

IN THE BUSINESS OF GOODWILL





ENTREPRENEUR

Australian filmmaker David Laity was on the third draft of his next feature film, and had 20 years worth of reels in his home on 7 February 2009. The bushfire that day, now known the world over as Black Saturday, burned every film and back up he'd ever made in a matter of hours, including that third draft. Four years on, he is able to describe the fire, which demanded an entirely new chapter in his life, as a blessing.

With the \$15,000 he received from the Red Cross Bushfire Appeal (money donated by the public), he and his partner set up social enterprise [Goodwill Wine](#). Some would have spent the money on replacement furniture, or clothes, but David put it towards creating an organization that gives back.

Goodwill Wine buys small parcels of premium wine from Australian vineyards and sells it, by the case, to buyers like you and me. The novelty is we get to nominate a charity to receive a percentage of the profits. Each bottle proudly sports a label designed for that particular charity by David. And each label is printed and adhered to each bottle... by David; it's a labour intensive job.

The towering mountain ash forests (famous in the Yarra Valley where David's house was burnt) are destroyed by bushfire, yet require fire to regenerate their seed. In parallel, the fire destroyed and regenerated David's life and career; Goodwill Wine would never have come about without it. In his words, 'It reset me.'

HOW IT CAME TO PASS

David was 40 years old in 2009 and in Melbourne when news of the fire reached him. He immediately drove back into the fire to rescue his dog. Injuring himself in the weeks that followed, as fires continued to rage and flare, he was left without a home and too injured to work.

He recalls a few weeks before the infamous fire, driving back home through a region that had recently burned and saw a couple of houses that had been reduced to ash. When they lost their home a few weeks later, David and partner Ali's thoughts turned to the owners of those houses they'd seen and commented that they doubtless hadn't received \$15,000, or a nation of help.

THE VENTURE

Humbled by the outpouring of support they received, they decided to take a three-month new enterprise course via the NEIS Scheme, where they fine-tuned a business plan and structure for Goodwill Wine, bringing to life a concept that had been floating around in conversation for some time. It was a concept that would pay it forward, in particular to the inaugural charity on their books, the Country Fire Authority; the volunteer fire fighting organisation to whom so many in country Australia owe their lives.

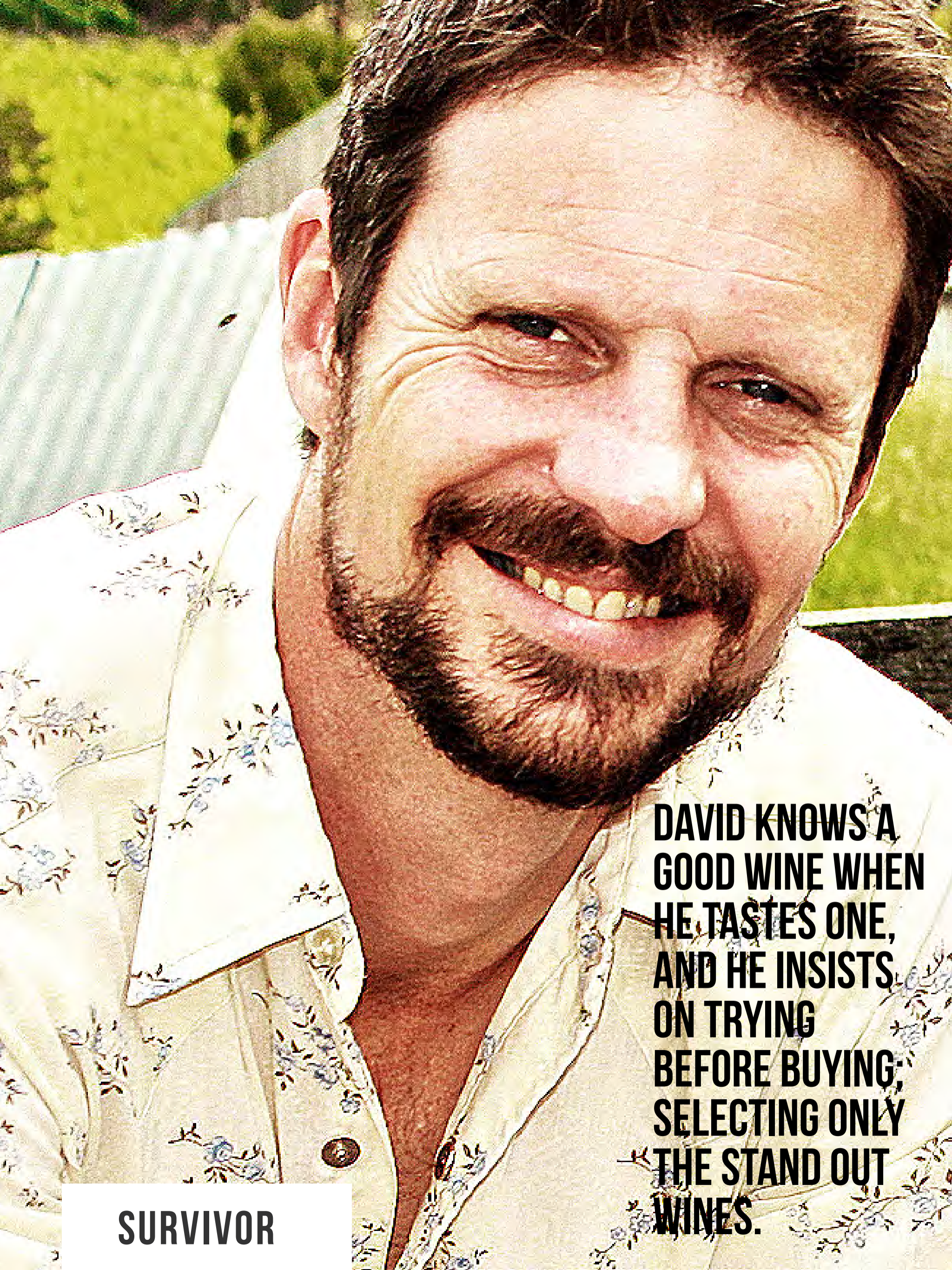
And Goodwill grew from there, with customers nominating a charity they wanted to support. To date, 130 charities have signed up and receive profit from Goodwill Wine nominations. And David explains the organization is designed to be able to take on thousands more. Had he the time, he would be approaching new charities every week to come on board, but being a one man band, he currently relies on them seeking him out. Which fortunately they do.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

