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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by Felicity Capon, editor of The Week Junior. Aimed at curious and smart eight to 14-year-olds, it's the UK's fastest growing magazine. Taking the helm in 2018, Felicity's also a travel writer for The Week portfolio and also appears regularly on The Week Unwrapped podcast. Previously, she was a senior writer and columnist for Newsweek, and has written for publications such as Prospect, the Independent and the Telegraph.

Felicity, thank you for joining me.

Thank you for having me.

The Week Junior has deservedly enjoyed a huge circulation growth. Of course, it's actually secretly read by a lot of parents as well, I suspect?

It absolutely is, and that's what I love about it. It appeals to such a wide range of people. It's not just the children, it's their parents too. It's adults, and we get some lovely feedback. We had someone who wrote in saying that the mother of their daughter had finally understood impeachment. And someone else wrote in to say that they had a really interesting conversation about Tourette's syndrome because we had a people profile of Jess Thom, who's a comedian with Tourette's. And her and her son ended up having an interesting conversation about disability and threats and that sort of thing. So we get a lot of anecdotal evidence of adults reading it too, which is great.

It's the same reason that when I was a nipper I used to watch John Craven's Newsround, and my mum used to watch it with me because John would explain the story behind the story.

Well, I think that's the thing. I think sometimes as an adult it's quite hard to admit that you don't understand something, and the news is moving so quickly that you're keeping up with the latest updates, but you don't always have the context or some really tricky concept being explained to you. So I remember once we had to do a story on the Panama Papers in The Week Junior, which was quite daunting and

intimidating, but you couldn't bluff it, you couldn't make it seem as if you knew about money laundering and all these things. You really had to explain it and break it down. There's no getting past our readers. If you don't understand something and you haven't made it clear, they will 100% pull you up on it. And I find that quite gratifying in a way.

So how is an edition put together? How do you actually distil The Week's events in a way that appeals to children?

It's all about balance really, for me. We obviously have a finite amount of space in the magazine. So our big news spread is three main news stories, international or domestic. And then our home news is five stories, which are all domestic. And it's about striking the right balance between the stories that they might be serious, they might be scary, they might be complex, but we also want to present the world to our readers as inspiring and fun. There's a lot of silly stuff in there as well. And it's also about visuals; we have to make sure that the pictures look good and the headlines read right. But I think it always comes back to that. If we have a story about a terrorist attack as our main big news story, we will endeavour to make sure that the facing page has something lighter – because this is the world our readers are going to inherit, so we don't want to put them off.

Lucky them.

Yes, exactly. So we don't want to put them off. And I think that's what for me personally is so nice about working on a magazine that goes out of its way and strives to find the good news stories.

The light and shade.

Exactly. Because in other writing jobs I've done, there is that slightly ghoulish, bloodthirsty obsession with the really nasty stories and finding out the most brutal details, and we genuinely rejoice when there is some sort of science breakthrough or some incredible records being broken. We all go, "Hooray! We've got a fantastic story that we can go really, really big on," which is really great. And I think adults probably need that too. I think there was a lot of really bad news at the moment.

There is, isn't there? It's a litany of woe from start to finish.

Quite, and I think actually looking back to when we first started, I mean, I don't think we had any idea really quite how many terrorist attacks we would cover, Brexit has been really tough, Trump in the White House. Climate change is now a huge story, and a huge concern for our readers. So it's a huge challenge I think, every week, to make sure we're providing a really good balance of stories.

I mean, in one sense you have the same problem that an editor of any weekly magazine has, given the news, but yours is an extra challenge, isn't it, given the audience?

I think so. And I think it's, especially with the sad and the scary stories, it's always about finding that kind of silver lining to the cloud, as it were. Even in the darkest stories – the one that springs to mind is obviously the Manchester terror attack, I think it must've broken the night before we went to press or perhaps the night before that – but we had to pull all our coverage, and it was such a big story, partly because this attacker had gone after our readers. It was an Ariana Grande concert, some of our readers would have been there. I think it was one of the biggest attacks on UK soil. So there was no way we couldn't do it, but it was how to do the story, which was obviously really, really frightening and scary that someone had come after readers our age. And I think the way we did it was A, we're always very calm, there's never any kind of sensationalism, it's the details. We take out anything that's gratuitously violent or anything like that. We break it down and try and explain things and ask the questions. But it's looking for the kindness of humans. The people who rushed to donate blood, the taxi driver who said he would give free lifts for people to the hospitals. And actually as I've mentioned, that's what makes it nice in a way, this job, is: let's find even in the midst of these horrible stories, the really, really nice things that keep your faith in humanity.

And you've got quite a diverse readership, but also the magazine, I imagine, has to avoid sounding patronising to them.

