

# Alan Manly tells how a fraudulent \$115 invoice cost him more than \$200,000

BY: LIZ BURKE AND DEBRA KILLALEA

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Alan Manly, author of "When there are too many lawyers". Pic: Phil Hillyard Source: News Corp Australia

**WHEN Sydney businessman Alan Manly received an unexpected invoice for \$115, he had no idea it would lead to a 10-year court battle and end up costing him hundreds of thousands of dollars.**

What the then not-for-profit director thought would be a simple bill dispute spiralled out of control and ended up in Australia's highest court with the epic battle costing him, his business partner Julian Day, and his family in more ways than one.

Representing themselves, the pair endured 250 court appearances over 34 cases that Mr Manly estimates cost him in excess of \$200,000 and was "very costly socially as well".

"I was at a point in my life where I was a successful businessman in my 40s. I had a house in a middle class suburb with a swimming pool out the back and a Mercedes Benz in the driveway, and it all fell apart. I was devastated."



His book is about representing himself in court for more than 10 years and 250 appearances while battling a fraudster. Picture: Phil Hillyard Source: News Corp Australia

It all began when Mr Manly was issued an invoice for photocopying costs from a colleague he understood was a volunteer.

“I was a wimp, I was the weaker (out of him and Mr Day) and I didn’t want to go to court, so I said, ‘Let’s just pay it,’” he told *news.com.au*.

“But it turned out it wasn’t that simple. Before we knew it, things turned into a dispute. We paid it reluctantly but by that time we’d been served with documents for the court and he was suing us for \$120,000.”

The pair said the invoice was fraudulent, and went to the police to lodge a formal complaint about it.

But it was when the invoice was paid and the cheque torn up that things really began to snowball and the two men’s lives would never be the same.

“Four years later we won in court, but during that four years, he had sued us again,” Mr Manly said.

“We couldn’t afford to keep paying legal fees, and we figured having watched the lawyers we could do it ourselves.”

Mr Manly made the decision to hit the books and represent himself in court, but admits he didn’t foresee he would end up representing himself in 34 different cases.

“Every time something was resolved, another claim would come up — defamation, trade practice claims,” he said.



Businessman Alan Manly said he was still haunted by his 10 years in court. Source: Supplied

“And when those matters were resolved, he would appeal them again.”

Mr Manly quickly realised that the invoice was the lure to catch bigger fish and ultimately more money.

“Sadly for him he had cornered two guys who didn’t have any money,” he said.

“I was entrapped. I could not afford to pay the lawyer and this guy would not go away. The system entrapped me.

“We found it endless but we kept going. It cost us a great deal, and was very expensive socially.

“Barbecues started to thin, I was unemployed, and unemployable for four years — no one wants to hire someone who has to appear in court once a fortnight.”

By the time the final court case rolled around, the disputes had been going on for more than half of Alan’s teenage son’s life.

After more than 10 years and after a decision in the High Court in August 2003 it was all over.

“It was disbelief,” Mr Manly said. “I had my life back.”

