

My Skype Family

By Christine Bacon

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Peter/Actor 1

Tanya/Actor 2

Kelly/Actor 3

Amit/Actor 4

Andy/Actor 5

Molly/Actor 6

***Molly** enters, sits down and opens a laptop. It is the middle of the night for her. **Andy** enters and sits opposite her and opens his laptop*

***Tanya** opens the laptop and proceeds to chop vegetables*

***Kelly** sits holding her phone in front of her face*

***Andy** enters and sits opposite Molly and opens his laptop*

***Amit** enters wearing earphones and holding his phone in front of his face*

We see an animation of Tanya's mother Tamara sitting at a computer

Skype ring tone

Molly (*yawning*) Hi darling

Andy Sorry, sorry. Couldn't get to the computer any earlier.

Tanya (*in Russian*) Good morning mama

Tamara (*in Russian*) Good morning

Kelly Hi love

Amit Are you there?

Kelly Hi love – I can hear you

Amit Can you hear me?

Kelly Yeah. Yeah. *(holds Priya up – animation)* Wave at papa

Amit whistles

Amit Hello, hey *(holds something up)* what's that?

Animation of Dylan and Devon lying in front of a computer screen in their pyjamas waving.

Molly *(to boys)* Oh, you already in your pyjamas. Very good.

Animation of Priya being held up in front of the phone

SFX over their Skype interactions with each other. Peter comes over to Tanya. We see one group after the other close the laptop or hang up the phone.

Actor 1 From the Conservative Party Manifesto 2010

Actor 2 We will make Britain the most family-friendly country in Europe.

Actor 3 Strong families are the bedrock of a strong society.

Actor 4 We will help families with all the pressures they face.

Actor 5 We will not be neutral on this.

Actor 6 Britain's families will get our full backing across all of our policies.

Peter We often think of all the things that happened in our lives which meant we could meet each other. When you go through all of the coincidences, any *tiny* little thing ...

Andy Everything about China is different to England. It's not just a few things. It was just a topsy-turvy country for me. My first train in China, I sort of sat down for the journey and the woman opposite me was really well to do, really dressed beautifully. And um before the train even pulled away, she went (*mimes spitting*) she spat on the floor.

It's not very nice but it's normal. Because some things that we do they find equally repulsive ... I mean wearing deodorant for example, they think the smell of deodorant is horrible.

Kelly Not in a million years. I never ever thought I would end up with an Indian man. Because well there is no Indian people round here for starters and you know there is no mixed relations in my family ... we're just white British people.

Tanya I lived a very quiet life with my daughter. I couldn't imagine that I would live in the UK.

Molly Life is so strange. It will take you anywhere.

Andy Interestingly – I was just telling Dylan the other day – Dylan, do you want to tell the story of why you're alive?

Dylan (*voice over and animation*) Because, because well um well his favourite film was called Kung Fu

Andy TV programme – did you ever watch that Kung Fu?

Dylan Yeah um there was this um child um he lost his parents and he and he and he walked... and he travelled around but before that he came to this temple and there was this Kung Fu monk was it?

Andy Yeah

Dylan and Yeah yeah and he said as quickly as you can, snatch this pebble and yeah once he learned all the kung fu perfectly, he has to give it back and then he leaves and he started travelling around America didn't he

Andy Yep

Dylan And helping people with his kung fu and fighting bad guys

Opening credits for Kung Fu

Andy Best TV programme ever. When I was watching it as a kid – this is the equivalent of a young girl wanting to be Cinderella. It's just TV. But, later on, I went backpacking for a year and I found myself surfing ... and I was sitting on my board in the sea in New Zealand back beyond where the waves break and I was thinking this is the best thing ever and um ... I just realised there's nothing to stop me doing anything I wanted to. Within reason. And so this outrageous dream I had as a youngster to be Kung Fu Kane, I thought I can do it. Why not?

Molly laughs

So I decided that's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna be a Shaolin Monk.

Molly He has the book, the red book, with uh Shaolin monk name. Shi yen di ¹ that's his name

Andy My Chinese monk name.

Right ... well I need to peel the potatoes if it's all going to be ready in time *(exits)*

¹ pronounced "sher yen dee", each word with a rising tone

Molly The Shaolin temple is very near to my home town. I had visited there. But I no like Andy, I don't like exercise. I like dancing. I can dance for four hours, no problem. Andy can't dance. When we go to bar or somewhere (*imitates*). He can't dance. (*laughs*) Also - We both can't sing. When we sing it's horrible. And the boys are really bad singers.

Andy shouts out in pain from offstage

Molly What's wrong darling?

Andy enters

Andy My finger. The back hob was on ... full blast and the oil was sat there So I went to move the oil, bottle of oil. Red hot.

Andy goes offstage again

Molly The Kung Fu master!

Peter I was leaving the air force, retiring from the air force in 2007. Divorcing, no children, and one of the benefits of retirement after a full career is that you could choose take up to four weeks to study something in preparation for retirement and I wanted to do a language. It was either Spanish in Sevilla or Russian in Petersburg. And because I did a defence fellowship at Kings College, and I was given one to one Russian tuition during that year, it seemed to make more sense to start in Russia.

Tanya smiles

Tanya just laughs at my Russian ... it's rubbish

Tanya With a very strong accent.

Peter A funny sort of story – we were at a cafe and I wanted some sugar ... and I said - I'll do it. I said to the woman ya hatchu sakhar and the woman said Shto? I said sakhar.

