

## Our Plastics Family

*Subject line: FYI Pete, draft of end of year speech*

*[Will make sure everyone is on mute]*

I like to say there's never a dull day in plastics, and certainly not in Plastic World Victoria, formerly Preston Plastics. But I have to say, as I deliver this year's end of year speech on Zoom, 2020 exceeded all expectations. There was the level two renovations, the failed takeover by Kiwi Rubber and Tyres, and all that before a global pandemic. We had a birth, congratulations to Ada in the backroom team, and sadly the sudden passing of Gary Timmons from Product Design *[Two weeks before retirement Pete! Though tbh he checked out years ago]*. Even in the world of durable product manufacturing we're reminded of our ultimate frailty, but this year has proven our ability, at least as a team, to recover.

In 2020, our resilience, along with our baking and hairdressing *[wait for laughs]*, was tested like never before. And though we can joke now, it was scary. Toilet paper initially appeared the better placed business model. But if plastics has taught us one thing, it is opportunity. I remember calling Clive in Extrusions. 'Can we pivot from irrigation nozzles to push pump heads for sanitizer bottles?' No is not in my vocabulary, he replied. Attitudes like Clive's not only saved our business, but possibly the country *[Will Clive use this in his performance review?]*. I remember when the Premier said the gin distillers who'd switched to making hand sanitizer were Aussie heroes, Bob Childs *[taking a break from white-anting management]* noted that the distribution of sanitizer would be tricky in paper bags. And though made with trademark dryness, Bob had a point. As creators of effective container solutions we were overlooked by the Premier, and by the public at large. Australians love their fireys, their tradies, their medical workers and distillers, but not plastics. You won't get the plaudits like footballers or celebrity gardeners. But know this: you are heroes. Plastic World Victoria honours your work.

## Our Plastics Family

People have questioned how I have remained so enthusiastic about plastics, even during a pandemic [*particularly since Karen took the house and Jackson*]. To that I say: Children playing Lego, gumboots splashing in a puddle, leisure wear for remote working. Plastics spark joy. Of course there were low moments. Shutting down the new granulating machine. Gary's zoom funeral. Fear about how long the virus survives on plastic surfaces. Disconnection from loved ones [*is it really necessary for her to post so many photos?*]. But there were highs. Being deemed essential workers. Returning onsite. The aforementioned pivot to pumps. And who could forget Tiger King? It was refreshing to see someone so unashamedly loving what they do. I sometimes think COVID brought a return to simpler times, to a focus and sincerity that has been missing from our lives [*I tried my best with Karen; I really did*].

There were quiet moments. The wattle trees flowering in Yarra Bend Park – don't worry, it was within five kilometres [*wait for laughs*]. The green and gold reminded me of Australia, which reminded me of the importance of our work [*and reminded me of home*]. Children safe to learn how to cycle on the street [*to think how frustrated I got with Jackson when in fact they were the best days, when I would give his bike a push and he would glide away from me*]. And on so many street corners a Spoonville; you couldn't buy better PR to build appreciation of plastics [*certainly our current PR team couldn't*]. Seeing my colleagues unguarded faces during Zoom meetings, children and pets milling, with occasional candid uproar cut silent by mute [*Remember the visit to my apartment Pete, when you joined my bubble? The 'office' I had set up in the corner of the kitchenette for appearances online, befitting of the manager. You saved me mate*].

And this brings me to what touched me most, in a time when we were afraid to touch: human connection. People emailing to see how I was travelling. Staff expressing gratitude. Suppliers who checked in. Yes, despite rumours to the contrary, the Managing Director is human too [*wait for laughs*]. Some anonymous donor even left soup on my doorstep [*Pete, is it just me or have you*

## Our Plastics Family

*noticed how Jocelyn Brightling looks at me in meetings?]. This extraordinary year has revealed what's important: we shouldn't be deceived by surfaces and we shouldn't take anyone in our plastics family for granted. Reach out. Check-in. Smile. Plastics World Victoria is so much more than a workplace. I always say: If you love what you do, you'll never be alone.*

It's an observed failing of mine that I see the world through the prism of plastics. But when you live and breathe plastics, you see connections. Plastics are everywhere, unfortunately even in places we don't want them to be. We can't shy from that but we can try harder. People will accuse you of wanting to destroy the planet, despite advances in eco-plastics and recycling, in biodegradables and organic based compounds. I say: be part of the solution. And just like flattening the curve we can only do it together. *[Did you know Pete, Jackson accused me of killing polar bears. As if that is why I get up in the morning. He's only a child, Karen says. But should a child be turned against their parent? No one wants to stop using cars, or ordering fast food, or using phones, but they're happy to make plastic the demon. I know it's everywhere, but we can only try better. Like the virus, there's no going back. If it's in one of us it's in all; part of the human experience.]*

To sum up, this year has shown me how precarious our small lives are, how precious *[Beneath the seeming order, Pete, chaos. That's what people like Bob Childs, who think management is easy, will never understand. Though perhaps beneath is not right, but rather it is there, lurking on the surface, the contaminant]*. We've heard a lot about uncertainty this year, yet there's never been a certain world *[you think you know someone]*. I take solace in how we've gotten through this year, recovering from knocks, together but apart, surviving and occasionally thriving. Despite the hostile intentions of Kiwi Rubber and Tyres our plastics family is here, still Australia's fourth leading plastics manufacturer, operating in a COVID-safe manner, with the positive future of plastics before us.

## **Our Plastics Family**

*[Is recovery even possible Pete? What is not, moment by moment, lost irretrievably? At the funeral, sobbing on the screen, Gary's wife said they were planning on moving to Venus Bay. Karen in a new relationship. Loss and discovery: hand in hand. You can't unbite the apple; you can't unmute what has been heard. Onward into freewheeling love, into coastal retirement, into the promising future of plastics. And whether we hurl ourselves into the unknown or step reluctantly, that is all there is to do. The best we can manage is company but at any point one of you might fall. The comfort of another is there until one goes, until you slip their hand and spin.]*