Absolutely. I think from day one that was what we said we didn't want to do. We've always occupied a strange position in the market in that we are for children. A lot of the children's magazines when we started were quite patronising, especially in terms of their gendered content. If you were a girl you would have ponies and princesses and unicorns, and if you were a boy you'd have football. And even that in itself is a patronising approach to our age group. And obviously a lot of magazines had tacky bits of plastic on the front. I think we knew that the world as it is, in the stories and the news out there, they could be explained in a simple way without ever patronising our readers. And I think that's what makes it such a success is that they know they're not being patronised, they're being spoken to on a level as adults really. And even on stories like Brexit, I mean, I think we were slightly worried, how would we tackle this story? What's it going to be too dry? Were kids going to read it? We've done quite a few big debates actually on Brexit and things like should there be a second referendum and all that. And the amount of response we had from readers who had articulate, well-thought-through opinions about this that they wanted to share...

Probably more articulate, and well-thought-through than most of the adults.

Yes, I think so.

On both sides I might add, in the interests of balance.

And I think it just showed that once you actually explain something to them and also ask their opinion, we want to hear their feedback. We're not talking down to them, we're talking *to* them. And I think that has been a huge part of the magazine's success.

Well, I mean, as you said, we're told that children just want to watch YouTube videos, but there is a real appetite for information about science, nature and what's actually happening in the world.

Yes, I think so. I mean, we cover so many stories. I think there is something for everyone. We have sports and animals and environment, and science and tech, and the news, and people profiles. I think what we've done, what we've been made sure to do, is also going back to that we want total sort of gender parity. We don't want some stories that are for girls and some stories for boys. For example, sport has been a page that we have gone out of our way to try and find weird and wacky sports so that if you, as a child, think, "Oh, I'm not sporty person," you could look at the sports page and you could find something that you might be interested in. It's not just football every single week. It could be all sorts of things like a pole vault record being broken or something like that. But yes, I think there is a huge, huge appetite. I think when we started the magazine it wasn't quite clear whether it would be a success, and whether kids this age did want to read about the news and current affairs. But I think our latest figures, we've shot up to over 72,000 is our weekly circulation...

Congratulations.

Thank you. So it has been a really big success.

And how much feedback do you get from readers? I mean, do they tell you how they want the information to be presented? How do you engage with them?

Lots of different ways, really. We've done quite a few marketing surveys where we've sent out questionnaires about what's working and what's not working, which is always very revealing. But I think it's also been very important that the members of the staff get out and actually meet kids in person. So I've done quite a few school visits, which is fun. It's going in and doing... well, it could be anything, it might be a quiz or an assembly about current affairs. So putting up a picture of prime minister, asking them who it is and getting them thinking and talking about current affairs in a fun way, or popping into a school's journalism workshop and telling them about how we put the magazine together, and that is equally rewarding and enriching for both sides. I think the kids really enjoy it. But for us, it's so important to actually be having these conversations with our readers and seeing what they are into. And you can just pick up so much. I remember going into one classroom and the conversation was all about Fortnite, and then next week I think we ran a big debate on Fortnite.

I've never even heard of it until recently. That proves that I'm a gammon, and I'm old, and I'm a boomer, as they say, "Okay, boomer."

And we get loads of feedback through email and social media channels. And actually, the correspondence we get is so invaluable to us. One of the biggest decisions we made last year was to go plastic free, so the magazine now goes out to our subscribers without the plastic envelope on it. And that was actually after an awful lot of correspondence from readers who are really, really worried about single use plastic, saying, "We love the magazine, but it comes wrapped in this plastic." And this was a big source of anguish, and we weren't quite sure as a company what we

could do about this, because there were costs involved. It was a huge decision, and that wasn't actually within the editorial team's hands.

It's a commercial decision.

Exactly, exactly. But it was so clear that this was one of our readers' pressing concerns that the decision was made to go plastic free, and I think it was the right thing to do, and I'm really glad we did it. Obviously the weather in the UK means that every now and again we do get a disgruntled customer who has a rather soggy magazine, but it's that sort of thing. I think it's hearing from our readers and seeing what they're saying that keeps us as popular as we are. But no, all sorts of correspondence we get. But the funny thing about our readers is that sometimes they can be absolutely delighted if they have spotted a typo, which is really nice I think, you get a complaint and it's a reader saying, "Oh, I just thought you should know that you've put a typo in this article." And they're so thrilled that they spotted it, almost like a game, then say, "But we love your magazine so, so, so, so much." And, well, this is a really nice form of complaint letter that is great.

Do you say, "Look, we've got lazy subs and we've sacked them all"?

Yes! Exactly.

Tell us about the genesis of the magazine. You alluded to it earlier in terms of how it was launched, but could you go into a bit more detail? I mean, I've been a reader of The Week, the regular Week for many, many years now. And of course I love some of their legendary columns, like 'Boring but Important', things like that. That's absolutely great. So where did the genesis come for a junior version of that?

