

GLANDORE

For the Love of Wine

The Smoke before the Fire.

What an absolutely mental ride our 2021 Burning of the Barrel was. In hindsight, it was probably one of the most entertaining and successful events of the 10 years but there were some speed bumps to say the least. One of which happened before things had even started.

The set-up had been cruising along as we ticked off all that needed to be done. Georgia was working furiously in the winery to ensure all the barrels were topped and sulphured as residential school at Charles Sturt was fast approaching and was going to keep her from being there on the night. There was lots to do but we were good. However, the wheels were about to fall off, in more ways than one. We just didn't know it yet.



The most dramatic of circumstances occurred on the eve of the event. It was Friday morning and Georgia, and I were putting the final touches to the Burning of the Barrel Pallet Entry with a few fairy lights when we heard a sickening crash. From our position at the front of the property, we turned in time to witness a Toyota Hilux tumbling down the road having just impacted with a delivery van as it exited Oakvale winery directly across the road.

Before we had time to think about it, Georgia and I were sprinting for the road wondering what the hell we were going to find. In the space of just a few seconds the events planned for the next 24 hours slipped from my mind.

As we ran, I heard Georgia shouting about calling 000 and I remember glancing down to my phone, clutched in my hand. It was a blur as I ran but I didn't have the time to stop. The Hilux was now eighty metres down the road having come to rest upside down on its roof with steam, glass and other random broken material scattered wildly around it. I could see, thirty meters away the guy from the delivery van pushing his driver door open and stepping out. When we reached him, I remember asking if he was alright. All I heard was

“Oh, my God! I think I've killed him! I think I've killed him!”

As I turned to look at the Hilux, menacingly waiting for me down the road, I had a brief realisation that he could very well be right. There was only one way to find out for sure, I was going to have to go down there and look with my own two eyes. I was not looking forward this.

The van driver was physically fine but incredibly shaken. I left him with Georgia as I ran towards the Hilux with the sickening thought that I was quite possibly about to see my first dead body. My heart was about to beat out of my chest, and I was bloody terrified. When I was about fifteen metres from the car I could see liquid all over the road, the car was upside down, leaning on its bonnet and I had a clear view of the under carriage of the car. The windscreen was shattered but still holding in and the entire front left front quarter panel of

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the car was destroyed from where it had impacted with the delivery van causing it to flip and tumble down the road. This was not looking good.

I needed to know before I got there. Was he alive? I tentatively called out as I ran. "Are you ok in there? Can you hear me?" and then I heard him:

"Help me man! My arms are dislocated, and I can't get out. My seat belt is stuck! Get me out of here. Get me out of here!"

I was so relieved. He was alive and could talk and sounded like he was ok.

I reached the passenger side of the car. The glass was gone, and I got down on my stomach to look in and there he was. A twenty something bloke. Bushy ginger beard and burly, hanging from the floor, now the ceiling, of the car with both arms dangle uselessly. My senses were dialled up, and I could smell the fuel on the ground, the tick of the engine cooling and the hiss of steam on hot metal. My hands were pricked by small stones or shards of glass, and I could see the pain and terror in the guy's face just a seat width away from mine as blood ran from a gash on his forehead that dripped on to the floor.

"Undo the seat belt man and get me out of here! I can't move my arms; I think they're dislocated." He yelled at me with panic edging his voice.

"Ok, mate" I replied, sounding calmer than I felt. "I'm coming in."

I belly crawled into the beast and reached up to the seat belt button that was holding this guy upside down in a wrecked mines vehicle, the floor littered with the detritus of past lunches, drinks, scraps of paper and oddly, socks. This was not where I expected to find myself today.

"I'm going to hit this button and you are going to fall onto the floor. Are you ready for me to do that? It's probably going to hurt." I asked with my thumb poised on the release button.

"Yeah man, just do it, get me out of here." He urged.

"On two mate. Get ready. One, two" and I hit the button.

He fell and crumpled on to his head and shoulder with a painful grunt. He was down but he was still stuck. His feet were wedged up under the dash and he couldn't twist without the use of his arms.

"My legs are stuck. You'll have to help me get them out." He said through the pain.



