

Nick's speech

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the bride and groom. Such a wonderfully exciting event. You have made two sets of parents exceptionally happy indeed. Anna and I are absolutely thrilled to have Boyan in the family and to be able to call him our son-in-law. I only hope he does not tell others what the comedian Ken Dodd said. "I haven't spoken to my mother-in-law for a year and a half now. She never stops talking. I can't get a word in edgeways!".

I also want to thank Boyan and Nicola for having organised a wonderfully perfect and happy day with such flair and originality. Everything has been thought through in detail and the result is pure delight.

Next, I would particularly like to welcome Mario and Amelia, Boyan's parents. It's a joy and a privilege to have them here and the only pity is that Alex, Boyan's brother, and his wife, Anna, cannot be here too. They are very much missed.

All of you know Nicola well and thus I don't have to describe in detail the beautiful and talented woman she has become. But I thought it might amuse you to know something about her early years. What she was like as a child and what characteristics she showed at an early stage. Here are a few snapshots that have come to mind.

Her hair was as blonde as could be (a regular blonde bombshell!) and when she arrived in Rome aged two, all the local women were wowed by it. They had to touch it to see if it was real. And often we were approached with the suggestion we should allow Nicola to appear in TV adverts. "You could make so much money!" Her hair stayed pure blonde – until the day she swam in a pool where the chemical balance wasn't quite right and turned it bright green!

She was fearless. She climbed everything with simian ease and would then launch herself off it with total confidence that she would be caught. Fortunately, she was! But then she hated things that buzzed. We once had to abandon a picnic up in the

Lazio hills outside Rome as Nicola threw a total tantrum over flies and wasps invading our space.

Shopping with Nicola aged three/four was often a nightmare as she would run down the street ahead of Anna and then hide in one of the shops, dodging here and there, even into the storerooms, playing hard to find. She thought it was the best fun ever. Trying to extract her was never straight forward.

She was always cheerful and busy and soon became known as Little Miss Helpful. She always wanted to be involved. We have a brilliant video taken by Anna of Isabel in her highchair throwing her cup of milk onto the kitchen floor. Nicola, aged two or three, grabs a face cloth and then tries to mop up the milk. At the same time she is firmly saying to Isabel “naughty, naughty!” and Isabel is yelling away and banging the top of her chair. Total pandemonium! Needless to say, Nicola’s attempts resulted in the milk going everywhere!

Nicola was never ill and the teachers at the pre-prep school she went to in Rome were amazed she didn’t miss a single day.

Game for anything, Nicola loved trying new food. We have a picture of her eating a huge boiled goose egg, with a wide grin on her face.

Early on in our time in Rome, we took her to the Christmas pantomime put on by the student RC priests at the English College. We were assured it was suitable for young children and we accordingly sat near the front. Nicola thought otherwise and come the end of the first act we eventually found her at the rear of the hall having crawled and squirmed her way under all the rows of seats, to get as far away from the stage as possible.

Her poise was perfect. In the British International School in Jakarta she learned a dance routine that involved the wearing of a long skirt and movements that took full advantage of its form and flow. Her straight back and perfect rhythm betrayed a Flamenco dancer in the making.

Her love of animals came to the fore in Jakarta. There is a lovely photograph of her holding an orphan baby orangutang alongside Anna who is holding two. One of Anna's is yanking Nicola's hair with great determination. Nicola grinning and completely unfazed!

She is a brilliant swimmer and the 11 metre pool we had in Jakarta was a magnet for all her and Isabel's friends. All sorts of games resulted including me having to carry them on my shoulders so they could dive off. On one occasion, Nicola hit her head on the side of the pool and split open her skin to a significant effect. I took her to have it stitched up. It was me that went green and fainted when the doctor started stitching. Nicola was utterly relaxed!

On another occasion when the children were quite young and being jabbed against some tropical disease or other, Nicola had her injection without any comment or even awareness. She was genuinely puzzled over what had made Harry flinch and cry out.

This awareness and welfare for others affected her ability to win races. When she was out in front and seemingly set to beat all, she would slow down and turn round to check on the other runners. That they sometimes creamed past and won did not seem overly to worry her.

And this unconcern also came to the fore when it came to her birthday parties in Rome. Nicola is a boy's name in Italy (the girl's is Nicoletta) and thus a lot of the mothers of the Italian children attending equipped their children with boys' presents to give her. Harry benefited hugely. Nicola didn't seem to mind at all.

We attended the graduation ceremony at Newcastle University to witness Nicola receive her first-class degree. The chancellor, Chris Patten (now Lord Patten) was obviously taken by her. Instead of a perfunctory handshake and a couple of congratulatory words, he spoke to her for two or more minutes. He too sensed she was worth it!

You will be aware of Nicola's skill as an artist in design and colour. In the family we are the proud possessors of hand produced birthday and Christmas cards going back many years. All are of a wonderful and original variety and some are now framed. They are works of art. Whatever Nicola turns her hand to, the result is perfection and pure delight.

Boyan, I am confident that you have already discovered that Nicola is a girl with extraordinary talents and abilities who manages to do things in the blink of an eyelid that would take others half a day. But she is also fun to be with and has a real care for others. She does not hesitate to use her initiative and, most importantly, she is determined and will carry it out to the full. As her father, I can confidently say you are a very lucky man to catch her. But then she is equally lucky to have caught you. We wish you both every happiness together!