I think the bright sparks at Dennis Publishing saw that there was a gap in the market, and I think they knew that The Week was this hugely popular, trusted, respected magazine. And the idea was to create, almost faithfully, the same magazine, but for a younger audience. And actually, if you compare the two magazines, there are lots of similarities. So 'It Must be True, I Read it in the Tabloids' is for our audiences now, 'That's unbelievable', which is the craziest stories that are almost too good to be true and often are. And then other segments such as 'It Wasn't All Bad' is obviously our 'Amazing Week For...' stories. The 'Around the World' map with the 10 stories in brief obviously came directly from there, as did the 'People' page. So it seems like a winning format, and a really good way of distilling what's going on in the world. I think people love The Week because it's a weekly retrospect, distilling stories into very succinct bite-size pieces that get people up to date very, very quickly. And it seemed like that was a perfect way to introduce our readers to the world around them. So I think that was the idea that they thought would work. In terms of how we started, it was November 2015 when we launched.

Were you the launch editor?

No, that was my current boss Anna Bassi, who's now editor-in-chief, so she oversees all the entire brand and all our spin-offs and so on and so forth. So I came in as

deputy editor, and I actually was catapulted in – my first day was the first week we were going to press, which was Monday, the Friday before was the terrorist attacks in Paris. And I remember being at home thinking, “Oh, I’m starting this new job on Monday. What’s it going to be like? This is exciting being part of this launch.” And I’d been in touch with Anna and she was so excited to make a big song and dance about this magazine and it was going to be all positive and wonderful. And then watching the news and this absolutely horrendous attack unfolding and thinking, “Oh my goodness, how are we going to, our very first issue, how are we going to cope with this?” And I spoke to Anna over the weekend and we decided that we were going to have to pull the front cover and pull our main stories that we had planned, which I can’t even remember what they were now, but the whole of the big new section had to be on this dreadful attack. And in some ways we thought how awful and how sad that this is this is our first issue is going to be about this dreadful event. But in some ways it allowed us to set out our shop right from the word go, and prove that we could take on these stories and make them accessible and explain them. So that was a baptism of fire really, for me to start this job and start this magazine with this horrendous story. And unfortunately, in some ways there have been even more of them. It wasn’t like that was the only one. And as I mentioned earlier, Manchester was another huge story, and we’ve done New Zealand. But yes, when I look back, I always just think what a nightmarish way to bring a children’s magazine into circulation, but we did it.

And how’s the magazine evolved over the last few years?

It was funny, I was looking back at some of our first few issues, and they’ve definitely improved a lot. They seem quite raw and things, it just seems slicker now, we’re more of a well-oiled team, and I understand the magazine a lot better than I did then because also it wasn’t that I didn’t come from a children’s publishing background. So I think that was a real learning curve. I think in terms of things like working out what should go on the cover, and what would work and what wouldn’t, now I feel much more well-versed in that, and I can sort of more easily look at a story and say whether they should go in the magazine, or what would be the potential problems with it. And what pops into my mind are the storms in the UK, because at the time of recording this it was storm Ciara and storm Dennis for two huge stories, and we had storm Ciara as our front cover, and it was an important story, and it was definitely worthy of the cover. I always forget how hard these images... it’s hard to make the images work, actually, because sometimes you get pictures which are all grey and murky, and don’t look terribly dramatic. They’re quite hard to put together. Things like that, I think we know what we’re doing now, and we’ve just got better at it, I think.

In some ways, you face the same problem that any editor of a weekly news magazine or current affairs magazine has.

Yes, I think so. I think it’s those things, knowing that you’re going to go to press and it’s still got to be fresh and relevant by the time you’re out. We go to press on a Wednesday, and then our subscribers receive the magazine on a Friday, and it’s on the newsstands on Saturday. You’re always looking back on the week that’s just gone, but also having to bear in mind that, by the time you’re going to press, you’re a few days behind. That’s the interesting thing about a weekly. I think the other thing I’m conscious of is that, are we always sticking our head above the power of hidden,

and looking to see what we could be... because it's a weekly, it's so intense. The minute one issue has gone to press, you're straight back into the next one. So, it's quite relentless, in that way. Yes, I think the challenges are quite similar in that it's always trying to see what's going to look good on the newsstand, what's going to be relevant by the time the magazine's out.

The magazine launched a column, *Becoming Me*, after learning that most children will have made up their minds about their future from a very young age?

Yes. The idea for this column came from Dr Ger Grous, who is Global Director of Education at KidZania. It was this research that revealed that kids had decided what they wanted to do already, but I think it was the idea that their choices were largely shaped by the types of jobs that they'd been exposed to. So what their parents did, or what their friends' parents do, that sort of thing. I think what we wanted to do with *Becoming Me* was to broaden children's horizons, and to raise their aspirations by showing them an array of occupations, and routes to success. It's about who a child wants to be when they grow up, as much as what they want to be.

I don't know what I want to be now, and I'm 44.

Well, that's the thing.

Should I read the column?

Yes, I think you should. I think that's the thing. With each column, we include a lifeline, where the interviewee has to draw a map of their life, as a line. It's so interesting, because it's weird and wonderful doodles that we get, that show that the lines go up and down, they tangled up, they sometimes go backwards. Life is rarely a direct trajectory.

