What makes me happy is...

I think I was definitely born happy, and then life happens.

I'm getting a bit emotional here.

I feel very happy.

Very happy. I'm happier now than when I lived in New York

and I got paid probably twice as much in New York as I do

here. Our happiness is kind of like quiet happiness, kind

of a stillness. What does it take to be happy?

The Nordic countries seem to have it all figured out.

Finland and Denmark have consistently topped the United

Nations' most prestigious index, the World Happiness

Report, in all six areas of life satisfaction.

How have they cracked the formula?

And, are the people they are really the happiest?

The United Nations just named the happiest place on Earth.

It is not Disneyworld.

It's Finland. In 2019, the World Happiness Report named

Finland the happiest country in the world for the second

year in a row. Denmark came in second place after claiming

the top slot in 2013 and 2016.

Year after year, Nordic countries like Norway, Iceland and

Sweden round out the top of the list.

Enter Jeffrey Sachs, a professor at Columbia and the

co-editor of the World Happiness Report.

What do those countries have?

They have a high level of prosperity, to be sure, but

they're not the richest countries in the world by any

means. The idea is a good balance of life.

You don't have to get super rich to be happy, they believe.

In fact, if someone's super rich, they, look, what's wrong

with that person? So they're not societies that are aiming

for all of the effort and time to becoming gazillionaires.

They're looking for a good balance of life and the results

are extremely positive.

The annual happiness ranking began in 2012, but we can

trace measuring happiness back to 1971.

It came in the inspiration of the country of Bhutan, a

country in the Himalayas that many people know for its

innovation of attempting to measure gross national

happiness. Globally, a standard for measuring success and

productivity is gross national product.

Bhutan had the bright idea of trying to measure happiness.

Measuring happiness is a fairly complicated business.

First of all, we need to understand what happiness means.

It means the satisfaction with the way one's life is going.

It's not primarily a measure of whether one laughed or

smiled yesterday, but how one feels about the course of

one's life. Meet Meik Wiking, happiness researcher and CEO

of the Happiness Research Institute in Denmark.

There is a lot of factors that impact happiness, everything

from biology to income levels to the city they live in.

But I think the best predictor we see in the data of

whether people are happy or not is whether they're

satisfied or happy with their relationships.

So, do we have somebody we can rely on in times of need?

Do we have somebody we can share our hopes and worries

with? These six categories help account for the differences

in life satisfaction around the world.

GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make

life choices, social support, generosity, and absence of

corruption. On average, richer countries are happier.

On average, richer people are happier.

But, once we get to a certain level of income, an

additional $100 a month is not going to impact how people

feel about their lives. So, with money, like with

everything else, we see diminishing marginal return.

And I don't know why I'm bringing up this quote, because

it's extremely corny, but there is a Kanye West song in

which he says that, "Having money is not everything.

Not having it is." And I do think that's true in the sense

that when you don't have it, it's all you worry about.

And when you do have money, you can actually worry about

other stuff. Happiness also seems like this elusive thing.

We have two words for happiness in Danish.

So we have "lykke," which is the elusive thing.

The thing you experience once every blue moon.

And then we have to be "glad," like the word glad, which is

different because it's more down to Earth and you can be

glad despite the fact that it's not anything special, it's

no special day.

Lykke seems like this elusive thing that you can't quite

chase. To be glad is more like our mindset.

So I feel more like I choose to be glad at times rather

than sort of trying to chase happiness because that seems

like it's never going to happen that way.

Maria lives in Helsinki with her husband, Duke, and her

2-year-old son, Luka.

Woah! Wow! Ah, hi! Yeah! There it is. There it is, you

little monster.

Finland is the best place to have kids.

When you go give birth, it's almost free.

We stayed in the hospital three full days as a family.

We had our own family room and we got like meals and

support and help and everything.

And the bill was about €300 in the end.

It's basically like living in a hotel.

In Finland, new mothers receive a free baby box jam-packed

with 63 items to help with the baby's first year.

You don't have to buy anything for the first two, three

months. Of course, diapers and stuff like that, but

basically. And also, you can actually put your baby to

sleep in that box.

Our baby actually, Luka slept in the box for the first

month. Finland, along with the other Nordic countries,

offers generous parental leave.

Anu Partanen, author of "The Nordic Theory of Everything,"

spent 10 years as a journalist in the U.S.

before returning to her home country, Finland.

She's also a mother. In Finland, you get 10 months of paid

parental leave, out of which about four months is set aside

for the mother and you start it before the baby is born and

then father can keep nine weeks.