The process seems effortless and streamlined. Charities approach him, asking to come on board. Why wouldn't they, it's at no cost to them? He designs a label for them, gives them a write up on a page on his website and the rest unfurls organically. The charity promotes the opportunity to their supporters, people drink a Goodwill Wine at a dinner, journalists write about his great concept, all of which result in wine orders. David prints off required labels, sticks them onto the bottles (which he lines up on his pool table) and ships the order out the following day. Labour intensive yes, but without advertising or PR costs eating into his time or bottom line, quite satisfying too.

Last year he sold 1300 cases of wine, an amount most vineyards would be proud to boast. Where the vineyards' margins are large however, Goodwill Wine is giving 74% of its profit to charity. 'I'm pretty particular about tracking and stats...I like to see that the business is growing... I'm on track to be actually earning an average salary in 5 years time,' David says, proving just how unmotivated he is by salary. Currently taking home a meager \$300 a week, he admits he's never been a slave to the dollar. Even as a filmmaker he was a man of the people, spending years championing the cause for Community TV, lobbying for funding and paving the way for other states to follow.



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SURVIVOR

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

The stumbling block is still the ‘charity wine’ perception. For wine lovers, it’s more than unsettling when the words ‘charity’ and ‘wine’ are uttered in the same sentence. But David knows a good wine when he tastes one, and he insists on trying before buying; selecting only the stand out wines. He even grows and is having blended, his own range of vegan wine, which appeals to the animal lovers who make up a large percentage of his charities.

‘Everyone’s first purchase is a ‘pity purchase’ he explains. ‘50% of them don’t know anything about wine and the other 50%, well, the bulk of those have become regular customers. They’ve purchased the wine skeptically, tried it and thought ‘wow, that’s really good’, taken it to dinner and their friends have liked it and they’ve realised that it’s true what I say on my website, that our wine is good quality. I’ve got customers who’ve been back 20, 30 times now.’

His background in boutique beer making helped him appreciate the complexities involved in making a fine wine: the techniques, the ingredients and what they can achieve. Without formal training, David humbly suggests his palate is improving all the time and he’s learning to trust his judgment when purchasing.

The wines he sources are end of run, or tank samples, sourced through contacts, and from winemakers wanting to help after reading about Goodwill Wine. Buyers are not told the source vineyard, because he is selling the wine cheaper than the vineyards themselves, so the deal is that he does not identify them. Suffice to say there are some top shelf wines being sold for as little as \$16 a bottle, and the wine critics back him up with praise in their write ups. "The quality of the wine at the prices they are asking is universally impressive. All wines tasted spoke of their region, were clean and fresh and good examples of their style" – high praise indeed from wine critic Ian Robertson.



WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Does he have expansion plans? He of course does, but it’s the ‘how?’ that needs nutting out. Shipping abroad is cost prohibitive, and he isn’t in the market to sell the business. He’s definitely in it for the long haul, surmising ‘this business would be too labour intensive to be of interest to anyone else.’ But rather than being put off by the effort required, David sees this as a strength, saying it deters competition.

David won’t rest until he’s raised at least \$1 million for charity via his venture and at \$73,000 so far, he’s a way to go. He’s looking into the viability of adding products such as beer, tea, coffee and muesli. And he likely won’t stop there; David Laity’s an ideas man and he’s not afraid to use them.

For more details visit goodwillwine.com.au



INTERNET CONNECTION REQUIRED



If it moves me, I’ll gladly write about it. Helen Collier, owner of Just Words, writes for businesses, magazines, philanthropists and always ...for pleasure.