Don't I know it?

It's not like you need *this* degree, from *this* university. It's not like you need conventional education, necessarily. We've had refugees who've ended up turning into some huge success. It's just about exposing children to the weird and wonderful world of careers. But also, telling them that there is not always necessarily one route that will get you there. Yes, it's also about busting gender-based assumptions about occupations. I think, possibly, there was that fear that... I mean, we've had a CEO, for example, on *Becoming Me*, and I just wondered if there was that fear that kids would think, "Oh a CEO, you would have to be a white male, who's 90, and went to this university, and I'm not any of those things." It was about saying, "Actually, that's not the case at all." It's about breaking down preconceptions and stereotypes, and challenging that. But also, there's just some really, really fun people. We've got a stuntman and a CGI double coming up.

Wow.

Yes. We've got a polar explorer.

Wow.

An award-winning, international storyteller.

I'm not any of those things. These people seem to have better lives than me.

I know, I get very jealous when I read this column. I think, "These people, they're doing these fantastic things."

I send emails for a living.

Yes, exactly. But also, how on earth did you get there?

Exactly.

How did you become a storyteller, as your profession?

I'm not reading this column, because it will just bring into sharp focus the fact that I've wasted my entire life.

Yes, what have you done? Yes, exactly.

I'll answer that, I've done absolutely nothing, it would seem.

But, very, very fun. Yes, surgeons, CEO, business leaders, adventurers, directors, artists. Our readers are so curious and inquisitive, and I think the more... I wish I'd had this, the more information you have about the potential careers that are out there. And sometimes I think, I'm sure there are careers out there, that I don't even know exist.

I mean, you were talking about the gender-based stereotyping, but nurturing an interesting in coding and STEM subjects among young girls has been a big feature, has it not?

It has, but interestingly, as the magazine's gone on, it's not something we've been so conscious about. It seems to be a natural element that slides into so many stories on our technology, and on-screen pages. I think we did do a specific feature on coding a while back, but now it seems so many stories just include coding as a given. It's no longer, "Let's tell you about coding," kids already know, and they're already up to date about this. We're just telling them the stories that already include coding in them. I think the other thing was I'm quite conscious about anything that's, "Let's talk about getting girls into coding, or girls into STEM," because I wonder whether sometimes there's a potential to do more damage than good by saying, "Let's try to get more girls into coding." So, I wonder, then, whether the boys who are reading the magazine then think, "Oh hang on, this is weird. Why is this article being directed at girls?" And I wonder whether the girls reading it think, "Oh, so this is actually something for boys that this magazine is telling me I should do, too?" I'd much rather have stories... there's no such thing as a 'girl coder', and a 'boy coder'. It's much

better that the magazines and the stories speak to both boys and girls, and there isn't this mention of coding for girls, or STEM for girls. Even though we're aware that it's an issue, it's just how we choose to present it is to speak to all our readers, as though they were the same. I think it's the same with *Becoming Me*, as we've just talked about all people. We don't go out of our way to find female coders to interview, or female scientists, or female mathematicians, they do just naturally come along. It's quite an effortless way to feature and to expose people in the magazine who just happen to be women at the tops of their games in STEM. But I think it has just felt quite natural. British Science Week is coming up soon, and we wanted to run three male scientists and three female scientists that we thought have changed the world. We're conscious of it, but it's not like we ever have gendered content that spoke to just girls.

I mean, I've certainly read that kids are the future. Do big organisations lobby you to get yourself to run articles to influence the readership? If I was Phillip Morris, I would want the kids seeing pictures of people smoking. I mean, obviously that's an extreme example.

We haven't had any tobacco companies!

Can you imagine that? That would be awesome.

That would be pretty bold. We're very, very conscientious of who we work with, obviously we have to be. We have to make sure that all our advertising and commercial is appropriate, and suitable, and all the rest of it. I think, on occasion, we've been contacted by government departments.

Who want to get the youth?

Yes. They'll be a line from number 10, that they'd quite like to get in. We are very, very, very wary of that sort of thing, because there is no way we want to be the mouthpiece of number 10.

But on the other hand, an interview with the Prime Minister would be, I imagine, of great interest to your readers?

I think so, I think so. It depends, if there was... I think, if the readers themselves got to do the interview, that would be best. So, certainly I wouldn't be against it, but it's more just making sure that all our articles are completely unbiased, and that it doesn't look in any way that we have any political bias whatsoever. I think another interesting one was a horse racing company, or association, got in touch with us, and wanted to do something on horse racing. Again, gambling, we thought, "No, this isn't the right one for us."

Captive market, though? It would be great to get the kids gambling at an early age, from their point of view.

Start them young, start them young.

Absolutely.

Yes, but we said, “No.”

Yes, well. I mean, the readership is aged eight to 14. Do you hope that they will go onto read the grown-up version of The Week? Is The Week Junior a gateway drug for the adult version of the magazine?

