s 60s  
Shadow must not be mentioned  
Aged in Cambridge 80s 90s  
Beloved mother  
Tolerant wife  
Until a certain breaking point  
Back to Sydney  
Loved as Grandma  
Loved the smell of salt at Coogee  
Died in Sydney in 24  
At peace and voluntarily in presence of your sons and sister  
Immaculately organised  
Down to your own auto-response  
I am sure I would have appreciated your email  
But I died at home on Tuesday  
But thank you all the same  
We will miss you deeply  
But like my mum said  
The body is gone  
The love continues  
Always

## 5. Biography

Professor Felicia Huppert was a psychologist with a long-standing research interest in the science of wellbeing and the promotion of human flourishing. Her work brought together approaches from cognitive psychology and neuropsychology with a population perspective derived from epidemiology. Felicia advised governments and international bodies on the measurement of wellbeing, and on policies to enhance wellbeing. She spent decades based in England, where she was Founding Director of the Well-being Institute at the University of Cambridge, and Emeritus Professor of Psychology. She also held positions including Honorary Professor at The University of Sydney's Body, Heart and Mind in Business Research Group, and Visiting Professorial Fellow, Department of Psychology, University of New South Wales, Sydney. Felicia was a member of the Australian Expert Group of the Global Mindfulness Initiative and was Director of the Australian Compassion Council Scholars Program.

Professor Huppert obtained her bachelor's degree at The University of Sydney, receiving first class honours in psychology, a master's degree in psychology at the University of California, San Diego, and a Ph.D. from the Department of Experimental Psychology at the University of Cambridge. She was a Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and of Darwin College, Cambridge. Professor Huppert was past Chair of the European Network for Positive Psychology (ENPP), and a past Member of the Board of Directors of the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA). She was a member of the Measuring National Well-being Technical Advisory Group of the UK Office for National Statistics, and a Member of the UN Expert Group on Happiness and Wellbeing: Defining A New Economic Paradigm.

Biography source: <https://feliciahuppert.com/index.php/elementor-217/>

## 6. Areas of research

- Evaluation of mindfulness and compassion interventions for individuals, schools, healthcare and organisational settings.
- Application of high quality multi-dimensional measures of subjective wellbeing to guide research and policy.
- Extending principles of positive psychology to create flourishing societies and a flourishing environment.
- Developing a wellbeing framework using theories and evidence from positive psychology and wellbeing science.
- Research on positive aging and dementia, including the development of a standardised instrument for the diagnosis of dementia in the elderly.

## 7. Selected publications

### 7.1 Books

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### 7.2 Book chapters

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### 7.3 Published papers

Anderson, J., Ruggeri, K., Steemers, K., & Huppert, F. (2017). Lively social space, well-being activity, and urban design: Findings from a low-cost community-led public space intervention. *Environment and Behavior*, 49(6), 685–716.

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For an extended list of publications, see:

<https://feliciahuppert.com/index.php/extended-publications/>

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