Typically, both parents stay home for the first three

weeks. They share the rest of the time until the baby is

nine months old.

A parent can even stay home until the child is 3 years old

and keep his or her job.

However, the stipend is much smaller.

Another determinant of well-being is one's sense of

personal freedom to make important life choices.

Can you shape your life the way you want?

Christina was unhappy at her job in advertising and took an

eight-month break. Social security is also something I

think is very important.

What I did didn't make me happy and it didn't let me have

that work-life balance that we cherish so much here.

And so we have a system that made it possible for me to

quit my job and have some thinking time and figure out, you

know, what's my next step in life.

Christina received about $2,000 a month from the Danish

government while she was unemployed.

She is now in school to become a painter.

Her tuition is covered and she receives an educational

stipend of about $1,000 a month.

Two of the biggest perks of life in Denmark and Finland are

free education and free health care.

Income taxes are not at all as high in the Nordic countries

that Americans tend to think.

However, overall, it is completely true that the Nordic

countries collect more taxes in general than the United

States does. In Finland and the Nordic countries, there are

higher taxes on consumption, like eating in restaurants and

buying jeans. But the thing that I think a lot of Americans

forget is that the Nordic people are happy to pay those

taxes because they get services in return.

Day care, great public education.

It includes your college tuition, free.

It includes healthcare, all of those are included in your

taxes. When the news hit that Finland is the happiest

country in the world, I think most people kind of reacted

to it, like, what are they talking about?

We don't think of ourselves as very happy because it's dark

and gloomy in the winter and whatever.

It's easier for Finns and Danes to shape their lives

because the government supports so many of their basic

needs. The American dream is probably more alive in

Denmark. The perception of freedom is probably also a

little bit different. It seems like in the U.S.

the feeling is you have to be protected from the government

and you have to have freedom from the government.

I think in Denmark the sense is that the government

protects you. People trust other people.

You leave a bag in a restaurant in Finland, you're pretty

sure you're going to make it back and the money is still

there. People even leave babies parked in strollers outside

coffee shops while they run errands.

And I think partly the Nordic society cultivates that trust

simply by providing basic services for everyone.

So there's much less poverty, much less feeling of

injustice, inequality, crime.

People get the education they need.

They can have a job. They can work.

They don't have to struggle in life as much.

There isn't super wealth and there's absolutely no super

poverty. Everybody participates.

It turns out it leads to a wonderful kind of life and one

that is expressed, year after year, as making these

countries the happiest countries in the world.

Monica and Alex are expats who live in Copenhagen with

their two teenagers.

Alex is originally from the UK and Monica is originally

from New York.

What else do you need?

The olive oil, and then the balsamic vinegar.

Where's the bowl? We originally came here expecting to stay

only three years, but it was so good, we've been here nine

now. It's also safe.

And this comes back to the community and the trust.

We can let our kids go out and we do not have to sit here

being really worried that, are they going to come back?

Are they safe where they're going?

Do we have to go pick them up?

You still worry, of course, but it's just very different.

There's still this very strong sense of family, friends,

community. Balance is the formula for happiness.

Aristotle had it right when he launched the study of

happiness 2,300 years ago.

According to Aristotle's Golden Mean, good behavior lies

between two vices, excess and deficiency.

People who pursue only money and say, "I'll be happier the

richer I am," turn out to be less happy.

I do think having nice surroundings is a part of happiness.

But I also think it needs to be linked with something that

sort of resonates with you on a deeper level.

Having nice surroundings and having a lot of money and

being in a five-star hotel in Las Vegas doesn't make you

happy at all. So I think it needs to have that balance.

Cue the classic Nordic work-life balance.

Rich Perusi, former New Yorker, has been living in

Copenhagen for seven years.

People stay pretty tight to a 9 to 5 workday.

But I do think that we get as much done in a short period

of time here as we were doing in longer times working in

New York. One of the comments we actually heard when we

first came here was a Dane saying, when she saw someone

working late, "Are they doing it because they can't get

their work done? Is there something wrong with them?"

Versus, "Are they just trying to get ahead in working?"

There is a sense that, yes, work's important and you need

to get your work done to a high quality, but you also need

to make sure it's balanced appropriately.

Saara Alhopuro is a diplomat who has shaped her work

schedule to make time for her passion.

So, I actually need to go to my physical workplace only

three days a week.