I think, from a marketing perspective, we would certainly hope for that. But, I think it's broader than that, I think it's about fostering and nurturing a love of literacy, and reading, and an interest in current affairs and the world around them, that goes beyond our brand, I suppose. I think the surveys show that the more kids who read, and who are engaged with the world, are happier later on in life. I think, as we discussed earlier, there will be that familiar content, which I'd like to think that later on in life, kids will find the grown-up version of The Week and say, “Oh, this is just like The Week Junior,” so there is that really nice continuity, which I hope is there. It certainly isn't the main aim. But, we do get these lovely letters and pictures in from our readers. Sometimes it will be three generations of the same family, with their different copies. I think it's so nice, seeing a 10-year-old with his Week Junior, and then his dad, and then the grandma, who all theirs, and they're all sitting there, which is really, really lovely.

Does The Week need strong digital presence, in future? Is print sales decline generational? What is the digital strategy for The Week Junior?

I mean, we've really, really focused on print, because it's doing so well. I think our latest figures have shown that we're very much bucking the trend, of this decline in print. We're actually going the other way.

Wow.

Yes. I think that's what we really wanted to do, we wanted to prove that print isn't dead, there is a huge appetite for it. There's something really, really special about getting a physical copy in the post each week, it's something that belongs to the readers, it's theirs. It's something to look forward to on a Friday when they get home from school, it's addressed to them. You don't get that with online stuff. So I think, for us, we feel very loyal, and feel quite strongly about making the print the most powerful thing that we have, and sticking to that. I think there are also fears about, for some parents, what's actually online, and websites that parents get very worried about what their kids are exposed to, there. Also, just the sheer amount of time that they might be spending online. Actually, to get them off the internet, and get their head stuck in a print magazine, and get them reading, is something that we're very proud of, and feel very, very passionate about. I think instead of developing a digital footprint, we're more interested in other projects. At the moment, at the end of last year, we started a podcast. We think that's a really, really good way to reach our readers, and to reach a broader audience, and also to complement our existing magazine. Because a lot of the content, we can't possibly fit it all into the magazine, so to have a podcast with the bits that didn't make it in, or the snippets from

interviews that didn't get into the magazine is really, really exciting. Yes, we always want to broaden and diversify our output, but I'm not convinced that digital is where it is for us at the moment.

How do you put an issue together? You mentioned that your off-stone, you go to the printers on Wednesday. Do you have Thursday, and then come back into the office Friday, and then it starts again? What is the actual process in putting an issue together?

It's pretty relentless. The working week starts with a Monday morning news conference where the editorial team all gets together, and we talk about what the biggest stories over the weekend were. So, on Monday, we need to decide a cover, we need to decide the main news stories at the front, the people, the 10 around the world, international news stories. The front half of the magazine is worked on by the writers at the end, and then we go to press on a Wednesday afternoon. Then, it immediately starts again, with the back half of the magazine, at the end of The Week. So, as we're going to press on Wednesday, and I'm finalising the pages, the Features Editor will already be working out the content, which is further towards the back of the magazine, which is a bit less time sensitive. So things like puzzles and the quiz, and 'That's Unbelievable' stories, and 'On Screen', 'Do Something', 'How To...', the things that we can get ahead of, we'll be working on. But there's no day off. It does feel as soon as you've put one issue to bed, the next one starts in earnest – and it all happens all over again.

Wow. So, the beginning half of the week is actually the front half of the magazine, that's more topical, because it has to be newsy?

Yes, exactly.

Then, the back half is done as soon as you've gone to print?

Yes, that's it. Yes.

How far do you plan these things? For example, do Hollywood Studios say that the new Ghostbusters film is coming out in July, so would you be interested in an interview with Bill Murray? How does it work?

Yes. Anything that we can, we definitely try and map out the year in advance, and see when the big news stories or launches are going to be. We've already looked ahead at 2020, and we know that the Olympics are coming up, for example, and there's coverage we can work on around that. Anything that we can get ahead on, we absolutely do. Then on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday is The Weekly stories, and the most pressing news. But our features and our interviews, they can be pretty timeless, and pretty evergreen. There's lots of evergreen content that we can just get done.

Were you always a newspaper junkie? I know that you worked at The Telegraph and Newsweek, before arriving at The Week Junior. Did you always want to be a journalist? Tell us about your career journey?

I think I always loved writing, I always loved stories. I loved newspapers and magazines, and I just wanted to be part of that. I think my time at the Telegraph was so, so formative, and taught me so much about the industry.

Did you join The Telegraph straight from university?

No. I worked, first at The Day, which was similar to The Week Junior, but it was online only. But, that was news stories for young people as well.

Wow.

But, when I got to the Telegraph, I remember just...

A newspaper for old people, arguably? Sort of, fairly. I hope none of my friends at the Telegraph are listening to this.

Get some complaints, yes.

They won't be, we've got no listeners.

But, I remember sitting there, and some huge stories broke while I was there. I remember Margaret Thatcher dying.

Wow.