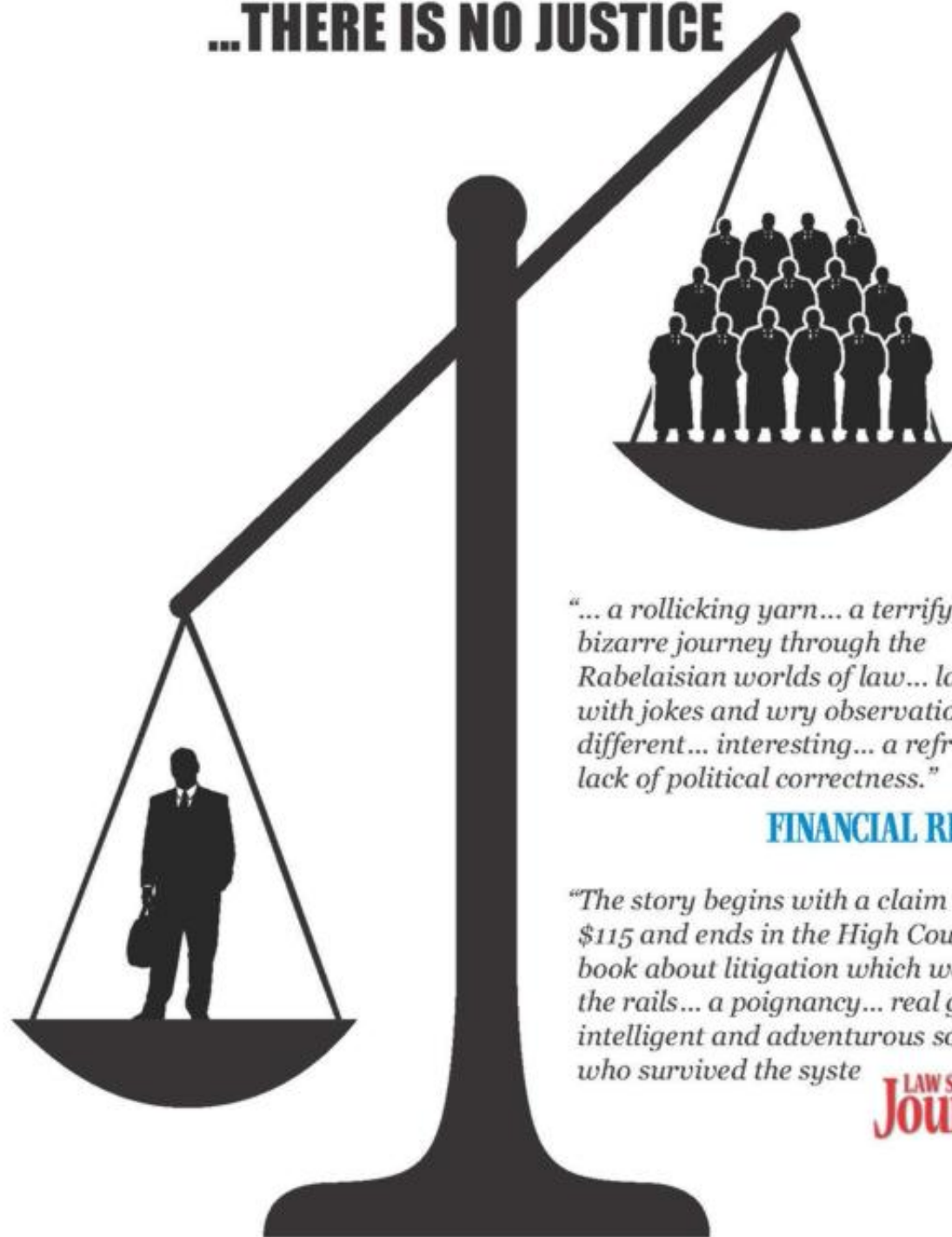
The legal battle was over but closure was far off. He said closing that final chapter was the motivation for writing his book, *When There Are Too Many Lawyers*.

“The idea is in the title, when there are too many lawyers there is no justice,” he said.

“But I guess it’s more my story, about who would represent themselves through all this. Would I recommend it to anyone else? Not necessarily. But I got through it and I guess that’s a story that should be told.”

# WHEN THERE ARE TOO MANY LAWYERS...

...THERE IS NO JUSTICE



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He said while writing the book was difficult, it was a cathartic experience and allowed him to put the tumultuous decade behind him.

Mr Manly, now the Group Colleges Australia managing director, said the whole experience still haunted him.

“It took 10 of the best years of our lives,” Mr Manly said.

“I was on the brink of bankruptcy, it left my entire family traumatised. It was only after I read the ninth manuscript of the book that I could do so without crying.”

And while Mr Manly certainly isn't anti-lawyer and uses them in business dealings, he has one word of advice for anyone considering taking legal action.

“Do it with your eyes wide open,” he said.

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SOURCE: <http://www.news.com.au/finance/money/alan-manly-tells-how-a-fraudulent-115-invoice-cost-him-more-than-200000/story-fnagkbpv-1227080343580>