Tanya She said - Shto?

Peter Sakhar

Tanya Ne ponimyoo.

Peter *(pointing at his cup)* Sakhar.

Tanya Nyet

Peter So then Tanya leaned across and said

Tanya Sakhar

Peter Oh sakhar!

So I'm banned from speaking Russian to the children because I will *contaminate* their Russian. What does your mum think of it?

Tanya *(to Tamara who is represented by an animation - in Russian)* Mama - what do you think of Peter's Russian?

Tamara *(in Russian)* Very good! ... we communicate very well/

Peter /Spaseba Spaseba

Tamara /We speak on Skype and we have worked out a few words we can say to each other/ No, no we understand each other.

Peter: /da da da (laughing)

Tanya They've got their own vocabulary.

Amit I was very nervous the first time we talk on the phone. Even she hardly understand what I'm trying to say her *(laughs)*

Kelly Afterwards I was like oh my god! I did and didn't understand him ... it was quite hard because Amit was nervous, and his English weren't as good as it is now

Amit And *your* accent was

Kelly Yeah ... we use so much slang here. Like In India they learn real English but we don't actually speak like that

Amit And she hardly understand my Indian accent you - (*he freezes mid word*)

Kelly Ah, I think you've gone. We'll call him back. We're used to it, this is our life. When I said to you we might have crap connection at first I was a bit ... and then I thought no, this is how I'm living. This is how Priya communicates with her dad.

Andy enters with his finger in a glass of iced water

Amit Hello

Kelly Hello

Amit Hi

Kelly It's not as good as earlier love. But just keep going.

Amit So yeah. It's really hard to understand your people accent. But now I'm quite good enough to understand what you are trying to say

Kelly Well you've had me in your ear for the last three years

Amit She's a very good coach.

Kelly We talked about all sorts in that first conversation, didn't we?

- Amit I was just happy to be talking with Kelly ... I wanted to be talking more to improve myself and to understand how she is like and I judged that she seems a very nice girl.
- Andy The only downside of being at the temple – it didn't really have the spiritual side like the guy in the TV and that's what I wanted, the full package, but it was just training, training. It's a bit of a myth now that whole package thing. But I still absolutely loved it. I came back here for my sister's wedding and I hadn't checked my bank balance for 18 months.
- Molly Yeah. He never know how much money is in the bank
- Andy And I had to sort of face the realisation that I'd have to get a job again. Um and I just couldn't think of anything I wanted to do and um I'd read the Guardian every day, you know, job adverts and nothing jumped out at me at all. And then one day, I opened the paper and it said TEACH. ENGLISH. IN. CHINA.
- Molly He went to the school in Zhengzhou² – that's where I was living.
- Andy If you look at the Lonely Planet the first line on the page for Zhengzhou city says don't plan to spend more than 24 hours in this shithole basically ... but It was the closest I could get to Shaolin but with a job. So the idea was I would work during the week and train at the weekends. But over a period of time teaching became more my passion than Kung Fu and I wanted to be brilliant.
- Molly I think in my home town not very good, I have to go to a big city. So I went to Zhengzhou and I worked in small hotel at front desk. It's very good. I have a lot of time. I work one day rest one day. I decide I'm young, I can't waste that time. I want to learn something. I think I'll learn English. So I went to Andy's school. It was a sunny day like this. I rode my bicycle there. They told me I need test my English. To see my level. So they send me to a little glass room.

² pronounced Jeng joe

Then Andy start ask me uh, yeah hello how are you.

Andy I don't remember you saying anything.

Molly Then ask me questions. It is easy questions, but maybe I was a little nervous

Andy I just remember you saying 'Ting bu dong' 'Ting bu dong'
³*(with head bowed, peering up)* – that means listen not understand. That's all I remember you saying.

Molly It was very easy questions ... like colour

Andy I was pointing at different colours wasn't I?

Molly Yeah. But ...

Andy I knew her English level within about 30 seconds.

Molly *(laughs)* Very low

Andy But I wanted to keep her there. I was just head over heels. She was just the most beautiful, beautiful woman I'd ever seen.

Molly Oh thanks darling

Andy So I kept her in there for a good 20-30 minutes.

Molly When I saw Andy at that time China not had a lot of foreigners ... we can see them but it's like uh very fat or very old ... when I see Andy, he was still young and handsome and I say oh, he's very handsome and he smells very good. It is like daisy smell.

Andy Daisies don't smell.

Molly You know Chinese men, they smell like cigarette and uh uh maybe sweat.

³ [pronounced: "ting boo dong"]

Andy So I left this placement test and my sales team were sure that she was either advanced or fluent. I just put her form down and they looked at it and said 'beginner'? What were you doing in there Andy? Honestly, I was just so in love with you. I uh, yeah. And um, yeah, I just wanted that time to last forever really.

Molly I think Andy ... like open my heart.

Andy Aaaw

Molly Yeah

Andy Wow.

Molly I think oh, I feel I really love this man. After, I can remember that smell, so I was thinking what soap he use? So I went to market and I found the soap and I bought it. I washed my hands with it and the smell – it wasn't there. So maybe it was your secret smell.

Andy I was very strict on not dating students, some teachers weren't and they broke lots of hearts, but Molly was never my student.

Molly When I go to the school Andy always ask me, oh, how are you today? How is your English? My friends is having party- do you wanna go? (*laughs*) Like that. I would say yeah ...

