

Trio's dynamic young weapon

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By Bret Christian

When the Walsham murder case hit national television, the focus was on the fresh-faced young schoolteacher who gave up her job for two years to get her friends out of prison.

Mirella Scaramella (27) has been the driving force behind the defence and appeal of the Walsham Three.

In the well of a sombre courtroom full of black-robed lawyers last month, she stood out like a busy blonde beacon.



Mirella Scaramella discusses the case with Malcom McCusker.

In her head was indexed tens of thousands of pages of legal documents, including 8300 pages of trial transcript.

When a new point was raised by one of the three appeal judges, she leapt to her trolley full of files, selected one, turned straight to the right page, removed it and handed it to Malcolm McCusker QC before the judge had finished his question.

She has worked 18 hours a day, seven days a week, for two years, taking time off only to nurse her ailing father, who died just before the appeal hearing in June.

She had moved back home with her parents and three rooms full of files.

"I never even knew what day of the week it was," she said.

Her feats in ferreting out evidence and assembling complex legal submissions have amazed some of Perth's best legal minds.

Her faith has never wavered in the innocence of the three, one of them her boyfriend Salvatore (Sam) Fazzari (28).

"I'll put my hand on my heart and say that if I thought Sam or the others were guilty, I'd go to the cops," she said.

"If Sam was guilty and had killed someone and ruined my life in the meantime, I'd dob him right in.

"People say he's lucky to have me, but I'm lucky to have him.

"He's a fabulous guy. They all deserve to be helped because they are innocent.

"They are helping themselves too, doing as much as they can in jail, which travels a long way with me."

She often missed prison visits, figuring the time taken for the long drive to and from Hakea prison would be better spent wading through the daunting pile of files.

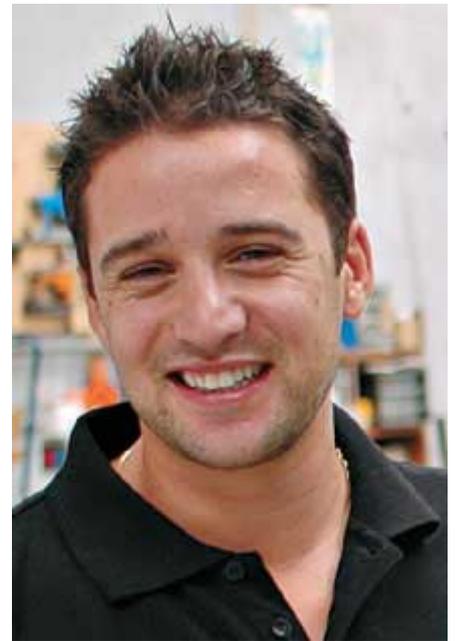
Mirella was travelling in Europe on the night of Phillip Walsham's tragic death.

To this day she is disgusted that Sam kicked a defenceless man and refuses to minimise the enormity of what he did.

Since then there have been many lows and few highs.

But always the optimist, she believes the experience has made both her and Sam better people.

"You don't realise what you can do until you are pushed," she said. "Small things that used to bother me are not important any more.



Salvatore (Sam) Fazzari



Carlos Pereiras

"I've met some amazing people and seen the best of people and the worst of people.

"Out of the blue, a senior lawyer I've never heard of, Phillip Priest QC, rings from Melbourne and says, 'I want to do the case and not charge you!'"

She says she would hate to think how innocent people can get justice when they are confined to prison and have no "Mirella" on the outside.

"They have to surrender their lives to their legal representatives," she said.



Jose Martinez

Something else has changed.

"I used to think the police were fantastic.

"Now I advise everyone: Never make a statement or go on video. Whatever you innocently say, they will find a way to use it against you."