So then the rest of the time I can spend here in the middle

of nature. When I walk in the forest, I walk there very

quietly, paying attention to all the small details and all

the colors. Very slowly, and I try to spot all the small,

small details. And I completely lose the track of time.

Usually, I spend about five to six hours picking mushrooms.

People don't make as much money in the Nordic countries as

they do in the U.S.

So, it's not really about how much you make.

You don't have to make as much to get the same quality of

life as you would in the United States.

So, if we look at the dimension called life satisfaction,

we can see that that money does matter for well-being and

happiness. But I mean, on average, richer countries are

happier. On average, richer people are happier.

But, the mechanism here is being without money is a cause

of unhappiness. Not everyone likes to talk about money

either. In Finland, it's been this kind of rule that you

don't talk about money that much, at least like my parents

basically wouldn't tell me how much they made, for example,

if I would ask as a kid.

It would be considered bragging if you would tell about how

much you make, etc. People are happier when they are

generous and when they feel that the society that they're

in is a generous society.

And then we find people want to live in places with decent

government. If government is corrupt, if leaders are

bizarre or autocratic or corrupt, the society is unhappy.

In 2019, Finland elected the world's youngest-serving prime

minister, 34 year old Sanna Marin.

Danes are among the happiest people in the world, but

they're not necessarily the friendliest.

Lars AP, author of "F\*\*\*ing Flink" and founder of the

movement of the same name, wants to change that.

So F\*\*\*ing Flink is a national movement.

Our prime goal is to take Danes that are among the happiest

people in the world, but also being the friendliest people

in the world. Why are we doing this?

Well, because friendliness and positive human interaction

means so much to us. Science shows us that.

And so we're trying to do that in all sectors, in all

realms that we can think of.

Finland and Denmark both have populations of less than 6

million people. The U.S.

has over 330 million people.

The Nordic countries are pretty homogeneous, too.

Do population size and diversity affect happiness?

A lot of countries with relatively homogeneous populations,

similarities among people ethnically or in terms of

religion and so on, are not very happy.

So it's no guarantee.

And on the other hand, it's possible to have a lot of

diversity and more happiness.

Our northern neighbor in the United States, Canada, ranks

higher. Yeah, I think Finland is probably one of the most

homogenous countries in Europe.

Still, we have recently had quite a lot of immigration.

But I would say that still it is fairly homogenous.

I think it's funny because I kind of always, I guess,

assumed that Danish society was kind of diverse.

But then we went to see Dave Chappelle's show here in

Copenhagen and both him and the guy who he had with him as

support kind of opened their show saying, "Denmark is so

white." And I never really thought about that before.

But then, ever since that show, I just think about it all

the time. We've been having immigration for hundreds of

years from all over Europe.

I mean, in the 70s, we had a lot of people from Turkey

coming up, from from Vietnam.

And we had people from Yugoslavia in the 90s.

And Denmark has remained happy throughout that period.

The 2018 World Happiness Report explores happiness among

natives and immigrants.

It shows that when immigrants are happy, the countries are,

too. But if the country is already happy, new immigrants

will experience increased happiness.

It shouldn't undermine happiness in the Nordic countries

that there are influx of people born abroad.

There's also a dark side to happiness.

Like in Denmark, one of the biggest epidemics right now is

stress and people being sick with stress and having to

leave their jobs.

And people outside of Denmark didn't really understand what

that meant, like, "What do you mean stress leave?"

But it might be that expectation to have a work-life

balance here that stresses people out.

That you both have to work, but you also have to take care

of your family. You also have to be social with your

friends. You also have to, you know, do this

self-realization thing, hobbies and traveling.

And there's so much you have to do in the same amount of

hours, whereas maybe in New York or other places, you know

that you're going to work to 10 every day so you don't

expect to have the same balance, you know?

It can be hard for outsiders to break into the Nordic

cultures. The Danes have such tight-knit friend and family

groups. It's not very natural for them to just include

people, new people into their groups.

It is a little harder to come in from the outside to sort

of become part of that group.

We've had some great Danish friends, some met at work, but

it is harder, I think, from that on that side, compared to

the UK and the U.S. in terms of developing friendships.

There can be serious side effects to maintaining high

levels of happiness.

Within the states, if you look at the level of life

satisfaction, the higher the life satisfaction actually

also the slightly higher the level of suicide rates.

And the theory here is that it might be more difficult to

be unhappy in an otherwise happy society because it creates

a stronger contrast to how you are feeling if you are

surrounded by very happy people.

So Denmark actually used to have really high suicide rates.