Andy The truth is, um ... this is going to sound bad, but ... Molly will agree with me, that foreign men were ... a premium in this city and um ... it wasn't difficult for me to find a girlfriend. Um, but Molly was special, ... I wanted the courtship, d'you know what I mean? 'Cause it felt that something special was happening.

- Molly I think ... don't be too quickly. I think we both keep back. First time we go out, Andy was very good and uh, second time after we met, Andy will hold my finger (*index finger*) ... and third time, like he will try to hold my hand ... next time he will try (forearm) ... then next time, (*points to shoulder*), then more and more.
- Andy I would sort of bow to you saying goodbye. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't shake your hand, I couldn't kiss you. I think we both knew that once we crossed that line, that was gonna be it. It was a big first kiss because it was yeah ... it was serious.
- Tanya I just loved English. None of my parents spoke it nobody could help me with it and I became successful at school with it. Also, my first husband, he was Indian, he used to speak English so that's why I could practice.
- Peter It was very tough when they moved to Petersburg – there is still a huge amount of racism in Russia. And he was picked on. He kept getting robbed and he couldn't report it to anyone wasn't it?
- Tanya Yeah and they would just take him from the street to check his documents.
- Peter These kinds of things started to affect him.
- Tanya We had my daughter Diva but we divorced when she was seven years old. The relationship didn't work. He ended with alcoholism. I couldn't ... I think everything went wrong with his personality. He was fine when everything worked for him, but when little crisis?
- Peter Crisis yeah
- Tanya Everything went wrong.

Peter I was married to my first wife for 26 years, and after about three years it started to ... we had different rooms, different lives, hated each other with a huge intensity for the last 18 months and it was sheer economics, I couldn't ... I wasn't going to go out and pay for a flat when we owned a house. I got stuck into work. I did all the usual military stuff until equivalent of Major, so training and doing soldiery things. But then I went back and forth to MOD in central staff jobs, which I was very good at. I loved policy ... helping write defence policy, organising the Afghanistan campaign, the first one. I was one of a relatively small number of officials and ministers allowed to see the original planning of the Iraq war. I'm bitterly scarred by that because we should never have done it. But I wasn't in a position to do anything about it.

As I was approaching retirement, I think that there was the dawning fact that retirement meant something different for our marriage and my wife and I had nothing in common. Absolutely nothing in common. At that point, I went out to do this Russian course for how long – five weeks six weeks I don't remember.

Tanya Two weeks you told me.

Peter No it was longer than that ... because I only met you right at the end. I went to a club on my own because everyone else had gone back home. A nice ... this was a famous club.

Tanya Yes. Quite famous. I was divorced for three years by then. My cousin said you should come out tonight. I didn't want to go. Because I don't like crowd and I'm falling asleep early and I'm not a night person. But one of our friends was leaving Russia to Sweden, so I thought OK.

Peter I was being very, very careful ... I was being heavily shadowed by the Russian security services because of my work. So I sat at the bar and I kept moving further along the bar into the shadows and as I got round to the shadows there was a stool with a lady sitting on it and she was covered in handbags.

Tanya I don't like dancing. And I don't drink. So I sit in the corner and be the guardian of handbags.

Peter And I was sitting there trying to hide and we sort of met each other ... two wallflowers in the night so to speak.

Tanya The first question Peter ask me – are you responsible for all these handbags?

Peter And Tanya's English was good enough, because my Russian certainly wasn't to just have a conversation.

Tanya I felt so comfortable with him. Immediately. As if I'm in *(laughs)* big comfortable hands *(demonstrates)* ...

Peter It was very strange because I felt ... very strange ... you sort of meet someone and you feel ...

Tanya I just felt very, very comfortable. As he was a big duvet.

Peter I've been described as many things That's ... that's ... uh ... *(laughs)*

Tanya The next morning we met together and we walked around Petersburg

Peter For.... Phhhhow many hours?

Tanya All day I think

Peter We said goodnight, and uh I said we would ... you know we exchanged email contact and I said if you want to come and see me off at the airport please do. And I bought a big pile of red roses.

They were getting closer and closer to boarding and no Tanya and I thought oh well, she's not coming, so I was working out if I could leave the roses at the desk and just as I was about to do that Tanya came rushing through the door ... you were delayed or something ...

Tanya Yeah. Bus was quite slow yes ...

Peter So we had half an hour before the flight left.

Tanya I should say that I felt comfortable but I tried to stop myself because I knew OK he is foreigner he would lie to me ... but one event after another proved that no, Peter is not lying, this is real.

Peter I did say I keep my word. I don't lie. So absolutely I made sure.

Tanya Peter came in September, his fourth visit, on my birthday. Peter brought roses. I still remember those roses. And he made a proposal.

Peter We sat down together the three of us, Tanya, Diva and I. We've got a photograph of when we did it. And I met Tanya's mother Tamara then. She and Tanya are incredibly close to each other. I went round for tea uh and had a banquet of Russian food. I mean we had caviar, we had bread, we had pickled herrings ... we had her famous beetroot salad which Tanya now makes ... wonderful, wonderful.

Tanya First thing mama said (*conspiratorial*) why you didn't tell me that he is so handsome?