And Nelson Mandela, and also the Oscar Pistorius case on Valentine's Day. It was just this weird sensation, of you could hear these ripples of excitement, and stress, and agitation, rippling out from the main news desk. And, all the TV screens would suddenly change, and there would be a news editor barking, "I need that copy in 10 minutes!" Or even when someone died, like Nelson Mandela, just realising that they had these... I mean, it's a bit grim, really, but they had these obituaries that they'd already got, ready to go. It was just "get them up there", basically. But, I found that absolutely so absorbing, and fascinating, and I absolutely loved it. There was so many great people, when I worked there, who gave me so many opportunities, and so much feedback on my work, and the things that I wrote. I think it was also that thrill of having a byline in a national newspaper, was so exciting. It does make me think now, as editor that when people get in touch who want to write for The Week Junior, or pitch an article, or even want to do work experience, I always, always, always try to get back to them. I think, especially in this industry, having someone who goes out of their way to get you in, or to get you a gig, or to get you writing something, or to give you a way in, or an opportunity, is just invaluable. I know that I would not be sitting here today if it wasn't for some extremely wonderful people who took a chance on me, and allowed me to do some writing. Unfortunately, it's still one of those industries which seems incredibly hard to break into, and possibly it's getting harder, and I think you do rely on that, the kindness of people who are already well

established, who say, “You’re a nobody. We don’t know if you can do this. But hey ho, let’s give you a shot,” which is certainly the case for me. But no, I think I’ve always loved... I’ve just loved the storytelling aspects of it. I think it’s the human stories that get me the most. And I think actually, my favourite spread in The Week Junior now is the People page. I get so absorbed into these stories of incredible adventurers, or writers, or whatever it is, and on something amazing that they’ve done. That’s what gets me.

I think one of the key criteria for being a journalist is just being nosy.

Yes, exactly. Exactly. It’s about asking questions, and making a personal connection with someone, and having that sort of empathy and curiosity, and being inquisitive about everyone you meet and wanting to find out everything, and eventually uncovering some incredible story. I think that was the thing I realised at Newsweek actually. Newsweek was a fantastic experience in that it was so democratic. If you had the best story, people would just run with it. If you can interview someone and get them to reveal something, and you get this wonderful scoop, that will be in the magazine and that will be possibly a cover story. Journalism has so many problems of course, but if you can write and you can get a story, you’re the one that they’re going to shout about. And Newsweek, I felt... I feel my time there was... What I really enjoyed about it was that you were just sort of allowed to find your story. Go off and interview this person, do this. “I’ve got this great idea for a story.” “All right, go off and do it then. Picture, make it happen, bring it to me.” And that was so fun. And some of the journalists were absolutely brilliant, and I think we did some really good work.

How long were you at the Telegraph for, and how did you come to move to Newsweek?

I think I was at the Telegraph for just over a year, so it wasn’t very long. Newsweek, at the time they were launching a Europe edition and it was being headed up by Richard Addis. He would be editor-in-chief, and he had set up The Day, which had been my... I’d been there before I was at the Telegraph.

So you’d already got on his radar as a good person.

Yes, I had.

I do that sometimes. I’ll think, “Ah I remember that person from five years ago was impressive. Where are they now?”

It’s funny.

Good old LinkedIn.

Exactly, and that’s the thing. You do have to sort of make a good impression, and keep your contact book up to date and keep in touch with everyone because that can be really, really important.

Isn't Newsweek owned by some evangelical Christian group now, or some weirdos? There's something in America, wasn't there?

I'm not sure. You might be right. I haven't kept up with the latest on Newsweek, so I'm not too sure, but I think you might be right. That does ring a bell. Was it Mormon or someone from some sect?

I don't want to get Mormons writing in saying that they're not dodgy. They're a mainstream Christian religion. So I withdraw all forms of criticism to whoever the owners are of Newsweek. But I mean, you're right though. I mean, that was the last sort of throw of the dice I think for Newsweek, wasn't it, as a brand where they'd thrown some serious money in, and obviously tried to attract some serious talent, including yourself?

And I think it was great. I think Richard Addis did a really, really brilliant job, and I think some of the journalism was absolutely, so interesting. My colleague Jack Moore, who was absolutely fantastic, he managed to get a great story about... it was a phone interview with a people smuggler, who was operating dinghy boats from Turkey over to Greece with Syrian refugees. And he got the most fantastic story just by sheer dogged, trying to hunt down these contacts and speak to them.

I went to Nicaragua with Jack.

Oh, did you?

Yes, we worked for an international microfinance bank for many years, and we wanted to highlight the great work they were doing in Nicaragua. So we contacted Jack said, "Do you want to all expenses paid trip to Nicaragua, and you can write whatever you want. We don't want to see it." And he went, "Yes, I'd like that very much." Great journalist.

He's a great journalist. He really, really is. And I was allowed to pursue a story about a fundamentalist Islamist in Norway, who had threatened to assassinate the then-Prime Minister and he had been...

Sounds like a nice guy.

