



# Long road to recovery

**I**T WAS indescribable. Where ever Joanne and Josh turned they could see Cyclone Uriah's destructive path.

It had snapped power poles, stripped the once lush rainforest bare, ripped roofs off houses, uprooted trees and flattened the local cane and banana crops. The devastation was immense. Nothing had been spared.

Mr Jones's large machinery shed had been picked up like a toy and destroyed. The cars parked inside had been tossed around. Not one of the 46 houses in Wooloo had been left untouched. Most of the houses and buildings were now just shells, the iron from their roofs strewn everywhere. The yards resembled dumpsites. It looked like the houses had thrown up, spewing their insides onto the lawns outside. Garages and garden sheds were in unimaginable places. Caravans lay on their sides or had been flattened. A water tank was stuck in the fork of a tree and a clothes line was left high and dry on top of the park's amenities block.

The marina had sunk. Every boat was either on the bottom of the swollen river or shoved up onto the bank in a twisted mess. The storm surge had even pushed a couple of boats two blocks away into the main street of the town. Wooloo was barely recognisable.

The place had been wiped out.

Josh and Joanne walked the length and breadth of the town in shock. It seemed Wooloo had borne the brunt of the category five cyclone. It was a scene of mass destruction. All that was left of the trees were sticks. The leaves were gone. The streets were strewn with debris. It had been a terrifying experience and now they could see the awesome power of the thing.

Even though Uriah had weakened quite rapidly after reaching land and was moving inland in a northerly direction, the rain and wind continued. High tide was due later that morning and flooding was a real danger. Josh and Joanne helped their mum and dad salvage as much as possible from the marina and the house, being careful to avoid downed powerlines and hidden dangers.

Electricity, water and telecommunications had been cut so they were unsure of what was happening. It would be difficult for rescue workers to get through. With 400mm of rain falling, the likelihood of roads being cut was high. For now they were on their own.

**I**T HAD been months now since Uriah had spent the night in Wooloo. Josh and Joanne had been evacuated the following day along with their

mother and Paolo to an evacuation centre in the "big" town. A helicopter had been doing a sweep of the area and had spotted the group moving around like ants among litter. The men had decided to remain behind and start the daunting task of cleaning up the mess. They had enough supplies in Mr Jones's bunker for a couple of more days and with the promise of further help on its way felt they would manage.

The children's first flight in a helicopter wasn't as thrilling as it should have been. Seeing the devastation from the air was depressing – an image that would be etched into their minds for a long time to come. Josh's wound on his head had required a couple of stitches and it was recommended that they all have a tetanus shot to safeguard them from the acute infectious disease.

The recovery was trying. Many of Wooloo's residents had wanted to return to see the damage and get home but it was physically impossible for days until the roads were cleared. The power and water had eventually been restored and the community resumed some semblance of normal life making do with what they had. People

came together to give one another a hand and the support from the rest of the country was overwhelming.

The damage bill to property was staggering. It would take a long while for the banana and sugarcane crops to recover and for some it was just too much and they left Wooloo behind. The rest stayed and picked up the pieces. They were just thankful that there was no loss of life.

The resilience of this tiny community was apparent for all to see. On a sign leading into Wooloo, Joanne and Josh had painted a message. "Nothing will bring us down."

Open for business. Cyclones not welcome. They knew the town would bounce back and that their piece of paradise was not lost.

## BLOWN AWAY by the facts

**The cyclone has passed**

After a tropical cyclone has passed, you should:

- ▶ Wait for the "all clear" before leaving shelter
- ▶ Check for gas leaks
- ▶ Not use wet appliances
- ▶ Have all electrical appliances checked before re-use
- ▶ Stay away from damaged trees and structures and fallen powerlines
- ▶ Never drive, ride or walk through floodwaters
- ▶ Check on and help your neighbours
- ▶ Not go sightseeing as you may hinder the work of the emergency services and place yourself and others in danger
- ▶ Protect yourself from possible contaminants and bacteria when cleaning up

In a life-threatening emergency call 000.

For general emergency assistance such as for temporary repairs required due to cyclone damage, isolation, loss of access or resupply, call the SES on 132 500.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The people and places in this story are fictional. However the events are based loosely around Cyclone Yasi, which hit the north Queensland coast in February 2011. We hope all those affected are well on the road to recovery.

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