Peter It was really, really lovely

- Tamara (animation) It's a wonderful relationship of course. Peter showed himself from the outset to be a very good and decent person ... I felt that immediately. And I was happy and on the one hand I felt fine about it the fact that my daughter had found her fate but on the other hand ... I'm selfish so I was worried for myself that they were going so far away.
- Tanya I was always completely attached to my parents. I am an only child, my father was in the military, a Soviet pilot, and we moved a lot. I didn't want to make friends because I will lose them, so I was not very sociable. There are no changes now. Of course it depends on the relationship, but in Russia it is expected that you look after your parents when they get older. My mama used to look after my granny until just recently she died.
- Peter 6-8 hour drive to get to the granny's house from the flat and they did it all the time.
- Tanya The retirement homes in Russia, we call them those houses for old people who hasn't got children. It's like to send their parents to death. A few weeks later they normally die in those places. Yeah. They are horrible, horrible places.
- Peter couldn't come back in Russia because he started to work in Home Office so it wasn't possible for us to live there. So, we moved to the UK and started to discuss what to do about my mama and her husband Yuri when we moved into this house and when we started to become ... how should I say ... stable?
- Peter Stable. Secure yeah. We were in rented accommodation at first. It was only a year after when we got our house.
- Tanya After moving around all my childhood and after ... I felt like this is my home. I felt I can now put my roots around.

Kelly I've always loved music. I always did school choir and everything. My dad sung to us, lots of country and western. One of my very first memories is coming down on a Sunday morning and Dad'd be making breakfast and Bat Out of Hell would be blaring in the kitchen. What I did was when the three kids were old enough to go to school, I went to music college, and got my qualifications, that's how I gained access to university. It was such an achievement - I was the first in the family to go to university.

Amit I belong to a middle class family in India and uh I have done my masters in India and I wanted to get something like a different kind of study that has a good impact in my CV so I just came into the Britain for study.

It is so expensive but I'm very thankful for my parents because they pay for everything. And I came to UK to do Masters in Logistics and Supply Chain Management from University of Bedfordshire in Luton.

Kelly And then just as I was starting at York University, my whole world came crashing down around me. My ex had an affair and then he left us. I was sat in the class, and I just couldn't take it in, I couldn't function. I couldn't take care of the kids and myself and study at the same time.

Amit So I wanted to improve my career. But I didn't realise that I will met Kelly over there.

Kelly My friend Lucy, who is not with us now, she died two years ago of cancer which it was ... she said to me because we were getting on OK the kids were back at home we were happy and stuff and she said I should try a dating agency. And I was like ooooh, I don't know because I'd never done anything like that. But, I joined and my god the weirdos you get on there it's unbelievable. I accepted Amit because obviously he's very handsome ... and we started to chat online and started to use Skype up until the March I think.

Amit To be honest I was just like a university student and uh in university it was just studying time so it was quite boring like you know.

Kelly He was lonely – weren't you babe?

Amit I just thought to improve my conversation it would be good if I really speak to like English people and my friend I was living with said dude look at this dating site.

Kelly Yeah because you spoke to lots of people on there not just me.

Amit And I didn't think about the flirt or something like that.

Kelly I didn't really ever see him as a dating possibility because he was so far away from York, but he was always nice and we had lots in common like the music. We like some types of music the same.

Amit Yeah

Kelly He also likes quite a lot of technotronic stuff ... the type of stuff I say to the kids turn that down.

Amit To be honest at first when I saw, I really liked her pictures and the way she just looked very innocent and then she called me and I was very nervous because I never spoke to any girl in my life in India I was like typically out from this kind of category to be honest.

Kelly He was a good boy

Amit I was very shy kind of guy before. But we talked so much then I just improved my English as well, even we celebrated our Valentines on Skype

Kelly We really wanted to meet each other by then

Amit I was living with one English guy Tony and he helped me to book my ticket

Kelly I went to meet him at York station. When he got off the train I remember thinking gosh I thought he'd be taller (*laughs*). But he was really handsome and stuff and that. And we just clicked straight away. We really did.

Amit Before arriving to York, one of my friends said dude you are going to meet an English woman and uh you don't drink, you don't smoke, right, you never did chat with any woman before ... how you will manage?

Kelly He said don't hide from me and run off.

Amit We always spoke about that day - oh we will do kiss? And I said no I will not ... I said - I never did. But I just came out from the train and I was, I was looking where is she then I saw she was coming and just going closer and closer and then I just gave her a hug and a kiss.

Kelly I was shocked I didn't expect it – I felt a right twat.

Amit I felt yes I like her. That's why I'm here talking to you.

Kelly We'd kind of already fallen in love before we'd even met you know.

Amit Your family members was excited to see me.

Kelly Everyone came nosy-ing, my brothers and stuff. Dad loves talking to people from other places so he had him sat there for god only knows how long chattering away. Amit got along great with the kids. We all really took to him.

Amit I cooked lentils. And she also taught me some British dishes as well. Tuna pasta

Kelly Tuna pasta

Amit And fish pie and you taught me Mexican omelette

Kelly Yeah

Amit And I just loved trifle

Kelly We had a lovely three days

Amit I have a picture when she was just waving her hand
goodbye at the station, I have the picture in my phone.

Kelly I knew it was just the start really

Amit Then you came to Luton.

Kelly He took me out for a Chinese.

Amit Yeah

Kelly The dodgiest Chinese in the UK

Amit laughs

Kelly But we had a great time we didn't mind

Amit She came to my graduation as well

Kelly Yeah I did. That's how we ended up with Priya dear

Amit We were - *(Skype cuts out)*

Kelly Oh it froze again! Amit? He'll ring back.

Andy As unromantic as it sounds, it was probably when Molly got
pregnant that I realised, this is the rest of my life. Neither of
us are religious so we didn't really want to have a
ceremony. So we just went to the registry office and that
was that, we were married.