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I was beginning to think how well this guy was holding it together considering everything that had happened. I back peddled out of there and ran around the other side of the upturned vehicle.

By now Georgia had the traumatised delivery driver settled under a tree and Peter Lucas from Peter Drayton's wines had rocked up.

"I've got to free his legs." I yelled at Pete as I ran. "Can you get down in there and grab his shoulders and pull him out?"

Pete didn't think twice. He disappeared below the level of the car and started reaching for the guy's shoulders.

As I got to the other side and crouched down to the half open window, I could see the guy twisting and moving on to his back. Pete was pulling him around. I just had to get his legs free, and we were good to go. I laid down on my back and reached up through the window and seized a pant leg, pulling it down and out the window. His second leg came around just as easily and once I had them both out, I yelled to Pete,

"Pull him out mate. He is free."

With that I watched as his stained and battered work boots slid back into the car and out the other side. We had don't it. He was out.

I picked myself up, dusted off my clothes and worked my way around the vehicle. Georgia and Pete were taking this guy, this incredibly lucky guy, arms dangling uselessly, a stream of blood trickling down his face, to where the delivery guy was crying with tears of relief. Mr Delivery Van guy was a bit of mess as he garbled how sorry he was and how happy he was to see him alive. It was emotional and I felt bad for him. It was an accident, but he would have a few questions to answer, I'm sure. The Hilux guy wasn't even mad. He just chatted and asked for a cigarette. Amazing.



I took a deep breath and with my hands on my knees I took a moment to look around me. There was glass and bits of plastic scattered everywhere. The Hilux was upside down and blocking half the west bound lane. Seventy metres down the road, the delivery van had been knocked towards me on an angle. I could just see the damage the Hilux had done to the front right-hand panel. Geez, these guys were

lucky. If the van had pulled out just a metre further, the Hilux would have T-boned him right in the driver's side door and this would have been a very different scene. As it was the van was blocking most of the road and traffic was starting to back up.

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My eyes stopped on Georgia as she was already trying to control traffic from the east and I waved her further down the road. I ran back down to where we had all our tools and equipment for the Burning set up and grabbed a couple of High-Vis vests. I handed one to Georgia as I jogged past, heading west on Broke road, about fifty metres passed the still steaming wreck to where I could direct some traffic and see Georgia down the road doing the same.

For the next half an hour while we waited for the emergency services to arrive, I witnessed a beautiful act of community. A guy that obviously had some experience controlling a scene like this had arrived. I assume he had some Mines Rescue training as took over very quickly. Administering first aid, checking over the two guys involved and looking after the two crash sites. A couple of ladies had pulled over and were comforting the two guys. Just talking to them and making sure they were alright. I think one was the delivery driver's mum. He must have called her at some stage.

The Glandore team had arrived on masse. Bringing water bottles, blankets, towels, brooms and an insane sense of purpose. As I watched and slowly directed the traffic through, the road was swept and cleared, the guys wrapped in blankets and given a drink and one of the ladies was helping the Hilux driver smoke a cigarette. He couldn't use his arms. The maintenance guy from Oakvale waded in with a backpack mounted leaf blower and started getting serious as he blew debris from the road. I felt pretty humbled by this fantastic display comradery, and it chokes me up a bit as I think about it.

Soon the cops were on the scene, Ambo's arrived, and a couple of tow trucks were waiting to haul away the damaged vehicles, so we wandered off in a bit of a daze. Georgia and I headed back to the Burning of the Barrel entry and kept putting up the fairy lights, to the backdrop of beeping tow trucks and flashing lights. WTF had just happened. We looked at each other and just laughed. Did that really just occur? We didn't even know the guy's names.

It was a pretty eventful Friday before the biggest event of the year for us at Glandore and there was still plenty more to come. I didn't even realise I had so much to say about this incident.

As it now stands, the Burning went off with heaps of hitches, I am sorry to say. Lockdowns, refunds, tears, stressed customers, COVID, people tripping over the fireworks wires, my mum! (that's another story) but in the end we had a beautiful night, with half the guests we were meant to and half of them had to go home at 6pm. The night was clear, the food was delicious, the bands rocked, we had a beautiful Welcome to Country and a hauntingly beautiful didgeridoo played as the fire was lit.

Phew! See you next year!