

Crime drama

Saving Andrew Mallard
8.30pm, ABC

IN recent years, Western Australia has produced harrowing tales of injustice. Bricklayer John Button and deaf-mute Daryl Beamish were found guilty of killing women in the early 1960s and served long stretches in jail. Forty years later, reporter Estelle Blackburn revealed evidence that they didn't do it. Both men received pardons, in 2002 and last year respectively.

The ABC's *Australian Story* serialised the Button-Beamish story, which hinged on the revelation that serial murderer Eric Edgar Cooke, just before he became the last man hanged in WA, had confessed in 1964 to killing both men's alleged victims.

Saving Andrew Mallard is another story of an alleged miscarriage of justice. Independent documentary-maker Michael Muntz had heard from Blackburn about Andrew Mallard, who was sentenced to life imprisonment after Pamela Lawrence was bashed to death by an intruder in her Mosman Park jewellery shop.

That Muntz decided to document the 10-year battle by Mallard's family to free him was a brave act. The facts make for an unpromising start; we confront a violent murder and an unhappy, dope-smoking young suspect (later diagnosed with bipolar disorder) who had moved into a flat near Lawrence's shop a week before her death. Mallard had even committed a petty burglary, so when Lawrence was murdered four blocks away from his flat, police moved in on a suspect already known to them.

Mallard was interrogated for 11 hours but, inexplicably, only 20 minutes of it was videotaped. The basis of his conviction and life sentence was handwritten notes in detectives' notepads and Mallard's partially taped alleged confession, in which he gave a bizarre third-person theory about how someone might have committed the crime.

It was such questionable evidence that it haunted Colleen Egan, an experienced court reporter then



Questionable evidence: Andrew Mallard

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working at *The Australian's* Perth bureau. She teamed up with Mallard's family and together they assembled a team of experts and lawyers who for years worked for free on Mallard's case. They unearthed startling facts, such as that documents disproving the prosecution's case that a wrench was used to kill Lawrence were never tendered in court. Neither was the fact an undercover officer had been assigned to Mallard for nearly a week before he allegedly confessed, nor that a witness sighting had placed Mallard away from the crime scene.

As each chapter unfolded, director Muntz and producer Artemis International were able to interview impressive players with articulate views: Mallard's distraught mother, Grace, and feisty sister Jacqui; a forceful police lawyer turned MP; a high-profile Queens Counsel; a former Australian Federal Police investigator; a prison chaplain; and Egan.

What the show lacks in *Australian Story* type high production values (some vision is

patchy, some voiceovers stilted), it makes up for in intimate footage of despair and tearful hugs after an appeal is lost, evidence proves elusive and time drags on. What's clear is that the stakes are high for everyone: a grieving mother, a legal team with reputations to lose and a plucky journalist who crossed the line to advocate for a fair trial. Their collective relief is palpable in the footage of Mallard, surrounded by family and friends, emerging from Casuarina prison in February this year.

The untold story is the effect on Lawrence's family, for whom a decade of trial processes, appeals and sustained media publicity must have been every bit as harrowing as for Mallard's family.

Unlike the Button-Beamish cases, no one else has admitted guilt for the murder. As the documentary states, the Crown prosecutor still considers Mallard a prime suspect. So, according to media reports, does Lawrence's family.

Victoria Laurie