Molly I think Andy really wanted a baby. And I wanted to have family, have baby too.

Peter And then we tried for a baby and couldn't have one so I got tested and found that there was no way I was going to have a child naturally so we opted for IVF quite quickly and uh Alina was born after the second cycle. And so we were complete, we had Diva and Alina and no intention of going ahead with another baby and then about a year or so later Tanya felt unwell and we went to the doctors ... and found out she was naturally pregnant. And of course for granny who is very orthodox Russian, it was a miracle.

Kelly It was exactly a year after we met when I fell pregnant with Priya. It was a surprise to us I'm not gonna lie she definitely weren't planned um I think we'd had a wild one in Luton didn't we ... for your graduation. He's laughing, look.

Amit Kelly said maybe I'm got pregnant because she not getting uh period, I don't know woman thing to be honest. She did the test with a kind of instrument. She said it is showing I'm pregnant

Kelly And Amit said - do another do another!

Amit First of all I thought maybe she just kidding me and she said no/

Kelly /No

Amit And then I thought it would be nice because I always like being around kids.

Kelly We talked about all the possibilities and I'll be honest with ya, I couldn't destroy ... Priya was created with mine and Amit's love and at the end of the day we're not getting any younger either and I knew Amit wanted children so we decided to go ahead with the pregnancy. We thought, we'll make it work.

Andy In China the husband can't be with the wives while they give birth. It's just not done.

Molly There was a gate and the doctor could sort of look at me – he told me are you OK? Push like poo ...

Andy They let me go in for just a couple of moments and I saw just the tip of Dylan's head

Molly Black hair

Andy Yeah, this little tuft of black hair. And then they brought him to me about an hour later and he opened his eyes for the first time when I said his name. Dylan, because well, Bob Dylan.

Molly laughs

And it was just ... yeah ... I know it's a cliché but it's a life-changing moment.

I don't think we planned to have Devon either did we?

Molly Accident. Happy accident. After Devon born Dylan was really happy. He jump and said oh baby! Baby!

Andy I didn't miss England at all at this stage, but my work contract was up and we were due a visit.

Molly I thought it was very beautiful in the UK. I remember going out on a sunny morning and I can see the air's water. In the sunshine, you can see the very small, small water

Andy The mist

Molly It looks really nice. Your skin feels better.

Andy I'd been away from home 12 years and usually when I come back to England, the first week is great, it's just seeing family and second week, meeting up with friends and doing stuff. Then I want to get away and get back to my life. This time was different. So we stayed a few more weeks. I was deciding what to do next career-wise really. And the thought of Dylan going back to a Chinese school ... once a week we could watch the final class of the day and basically, they would have one thing to practice for the day, rote memorisation and they would perform for the parents and oh, it was soul destroying ... I would watch Dylan try to follow actions and he wasn't ... Chinese people are desperate to come and get schooling in England and it seems daft when we've got an opportunity. I guess it was always going to rear its head that issue when he got to school age.

My parents suggested why don't you send Dylan to the local school to see how he gets on ... a lovely school in South Somerset and he loved it and I dunno ... Their English was improving, and they got a nice bond with their grandparents.

Molly Yeah, their grandparents are very close to them. Grandparents very good for families.

Andy So we just thought why not, didn't we? We decided why don't we sort your visa out and see what happens. I thought it should be straight-forward. Our friends Hannah and Steve, exactly the same situation as us ... they had no problem.

Molly They came back earlier. A few years before us.

- Peter We were talking about what we could do in very generic terms. It would be nice when Tamara and Yuri could come over, planning in terms of principle. Because under the rules for us to sponsor their visa, they both had to be 65. So we talked through and got detailed plans done, beautiful plans, we had several goes at them. Yuri is a porcelain artist, so we talked about where his studio would be.
- Tanya Lots of light in the studio so Yuri could do his painting.
- Peter A little annexe on this house and there would be a connecting door which could be closed and opened as required. Tamara and Yuri would sell their property in St Petersburg and that could be just enough to cover the cost to live here ... it was to degree of detail ... a credible plan which we had all bought into and it was all very exciting. It would have meant the kids were with their grandma and Tanya could work. It was just a perfect solution.
- Kelly We was very happy of it with the pregnancy but it was tainted by everything because we knew eventually that Amit's visa would run out.
- Amit Before they give a postgraduate study visa - so when you finish the degree you will get two years to look for a job. But when I come, they change it to four months.
- Kelly So after he graduated, we only had a few months to find something.
- Amit I was really trying for a job even I had some interview and I thought maybe I would get some luck with me.
- Andy I went on google and I called the first immigration solicitor that I found and didn't like this guy at all. He was bombarding me with questions – right, how long have you been married, I need your credit card details immediately ... and I was like woah hang on ... I just made my excuses and I thought well there's no hurry, the boys had British passports ... and I put it on hold for a couple of weeks.