Yes, lovely guy. He had been let out. He had finished, completed his prison sentence, but he couldn't go back to his native Iraq, and they didn't know what to do with him, so they sort of sent him to this tiny, little village. I think it was a skiing resort in somewhere completely rural, and I managed to-

I bet they welcomed him with open arms.

But it was so interesting. I was like, well this is just a great story. This is, this awful guy sort of rocking up in this beautiful pristine skiing resort.

Was he pissed off at the relocation? That was terrible.

That was terrible.

Pretend that was never said.

Well, there, I think I spoke to, I managed to speak to you, some of the people who lived in this village, and they had been making this joke comparing skiers with Shia Muslims, but it didn't quite work because I think he was a Sunni Muslim. But they thought this was absolutely hilarious. Anyway, it was that sort of thing where you could find a really interesting story and just go with it.

One of the reasons I don't do evil in life is I just can't be bothered. I'd rather just watch a bit of telly. These evil people, they seem to be incredibly motivated to do things. Can't they just chill out?

I think that was the only slight problem that I remember with this story. I know, I just remember thinking I'm onto a winner here. This is going to be great. And then the people I spoke to in this village, I so thought they would have, I thought they'd be absolutely outraged that this guy was coming to sort of upset their peace, and they were all so sort of broad minded about it.

Oh, I hate those people.

I know, and as a journalist...

All these tolerant people who are giving you decent, spicy copy.

Exactly. I think that's one of the problems as journalists, you're like, "Come on, say something that's going to rile up..."

Don't you realise he's a terrorist?

Yes, that I can put it in the headline that's going to really rile everyone up, and it didn't quite come but it was still a good story. It was fun.

Now, I don't expect you to answer this because no one ever does, but I'll ask it anyway. What's next for you? You edited, will you be there for the next sort of two or three decades or is there something else that you want to do? Do you have a kind of career plan in mind?

I am very much like one of these lifeline drawings on becoming me in that I have absolutely no idea. I'm very happy being editor of The Week Junior. It's such a fantastic job, and I feel incredibly lucky to be doing it. And having taken over as editor in 2018, I think there's still life in me. Yes, so I'm not quite looking to hang up my beats, but I don't know. I really don't know. I mean, I think that writing bug will always be with me. I think writing features and stories and putting magazines together and front pages together will always be a huge passion of mine. So fingers crossed I can keep on doing what I love.

Now, I think podcasting is a complete waste of time, but you do a podcast, don't you as well? I mean, tell us about what your foray into broadcast journalism.

Well, the very, very good people at The Week Online occasionally allow me to do The Week Unwrapped, which is fantastic. It's three stories that haven't made the headlines but are really, really important, and they're sort of running under the radar that you might not have heard about, but you should for these reasons. And I think when they set up the podcast, they thought there were so many podcasts that are doing the big breaking stories or Brexit cast and we can't... There's no point trying to do exactly the same thing. But is there a podcast, which is news and kind of first, but it's the stories you might not have heard, which are just really, really interesting.

What's the impact been?

Good. It's been really good. It's got a very loyal following of people who tune in. I think that the format really, really works.

Olly's a great broadcaster, as well. I've known him for many years.

Olly is absolutely fantastic. Yes, and I think actually getting him as a presenter was a huge draw because he was already such a big name, and he's actually also just a really, really good fit for the whole cast.

Shouldn't tell anyone that. But Julian Lloyd Evans is a big friend of mine at Dennis, loves the podcast, and he actually asked me for recommendations back in the day. Said, "Who do you think should do this?" And I said, "Well, me obviously." But I declined a screen... I wonder, what's the audio equivalent of a screen test, but an audio test, isn't it? No, but I said, "Olly's your man for this." And he's been fantastic.

He is brilliant. And the only problem with Olly is that he has such a forensic knowledge of the stories, and sometimes without any warning, he will ask you something completely obscure that you hadn't researched at all. And it's sort of a bit of um-ing and ah-ing about how to answer this.

I hate people like that.

I hate people like that.

Damn him and his abilities and his conscientious work ethic.

Yes, and he also plays devil's advocate so brilliantly, as well.

He's a brilliant broadcaster.

Yes, he is. But I think it's just really fun. It changes each week. It's a different bunch of us in the room and we all get on really, really well, and the stories are just genuinely fascinating. And a lot of the time there are stories that I wasn't even aware

of, and then I researched them and then they go into The Week Junior. So for example, I think the last appearance we were talking about Malawi and the fact that there, the results of their election last year were going to be overturned. And that was only the second time this has ever happened in history in Africa.

So you nicked it.

Yes, nicked and put it in The Week Junior as I thought... because they called him 'the Tipp-Ex President' because loads of the ballot papers had been... they'd used correction fluid to sort of...

Wow.

Yes, and I just thought at school we all have Tipp-Ex, and it just seemed like a really nice way to talk about this story.

Now they have calculators, and iPads and everything. I'd go back to parchment and quill. Isn't that incredible, really?

