

Floods stink.

By Gillian Hyde, Head of Membership, The Wine Society

I was a teenager when the 1974 floods wrought havoc in my hometown. I remember listening to the radio reports with fear, awe and guilty gratitude that my parents had the foresight to build our home far from angry waterways. When the rain finally stopped and the floodwaters began to subside, we emerged from our safe, dry haven and were shocked at what we saw. We wanted to help. We *needed* to help.

It was the last week of the school holidays, and Tuck Shop mums ferried carloads of teens to the muddied suburbs, where we queued for a tetanus jab, then headed for a house (*any* house) to start work. Our soft student hands blistered after about an hour of shoveling muck. By day 3 they were as tough as a navy's.

We worked incredibly hard, but not always effectively. Well, none of us had ever before cleaned a house which had been completely submerged by river water. Who knew you had to check the roof cavity for dead livestock before starting to mop the floors and walls? When the ceiling of the lounge room we had enthusiastically cleaned began to groan and buckle, we suspected we were in trouble. But - like the teenagers that we were - we ignored the warning signs. The bulging ceiling finally gave way with an ugly ripping sound - spewing onto the floor mud, water, and (to our enormous surprise) a dead cow. There's something truly unforgettable about the sight of a bloated beast in the middle of the lounge room floor.

I'm sure it's no coincidence that the thing I remember most strongly about those humid and muddy days is the incredible stink.

As it happens I was back in Brisbane in January this year, just as the waters began to recede. Glued to the radio, as I had been all those years earlier, I listened to the stories of the heartbroken, the frightened, and the stoic. Once again from all over Brisbane and beyond, friends, neighbours and absolute strangers came together for the cleanup. Carloads, truckloads, and busloads of wonderful people put in days and weeks of sweaty, stinky - and sometimes dangerous work to help out. Why? Because they could.

Then, just as they were shovelling the last of the putrid silt from bedrooms and lounges, along came Yasi to terrorise the Queenslanders of the north. Thankfully, early warnings, and sound infrastructure kept casualties amazingly low. But the damage has been well and truly done.

Through all this, hard working people across rural Australia quietly and warily prepared for their own wall of water to descend. Forewarned may well be forearmed, but it certainly isn't fun.

I am filled with compassion and admiration for them all.

As with all Primary producers, there will be serious impacts for grape growers up and down the eastern seaboard. Obviously, complete immersion can be catastrophic for vines, and growers from south-east Queensland to south-west Victoria and even Tasmania have lost complete crops. And that's not all. Areas which escaped the path of floodwaters can still be affected. Heavy rains and high

humidity bring the ravages of powdery mildew and botrytis, which can seriously compromise fruit quality. It's clear that we can expect a limited vintage in 2011.

Australian wine producers are accustomed to doing it tough. The ubiquitous wine glut has been forcing prices ever downward; the big retail chains add to pricing pressures, and competition from imports (New Zealand e.g.) has never been stronger. For some, this may be the final straw.

Many of us – particularly city-dwellers - will be only *indirectly* affected: no rivers will flow through our bedrooms; our livelihoods may not be lost. Our pain will be mostly supermarket- based, as prices soar to match demand. But it's time to show where our loyalties lie, and support our tenacious Australian growers. Send those flawless lemons back to California! Bring me the *Aussie* citrus! So what if they're a bit spotty? (who eats lemon skin anyway?)

And drink up! Those of you in the medical fraternity are well apprised of the health benefits – it's time to spread the joy...

Take yourself to your local bottle shop (an independent, if you can find one!); or pick up the phone and call the friendly wine advisor at your wine club, and **make a purchase of quality Australian wine**. Then sit down with a kindred spirit and enjoy a delicious, heart-friendly anti-oxidant laden glass of rural recovery. That warm glow you feel may not be alcohol related at all.