- Kelly Amit would have taken any job to stay and provide and be with us. He would have worked in Tesco, care jobs, anywhere just to be here, but because of the length of the visa, no one would take him, which is understandable, but at the same time it don't make it any easier for us.
- Amit I thought I will get a job about 20 grand because I am doing Masters, but then I realised later oh it's not easy because there's hardly job over there in UK for UK citizens so ...
- Kelly So then we started to think well we have human rights, he shouldn't have to leave his daughter why should he have to?
- Andy And then I looked into it properly and discovered the rules had changed since the last time I looked and I was just ... gobsmacked. I read it again and again ... I thought I'll go away for a day, go back to it, something must ... but sure enough, it did apply to us. As the sponsor of Molly's visa I needed to demonstrate I'd been in salaried employment here with the same employer for six months prior to the date of the application, with a salary of at least £18,600. So that solicitor he'd been aggressive because he knew the rules were about to change but he didn't tell me that. And oh man I can't tell you how ... phhh. We're an honest family and we've spent some of our time as a family in China, we now wanted to spend some of our time as a family in England. That's a right we should surely have.
- Kelly £18,600? When you're at the bottom of the pile like we are, because I'm a single mum on benefits, no one gives a toss. You know, as far as anyone else is concerned, British people alike, I should be out there working doing whatever. Now that's a nice thought. I would LOVE to go to work on a daily basis and have my own social structure outside the home. But what they've got to realise is not everyone's in a position to go out and work full time. Me working part-time to bring Amit here it wouldn't be good enough. Even if I was able to go back to uni and get my qualifications, a trainee

teacher doesn't earn enough. My mum has worked all her life – she's a support worker looking after people with learning disabilities and she doesn't earn that. So I will never, ever earn that income requirement by myself. It's just not logical, it's not gonna happen.

We contacted solicitors and stuff but basically, we didn't have the money to pay them to take on our case. And because we knew that if Amit had overstayed his visa then we'd be in more trouble and he wouldn't be able to come back ... that's why when Amit's visa run out we waited till, I mean I think you had a few days left on it didn't ya?

Amit Yeah yeah. Because I thought this over that the only possibility I had over there was if I get a job. I can stay with Kelly. So I was trying.

Andy We went to see the local MP, David Laws. Who was very friendly and like all MPs are, a fantastic linguist, they're able to be on your side without actually doing anything whatsoever (*laughs*). I mean there's nothing he could do to be honest ... really nice guy, I liked him a lot. He wrote a letter on our behalf and yeah we got the letter back saying the rules are the rules, that's that. We didn't buy Molly's ticket until the 7th

Molly The last day yeah

Andy We were told in no uncertain terms that if she overstays the visa you risk her never coming here again. We thought we'd do the right thing and she could come back on a visitor visa while we were sorting out the spouse visa.

Molly We think oh, only a few weeks then I come back.

Andy Then when she went to the embassy in China, we discovered no she couldn't visit.

Molly Because when you ask spouse visa that means you wanna live in UK forever. So if they give you any visa that means you will stay here, don't go ... they worry ...

Andy We had no choice but to just jump through the hoops really.

Peter I watched this whole thing going through at work. Interestingly, at the time I was Head of Security at the Home Office. If I had to do an assessment of UK Border Agency or whatever it's called nowadays, it's a completely dysfunctional basket case. In 2010 you then had the conservative party talking tough on immigration and the delivery was never ever, ever gonna come close to the rhetoric. Not a chance.

I'm giving you a guarantee I think Cameron said, the reduce net migration to the tens of thousands. Pluck is a good word for where this figure came from. On what sound scientific evidential basis could you have made that decision? Then it became about ... who can we target? Who can't defend themselves? We can't touch EU citizens ... and so they started looking at foreign spouses and elderly dependent relatives.

From the minute these measures were mooted I know it would affect us but I thought ... you go into denial. That can't possibly ... this is so manifestly unfair that somebody somewhere is gonna challenge it. How wrong was I?

If wasn't intimately involved in this situation, my view wouldn't be this is an outrage, my view would be this is just another ... But you've gotta live it. You've gotta live through the tears and the heartbreak to understand just how pernicious it is.

So, the new rules came in before they reached the age where Tamara and Yuri could benefit, so we missed it by maybe 18 months. If that.

We hummed and haaahed about how we were going to say it. And it was one of the saddest conversations ...

Tanya Very slowly. One drop after another I tried to tell her mama ... something is not quite right with the law, something changed.

Peter I don't think Tamara understood initially and then of course it was understood ... there is nothing ... No, no, there's never a circumstance in which you and Yuri could come because

Tanya You both have to be so ill that ... you would need to not be able to dress yourselves or feed yourselves

Peter And not only that, we'd have to demonstrate there was no way we could pay for someone in Russia to care for you ... in other words there's absolutely no chance.

Tanya It ruined their plan for their life

Peter It ruined our plan for our life

Tanya I felt ... on my own. As you can understand I am a very family-oriented ... I belong to my family and now it's like to feel that half of me was left there, and half of me here.

Tamara *(animation)*It's not clear why ... we're an established upstanding people ... who have lived our life ... we can't bring a negative ... we can only bring something positive ... nothing disruptive, no problems.

Kelly I took him to Leeds airport, my brother came with us. It was just devastating. Watching him leave stood there five months pregnant not knowing when he'd return.

Amit I was really feel like guilty and everything because I never wanted that her family and Kelly would think bad about me that I'm leaving her like that because I'm not like that. When I just left Leeds and she came over and gave me hug and it was like totally emotional feeling ... I just said I'll come back and Kelly said don't leave me.

Kelly We were both just in tears. My brother took me to MacDonald's on the way home to cheer me up (*laughs*) he was like come on I'll buy you a milkshake! Bless him.

Amit On the plane, honestly I was crying ... just crying

Kelly Just pure emotion because we'd lost everything in those few hours, it was all gone.

Andy I was planning to do teacher training here – but obviously that doesn't pay the required amount. So I just literally applied for anything that was over that amount and I got the first job that I could to start the clock ticking. But it was in Cornwall. 130 miles away from where we were living and where Dylan was in school.