Absolutely. But it's really nice. I think it's really nice for me because it's good to be able to sometimes talk about the stories that we would never put in The Week Junior because they're just not suitable, or they're not appropriate. For example, we did one on a Times' investigation that was looking into the use of DNA tests where, if you thought your spouse might be cheating on you, you could take some of their... a sample of their DNA and send it into a company and get them to check it out, which is obviously something we would never do in The Week Junior. But it's...so, it's really, really nice for me to still be able to talk about those stories that I'm not allowed to talk about in The Week Junior.

Absolutely.

Wouldn't be appropriate.

I write a column for Entrepreneur magazine every so often, and as part of their entrepreneurial guidelines they were saying that you can never recycle other people's content as your own, and you can never recycle your own content from months or years ago. And they used the phrase that's really stuck with me because they said, "You can't do that because self-plagiarism is still plagiarism." And I thought, "Wow, okay I thought I knew everything, but clearly I don't."

No, that's news to me.

So you've nicked that from yourself. What advice would you give to someone starting out in their career, that's listening to this, and inspired by your success? What are the do's and don'ts to get ahead?

I feel that if you want to be a writer, and you want to be in journalism and publishing, you have got to be writing all the time. Whether that is at your...for your school magazine or local newspaper, or you've got to have a blog. I think that's really, really important. I think when it gets to going for an interview, my number one piece of advice would be know the publication inside out and upside down. If you don't have ready access to it, get in touch and say, "Could you send me some copies of the magazine?" You've got to know what we're about. With The Week Junior, you've got to know our audience, you've got to know the types of stories that we would run. What else? I think the other thing is I think work experience is really, really invaluable and I know it can be really, really tricky to get hold of, work experience, but once you're there make yourself completely indispensable, whether that's making cups of tea, or suggesting ways to help out, or suggesting good stories, or even just being bold enough to ask could you write something, could you have a 10 minute chat with me. I think there's so many times where we've had people in, and the minute they go, I'm sort of bereft and don't know quite what to do with it. And I think that's the thing. Making a good impression, getting in some face time. And we've had people in work experience who have then got in touch with us later down the line, and said, "Could I write something, or could I come back in for experience," and that sort of thing. So I think it's A) you've got to nurture that love for writing. You've got to be doing it all the time. The more you're reading and writing, you just naturally will get better. And then I think once you've got your foot in the door, exploit it mercilessly. Talk to everyone you can. Do all the annoying things like making cups of tea and doing the photocopying because it does go a really, really long way.

And what's the story you've worked on that's made you most proud?

I think this is going to be a total cop out answer, but I think it's every time The Week Junior goes to press with a really, really tough story that I know from the feedback we have actually genuinely fulfilled our mission statement of making sense of the world. I think something like the US presidential elections, like Trump for example, which I, to my shame called completely wrong and had my copy all ready to go for Hillary Clinton.

Didn't we all?

And in the end I had to rush into the office, and quickly rewrite Trump. I think the way we have written about someone like Trump, who I feel like it's very easy to turn him into a pantomime villain that our readers can all boo, and actually we have to really step away from that and make sure we're not doing that sort of thing. But that kind of story, President Trump, or Brexit, or climate change, I feel every time we've really sat down and explained something clearly and calmly and succinctly, even the backstop. Let's explain the backstop in six lines. Okay.

Would you explain it to me?

I'll give you the relevant copy.

We've discussed a lot of the difficult subjects that you've handled, of course with the Manchester bombings and so on. But like, for example, issues like suicide, how do you cover that for your readers?

Suicide, we just wouldn't go there in a billion years actually. And a story like Caroline Flack's suicide, for example, that at the time of this recording was a very, very big news story, my initial reaction was I have... I mean, it's just a really upsetting, horrible story that I don't want to put in anyway. I've only got so much space. It's so, so tragic. I think we have done features before on death. I think children are actually very interested in the idea of death and I think it's really important to talk about that. I mean, so many kids either have, whether it's a pet or a grandparent or someone far closer to them, a lot of them have already experience of that. And also that a lot of children's books and films talk about death.

I've actually become less interested the closer I've got to it over the years.

Yes. But I think kids aren't afraid to ask questions about it. Where do we go once we die? And I think, I feel that the magazine has a duty and responsibility to talk about that. Suicide scares me a bit more because I don't want to put that on their radar before they're too... before they're ready to think, to talk about that. I think that's not quite right for us, but it's something that makes me feel very proud and fulfilled to do the types of journalism that we do, that feels positive and fulfilling, like we're making... we're doing something positive. We're making a good contribution to the world of journalism, and thinking about Caroline Flack and all the articles in The Sun, and the tabloids, and these nasty stories that sort of bring women down, or are only sort of about bullying, or that sort of thing, it's so refreshing and sort of reassuring to be able to work on a magazine where we say, "We don't want to have to deal with those nasty sort of gossipy stories."

Felicity, it's been a hugely interesting conversation. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you very much for having me.