So in 1980, we had suicide rates of around 40 per 100,000,

which was I think some of the highest in the world.

Now, fortunately, it's around 25% of that, so it's around

10 per 100,000.

South Korea and Lithuania have some of the highest suicide

rates in the OECD as of 2017.

So fortunately, suicide rates have been reduced a lot in

Denmark. And also in Finland, there's also been a great

reduction over the past two decades.

But still, it's not zero.

So we still need to reduce that even further.

Despite mental health challenges, a big part of Finnish

culture focuses on overall well-being.

Sauna is a sacred thing for Finns.

I have like so many good memories about having these sauna

moments with my family.

Sauna is something that I suppose you kind of have to like

and love as a Finn.

As of 2018, there were 5.5

million people living in Finland and around 2.3

million saunas.

My grandmother always used to tell us kids that we can't

fight in the sauna because then we would risk angering the

sauna elf. And there's even even a sauna in the government

of Finland, where they say that they make some of the most

important political compromises because you're culturally

not allowed to fight in the sauna.

Danes have mastered the art of comfort and coziness through

hygge. I think the best short definition of what hygge is

the art of creating a nice atmosphere.

And of course, that is something that happens everywhere.

But what is uniquely Danish is we have a word that

describes that situation.

You can curl up in a couch and read a good book and have

good music on and just be in a hyggekrog, it actually means

a hygge corner of your room.

There's a social component to hygge which I think is really

important. Hygge seeps everywhere throughout the country,

from cozy drinks to warm lighting.

So one concrete manifestation of hygge is the focus on

lighting. The rule of thumb is the warmer, the light, the

more hyggelig the lights.

So Danes love candles.

So how does hygge contribute to happiness?

So happiness is both having a strong sense of purpose in

life. It's also experiencing moments of pleasure on a daily

basis. It's also feeling satisfied with life overall.

So, hygge, is this element in our daily lives where we

experience comfort and pleasure and togetherness and

hopefully over time that accumulates also to a higher sense

of life satisfaction.

Another way Denmark and Finland support their citizens?

Paid annual vacation.

So in all Nordic countries, everybody has a right to paid

annual vacation. It varies a little by country, but in

Finland, for example, it's typically, after you work one

year for the same employer, it's four weeks in the summer

and one week in the winter and everybody gets this.

I actually heard a statistic.

It's something like, when Americans go home after work

October 27, you guys have worked as much as Danes will work

for the entire year.

But I actually think that taking a little more time off

also makes you a lot more productive.

In Finland, it's traditional to spend the summer in a

summer cottage or mökki.

We did have a summer house was when I was little.

It was something that my grandfather built himself during

the 60s I think.

And we used to go ther like all the time when I was small.

A week doesn't go past during the summer when I'm not

thinking like, "Oh, I wish we still had it."

Traditionally, the mökkis wouldn't have necessarily

electricity or running water.

And usually, most mökkis come with a lake or the Baltic

Sea. You can go to your sauna and have a dip in the water.

So in a Nordic country, the vacation time also serves

families that if the parents stagger their vacations a bit,

they can handle much easier the summer vacations for their

children. And of course, then the family can spend time

together. Maybe Finnish happiness is more like inside, you

know. It's like inner peace, or something like that.

It's not so open.

It's like balance.

It's more balanced, I think.

So, ready!

Ultimately, happiness is relative.

If you think you are having more sex than your neighbor,

then you're happier. We are social beings.

We compare ourselves to each other.

So there are social comparisons in salary in terms of the

houses and how successful we believe we are, but also in

terms of sex. So what's one small way we can be happier

today? For me, something that I've done which has made me

happier is exercise.

I think the saying no, or being a tiny bit more selfish can

make you happy. One step to improve your sense of happiness

is go first.

You're walking down the street, someone else comes walking

towards you. It might be just a smile.

It might be just looking the other person in the eye,

whatever it is. But go first with that, because you can't

expect that the other person is gonna do it.

Don't be reactive, go first.

In Denmark, we sometimes talk about the ABC for mental

health. If you want to boost your mood, three sort of

universal tips is doing something active, doing something

together with other people and doing something meaningful.

So, gather a group of friends, go for a walk.

That could be something that could boost your mood.

Predicting the future on this is very difficult,

unfortunately. Where will the U.S.

be? It could be even worse than now.

It could be much better than now.

It's a matter of actually making choices for a better

direction for the country and one that is not guided by

fear and hate, but one that is guided by a sense of

community and the common good.