So I had to ask my parents to look after the boys during the week. It was a big decision for them, they never signed up for that. A lot of stress built up for them.

Molly They are very busy ... they look after the church.

Andy I would drive back each Friday, and I'd get a story in before they went to bed. Then we'd have Saturday and Sunday together. And that drive back on Sunday was ... yeah ... horrible.

- Molly In China, people say to me, you have British boys why you can't stay in England? No one believed me. I tried to stay busy. I worked in restaurant, I learned how make fingernail and how to drive. I missed them ... sometimes it's like I have no hope ... I think uh if I can't get this visa, any visa they won't give to me. So sometimes I think in this life I can't go to UK anymore. And Andy said can you swim to the UK?
- Tanya We speak by Skype.
- Peter Skype is left on in the kitchen. They have it on with actually no conversation so when Tanya's in the kitchen cleaning or preparing dinner, Skype is on every day.
- Tanya A few times a day definitely. When Dominic was in a high chair, mama called at the same time as his food time so she can see how he is eating.
- Peter If they haven't spoken during the day, there is anxiety until they've actually spoken. It's quite a big issue isn't it when granny can't get hold of us.
- Tanya It's great to have Skype. Yes, without a doubt. But children ... they can hear mama's voice but they don't come to talk very often ... I dunno ... because they can't touch, they can't hug. It's just like a voice and a picture. Like the television. They don't sit and chat.
- Peter Or – will you speak to granny? No. And that's really upsetting for her ...
- Kelly I remember being in labour with Priya and I remember that it wasn't right. When I'd had my other children and finally pushed the baby out it was like (*ahh smiles*) and a really happy, joyous moment, but it wasn't like that ... it was early hours of the morning and who wants to sit on Skype when you're giving birth? When Priya was born I told Amit and he was like oh congratulations baby and I was like same to you. It was just all tainted it was like there was a hole and the hole was Amit.

Amit You know that your picture that you sent me in Viber?

Kelly Yeah ...

Amit Where you kissing Priya in the hospital. Then I was thinking oh my god I should be in that picture. I should be behind them.

Kelly She's called Priya Lucy after my friend. Lucy was really happy that I'd met Amit before she died.

Amit She sent me a message on Facebook when she was very poorly.

Kelly She did

Amit She said to me she is really like me and Kelly likes me and don't hurt her because she already saw so many bad times before.

Molly We talked in Skype ... Devon was always saying I want mummy to come to UK. Come to here.

Andy Devon had only just stopped breastfeeding when Molly left. He'd just be in this daydream. But the weird thing is he didn't know why. He couldn't put two and two together. When he started calling Molly computer mummy that killed me, absolutely crushed me ... not for them – she *was* computer mummy to them. But that absolutely broke my heart.

Molly Dylan was really good all the time on Skype – he was always talking, talking. And my computer fixer he was very good. He helped me find Facebook, because in China it's not allowed. So I can see photos of Andy and the boys. I like watching their picture.

- Andy We were ever so lucky that Skype existed to be honest ... not having that oh. We sometimes had three way Skypes when I was in Cornwall so the four of us could be together even if we were in three different places.
- Molly I missed all the birthdays.
- Andy We missed hers as well. And Christmas
- Molly Chinese New Year.
- Andy I was just in a really dark place. I felt helpless. Like half a man. I mean not being able to keep my family together. And I was really angry. How dare anyone tell me who I can and cannot fall in love with and raise my family with, and how dare anyone tell me that my wife who has never harmed a fly and never received any benefit of any kind in her entire life be a threat to the UK economy or society. I mean there were so many nights ... I read a lot about Mark Harper and Theresa May ... I researched them. I dug into their lives. I wanted to ... I wanted to get them. And there were some nights when I came so close to just getting in the car and just driving to wherever they were and doing something crazy. Because I was crazy.
- Kelly Theresa May – well they didn't name her after bloody Mother Theresa did they? I really know what I'd like to do to her. It would involve nail-pulling I think until she listen to ya. I'd clean her ears out with cotton buds and say are you listening now?
- Peter And the thing is, if you're a European citizen living here in the UK, none of this applies to you. If I was German or Italian living here, it would be no problem. Because they have no right in the UK to deprive an EEC citizen of the right for their family to join them.

- Kelly What kept me going these last two years was the fact that our government might change hands. I was devastated on election night. I sat and cried, because I just knew at that point that all hope was gone. I mean actually I started, friends family, I had everyone voting you know and like it was like a glimmer of hope that maybe, just maybe, they'd change that limit and make it lower. If I had to I'd go out and I'd work full time, my family will help with the kids and that. We're not saying we won't do that. We're just saying make it bloody reachable for us.
- Tanya For now Mama and Yuri can travel and they come once a year for a short time but there will be a point where they can't travel here and what will I do? How will I look after them? It's my responsibility to do this.
- Peter There will be no question in Tanya's mind ... and if that meant she took the children and went she'd take the children and go and guess what – I wouldn't be very far behind. And I'm doing quite an important job here as well, but I would support my wife ... it wouldn't even be a let's sit down and think about this. Because her reaction would be an emotional one and I'm not criticising that because it's visceral. Its' a massive ... I'm not saying well that's sorted ... but if her mother and father needed her then that's what would happen full stop.
- Tanya I feel guilty that I can't even help them now to ... But I can't throw away in one moment my life here. I can't feel angry at the government because My home is here. This is my home ... It's just wrong. It's not fair. They are just a couple of old people from Russia.
- Peter I feel angry. It's interesting – it's Russian fatalism – this is the way it is. The rules are the rules ... but the emotional consequence is still there. I mean you can't imagine ... if you wanted to get the real story come here when Tamara visits and on the morning when she goes to the airport. And the next day and the next day.

