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Dear Gary (if I may)

When historians look back on this period in our lives, they will have to answer one really testing question: “how did a country so deeply divided by Brexit manage to pivot in a matter of days to become one of the world’s most unified communities?”

For the answer we need look no further than Her Majesty’s March 19th message to the nation:

“At times such as these, I am reminded that our nation’s history has been forged by people and communities coming together to work as one, concentrating our combined efforts with a focus on the common goal.”

‘Coming together’ has been most evident in our capital. The NHS has been the most visible example with thousands of Londoners celebrating the hard work and sacrifice of doctors, nurses, auxiliary staff and others who risked their own health for us. Joining NHS Volunteer Responders or participating in #clapforcarers showed ‘a focus on the common goal’ like never before in peacetime.

However, as you know, the headlines hide many worrying issues. Londoners have lost loved ones, or have been struck down by Covid-19; lockdown has left vulnerable people housebound and dependent on others for life’s basics; children in cramped accommodation have had little to satisfy agile minds and growing bodies; adults are struggling to feed their families as they cope with furlough or unemployment.

Fortunately, London is blessed by having many wonderful organisations like Cystic Fibrosis Supporters which are striving tirelessly to improve the lives of those facing tough realities. My Representative Deputy Lieutenant for the Borough of Bromley – Colonel Murfin TD DL – has been in touch to tell me of your work in normal times and how you have been affected by the pandemic.

As Her Majesty’s representative in this great city I have made my priority the improvement of social inclusion and so I particularly applaud your vision to create a chain of dual-purpose shops which will double as sources of income as well as havens for those suffering from the debilitating effects of cystic fibrosis, their families and carers.

I can only begin to imagine how disappointed you must be to have to postpone the launch of your debut shop but I have no doubt that, when it becomes possible to open your doors, the community will welcome what is bound to be an oasis on a High Street given the general decline in retail businesses.

The last few months have been very testing for so many reasons but I am confident that when the historians to whom I referred in my opening lines study this period, the determination shown by you, Lisa and Sonia will give them ample insights into how those positive forces were unleashed so quickly.

To close, I would like to help those chroniclers with a quote from The Queen’s VE Day broadcast:

“our streets are not empty; they are filled with the love and the care that we have for each other. And when I look at our country today, and see what we are willing to do to protect and support one another, I say with pride that we are still a nation those brave soldiers, sailors and airmen would recognise and admire.”

At last, Londoners are beginning to fill our streets again as a result of the love and care which you and so many others have generously dispensed. Thank you, I am very proud to share London with you.

With thanks and best wishes
Ken Olisa

Gary Tommy – Chair