(One other event I should have recorded but I only remembered it after the lunch):

We were at an outdoor restaurant in Rome and Harry had brought with him a Lego rocket that was sitting on the table. With no notice, the heavens opened and the most horrendous rain shower descended. We all rushed for cover inside but when we got there Harry discovered he had only part of his rocket. Total meltdown! I had to go out and find the rest no matter how soaked I got. While the attention was on Harry and resolving his crisis, no one had noticed that Nicola had strayed off to the cabinet where the cakes and puddings were on display. To our horror, we discovered she had sampled with her finger the cream topping of at least one of them. We distanced ourselves smartly!

Mario's Speech

I am delighted to be here on this wonderful occasion with all of you. When Boyan was born, I could not imagine he would marry in the United Kingdom. However, in a way this is normal – my counting shows he lived longest -14 years - in the UK, followed by Belgium - 7,5 years, Bulgaria – 7 years and France - 5,5 years.

This is also logical because with his mom, Amelia, we are attached to our international jobs. When our sons were kids, it was fashionable to aspire to be “a citizen of the world” and we are happy both of them in a way became so, ... although the world is completely different today, isn't it....

Nick spoke with love about Nicola. We met her first in the summer 2021 on the Bulgarian seaside. Already then, we were impressed by her intelligence, sense of humour, good education and modesty. We saw what a swimmer she was and later – what a skier. Since this first common stay, we admire how, even in difficult moments, Nicola is always smiling! During the 2021 trip I was astonished that – after she drove the car we rented – Nicola said proudly: “*I passed the test*”. I thought this was because of the left steering wheel and the driving on the right. However, after that, on other occasions Nicola also used several times the expression “*this was a test*”. So, it looks like British people think everything is a “test”. Anyhow, it seems Boyan passed a massive test because he is your husband today, Nicola!

In the European Commission, which is a big “family”, we are not supposed to represent our countries and instead of naming them, we use the expression “*the country I know the best*”. So, let me turn now to Boyan, who “I know the best” in the just married couple. He is always cheerful and has a big, good heart. He graduated with merit from high-ranking schools and universities, practiced many sports, and is even a certified tennis teacher. But I must confess that, when following this relatively classical path, sometimes Boyan preferred to do things in his own way – and always with fun!

Take snowboarding, for example. The whole family loved skiing. Boyan also skied – for a short period – and then looking slightly bored, said “*I'm going to throw myself down the mountain sideways instead*”. Even after an injury in France – involving a shoulder dislocation and long pain – he stuck to snowboarding.... Breakdance, parkour and boxing, combined with his attraction to rap music, also show he followed his taste and preferences.

Another example is a traineeship in the European Union. I was happy he was going to meetings of all Member States, his role being to prepare, listen and write reports. I thought he would love diplomacy. After a while, I asked him whether he liked the meetings he was attending, and he said – *“it is very interesting, but, Dad, there should be new rules, we should simplify and rationalise, now they speak too long.... Instead, the first two or three delegations should be allowed to present their points of view, and the rest should just indicate whether they subscribe to one or the other opinion - and simply vote”*. What a revolution in multilateral diplomacy! In a sense, Boyan was right, but then I understood he will not follow the profession of his father. His work in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development also revealed he is sceptic about international administrations and about “9 to 5 jobs”.

We appreciate Boyan wants “to help people”. The student work he praised most, was a programme for being a tutor in Italy. He talked to us passionately how pupils were interested in what he was teaching them. He was admired there and even went back to Italy for a second time! In a way, this explains why he is glad about his current occupation of “supporting others”.

When I look around - the new generation is slightly unlike ours: no gluten, no milk, in particular cow milk, no alcohol, avoiding much stress, relying on the artificial intelligence, being extremely tolerant, emphatic to the future of the humanity, caring tremendously about the environment, having more spirituality and taking time for reflexion. In view of better understanding my two sons, their wives and friends - I read books about the long-termism, and about what the other philosophies and religions can bring to the Western one. They help to see where the new generation is heading – in a nutshell, the future looks bright, philosophical and – slightly gluten-free....

To conclude, in the old Bulgarian tradition, in the day of marriage, parents are expected to give advice to their kids for their future life as a couple and then as a larger family. In modern times it is better not to “give advice”; rather “share experiences”; and even better – just “encourage”. So, Nicola and Boyan, I would “just” like to encourage you:

- To love and respect each other and be ready always to help each other;
- To keep enjoying nature - something you both share - it evidently gives you strength; and continue feeling happy!

Let your love, Nicola and Boyan, last for ever! Alex and Anna are warmly greeting you, unfortunately his health condition doesn't allow travelling. Let's drink for you having fun and passing every single "test" that life throws at you – together!

Thank you for the attention and cheers!

Boyan's poem:

Here, in this moment

We made it here—through days of light and nights unknown,
Through laughter bright and seeds we've sown.
Through moments fleeting, simple, sweet—
A glance, a touch, the way we meet.

Through all the steps, the dance, the flow,
Through times of doubt, through love that grows.
Like fire and water, we rise and bend,
Not to oppose, but to transcend.

For every tear, a laugh will rise,
For every loss, new love will thrive.
The weight we carried, the storms we braved,
Have shaped the love we celebrate.

And here we are—no past, no end—
Just love, unfolding, hand in hand.

The world may turn, the tides may shift,
But this—right now—is love's true gift.
A quiet knowing, close and dear,
That I am home when you are near.

So let us feast, let laughter ring,
Let joy take flight on open wings.
For love is not a thing we chase,
It's here—it's now—it fills this space.

And in the years that stretch ahead,
Through all the words yet left unsaid,
One truth remains, both soft and clear—
I love you now. I'm always here.