- Molly I can't say angry or not angry ... I know there's rules we have to follow.
- Andy Molly was just well this is what we've got to do there's no point in getting worked up.
- Molly We had to do it.
- Andy I wasted so much emotional energy ... I just about held it together. Only just. Whereas yeah you're much smarter than me in this respect.
- And you get these comments ... Where I worked, my assistant, really nice girl who knew about our situation. And I remember her one day saying - but the country is full though Andy. I mean she was basically saying that she understood why Molly shouldn't be here even though she's my wife.
- Kelly I understand we're trying to protect Great Britain and what we've got because of the economy and stuff. But at the same time, anyone who comes here from outside of the EU they're not entitled to anything. So what's the problem with them being here? So I don't get it. I really don't get it.
- Andy So I did the six months, got the six payslips. And I just didn't want to risk anything going wrong so I flew to China so we could apply together. Went on the Monday to apply and they said that we needed a chartered surveyor to measure our property. They'd changed the rules again while I was in the air! I had to get a certified person to look at the house - another 150 quid ... and get that written and sent out to me in China.
- Andy We checked the application with a fine tooth comb and then I came back.
- Molly We wait two months after we gave the application.
- Andy It was almost three months I think.

Molly Every day, first thing when wake up

Andy Yeah – it just tells you online – approved or not approved. So every day you know you'd open it up and it's like oooohhhhh I don't wanna look and every day I'd tell Molly no news yet. And then one day ... got it ... and I think I just broke down.

Molly He gave me a call – oh, you got your visa!

Andy It was pretty much the day Molly got the passport in her hand with the visa in it ... that's when I felt yeah ... I quit the job.

Molly I was gone from UK nearly one year. The boys don't speak Mandarin now because I wasn't there for so long. It's sad for me. When the boys first saw me at the airport, they look at me like I was strange. They know I was mum because we talked on Skype, but a long time they no see woman in their house. I still remember, they look at me in the eye – they look very carefully.

Andy I've always been able to support our family no problem at all. But I was never given a chance to prove it. So I got a job to qualify, but what does that prove? I mean the reality is that I stuck at a job that I didn't like in a place that I didn't want to be when we could have been together as a family.

Peter I don't know what will happen now. It remains to be seen.

Tanya Peter just said optimistically – oh it's just temporary. They will change it. Slowly it will change.

Molly I think um I don't believe the rules will change but I think that if a lot of people talk about it maybe one day ...

Tanya I would like them to put themselves in the same position like we are and let them to try our situation and let them to feel what it would be like if their parents would be taken away from them. That's all.

Peter I'd like to think MPs are waking up to it, but are they still in parliament? And do the new people even understand there's an issue?

Andy I had the labour candidate knock on the door before the election and I said - Look I'm a one policy person – tell me about your immigration policy. And he said, oh we're going to reduce numbers, we're gonna clamp down ... and then Devon walked out and I said where do you think he's from? And I ended up explaining to him and he claimed that he knew nothing about it.

Even my best mate, he's in China, married to an Australian woman, and he was debating whether they would move to Scotland or Australia and I said well you know you'll have to get a job and do it for six months if you wanna come back to Scotland together. And even he, who knows everything we went through, didn't get it that it would apply to him ... but it will mate, it will.

Amit Please see our situation very deeply. We are just human beings we are not criminals. If I will come over there it will not be a loss for your country. I mean you have to put a kind of rule which we can afford it. They have to think about our family and my emotion as well ... I desperately want to meet my daughter. I need the time to spend with her, not just to Skype her every day. I want to give her like what my parents did for me. And Kelly wants me there as well, she needs me there.

Peter I'd like a Minister to look a family in the face, keep eye contact with them and explain to them why this is fair. Explain why it may be personally damaging to you and your family, it may cause heartbreak, but actually in some other sense it is a good thing. I'd love to see them do it.

Andy Basically I've gone out into the world as a British person – I've done my research around the world and I found a beautiful wife, a good person. And I brought her back to England. There should be people lining the streets saying (*claps*) yeah, well done. You found a good one there for our gene pool. Great job. It wasn't like that at all. What's that? That's not a European!

Kelly We just want a chance. We'd finally found happiness. After being so sad for so long and then meeting Amit. Taking that away from us for an income requirement, it's not good enough. It's not good enough that my daughter lives without her dad because I don't earn enough money. So because we're poor and on benefits we don't deserve a life? Is that what they're saying? That our love means less than anyone else's?

So we're waiting for the Supreme Court now. But that will make it another year or two for us. But it's something. Even though it's distant and uncertain, it is the hope that yeah, someone's gonna listen to us. Someone is gonna have to sit up and pay attention.

Before bed Amit'll send Priya a message on Whatsapp, you know a recorded message.

Amit Hi Priya. Hope you understand me. I'm your dad. And your papa. Papa loves you very much and I'm missing you so much. Have a good night. Sweet dream.

Kelly You sit there and you play it and you play it and you play it and it's like ... ahh. The only thing that me and Amit wanna do is wake up in the morning and say 'Morning!' and go to sleep next to each other saying goodnight love.