



## Big Smile, No Teeth Jason Godfrey

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WE live in an era of information. We turn on the news and see what's happening across the globe, social media has connected us so that the things that happen to our friends far away can feel like it's happening right next to us....

The problem with having access to all this information is that it can have trouble sinking in. We're so inundated with info that, sometimes, it doesn't affect us.

Take for example a report from the BBC stating that 8.3 billion tonnes of plastics have been produced in the past 65 years. They try to make that relatable by telling us how much that weight is in things we can relate to like:

- > That's the same weight as 25,000 Empire State Buildings
- Or
- > A billion elephants

Both of which are just as abstract for me as the initial talk of 8.3 billion tonnes. I can't picture any of it. But, intellectually, I do realise that the production of this much plastic is absolutely horrific. Because most of it ends up in the trash – and plastics don't degrade quickly. The average plastic bottle can take 450 years to biodegrade. That means that most of that 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic waste is probably still kicking around somewhere, probably washing up on some otherwise

# Plastic not so fantastic

Do YOU want to live on Planet Plastic? Please digest this information, really let it sink in so it will affect your behaviour.

beautiful beach or stuck in the throat of some poor sea turtle.

And I know this. But on some level it's easy to shake my head at this and go on sucking air and waiting for the new episode of *Game Of Thrones*. Too easy.

Apathetic.

That's what all this information has made us. Apathetic to things we absolutely should be caring about. But reading about it isn't enough. The problem with most humans is that we can know a thing but we can't really know it unless we've experienced it.

So that's what we need to do.

For me that happened shooting the documentary *Trash Trail*. On the shoot, I learned that those paper cups we get from our favourite coffee spot (you know the one, Starbucks or something) are not recyclable. Paper coffee cups, or the paper cups we get in general from most fast food outlets, can't be recycled because of the plastic lining that makes them waterproof. That lining must be removed before the cup itself can be broken down and



the pulp recycled.

So, yeah, I found this out. And I know the average lifespan of a paper cup is 15 minutes. And I just have to look around to know that there are a lot of paper cups being used but it wasn't until I went into a paper cup manufacturing plant that this really sank in.

At this plant there were huge bails of virgin (not recycled) paper – because we want our disposables to

be made of the best stuff, I'm serious – shipped in from northern Europe. These bails weighed in at a tonne each, were twice my height, and basically looked like giant pillars. In the next room was an army of machines being used to churn all that virgin paper into the branded paper cup you may be drinking from right now.

Watching those machines curl and fasten and transform the sheets into disposable paper cups is what did it for me. Each pop from every machine, signalling the creation of something designed to provide us with the slightest of conveniences. And that popping noise was continuous. A waterfall of plastic-lined paper cups being puked out, all destined for a landfill or a ditch near you.

This is when I realised how wasteful those paper cups actually were. I had to see it.

Suddenly, the fact that paper cups have an average usage of 15 minutes hit home. All the effort, to cut down forests, to ship these huge bails, to run that battalion of machinery, all of it so I could drink a crappy soft drink for five minutes

or so I can enjoy a coffee without having to remember to bring my own mug.

Is that really worth all the resources put into it? Is it worth continuing to breed this idea of disposable convenience in our society? An idea of disposability that has led to 8 billion tonnes of plastic being produced and leading to the BBC headline, "Earth is becoming a Plastic Planet" ([tinyurl.com/star2-plastic](http://tinyurl.com/star2-plastic)).

Knowing 8 billion tonnes of plastic have been created means we should let that affect us, and let it affect our choices as consumers. Maybe avoid buying disposable plastics as much as possible. It's a small step but it's something everyone can do in their everyday lives.

Because it's not enough to read headlines and know that things are happening, we have to *really* know and *really* understand to affect change.

Because I'm sure you, like me, don't really want to live on a plastic planet.

Catch Jason Godfrey on *Inspiring Homes* on Life Inspired (Astro CH 728).