



EPISODE 56: 'The Magic Men' - What Happened To The Plyler's

Mandy Matney 00:02

I don't know how Russell Laffitte lived with himself knowing what was done to the Plyler family, but I am horrified by the depth of distraction in this case after talking to Alaina Plyler about everything she and her sister have been through since their mother and brother died in a car accident in 2005. I am inspired and moved by her story, and I think you will be too. My name is Mandy Matney. I have been investigating the Murdaugh family for more than three years now. This is the Murdaugh Murders podcast with David Moses and Liz Farrell.

Liz Farrell 00:52

Until recently, not much was known about the Plyler case, when the shocking details of the Satterfield case began to emerge. Last fall, several former clients of Alex Murdaugh started to come forward. But the Plyler sisters were not among them. We knew the case existed. We mentioned the case a few times in past episodes, and we knew that the Alex Russell combination we were seeing in the Public Index was a giant red flag. But we kept hearing that there probably wasn't going to be anything there. The immediate thought seemed to be that maybe Russell had actually done his job as conservator. And there were more than 2000 pages of probate court filings related to their case, which made it vastly different from the Satterfield case in which there was, as you guys know, a single piece of paper filed with the court, but also there were more than 2000 pages of probate court filings related to their case. So the full picture will take some time to get at turns out the case isn't vastly different from that of the Satterfields and the Pinckney's and the Badgers and most of the others we've heard about. Yes, Russell filed a lot of paperwork in this case. And yes, Hampton



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County probate Judge Sheila Odom did actually issue some orders when it came to the spending of Alaina and Hannah Plyler's money, but no one did right by the girls. Not Alex, not Russell, not Odom. Far from it. Russell faces state and federal charges for the 22 loans he gave himself and Alex out of Hannah's accounts, which weren't entirely paid back. He was also a terrible conservator and frankly, a questionable banker. It's clear to us that the fix was in from the beginning. The Plyler sisters didn't live in Hampton County. But as they did in the Hakeem Pinckney case, Russell and Alex told the probate court that they did why, because they would face a lot less scrutiny in Hampton county than they would have in Lexington County where the girls lived at the time. On the petition for Russell to take over as their conservator. He checked the box indicating that Hannah and Alaina were Hampton county residents, but about an inch above that box was the girl's address in West Columbia, plain as day. The sign was right there from the very beginning that something was wrong here. But that sign was ignored by the court and it would be years before anyone would know how wrong. The Plyler story is a compelling one. It gives us a much deeper and fuller view of what Alex and Russell's alleged crimes look like from the inside and the callousness with which they allegedly committed them. And it shows us that despite what Russell is telling himself and the court that Alex tricked him that he did everything the right way. He is definitely not a victim in this.

Mandy Matney 03:44

This week, we were so lucky to speak to Alaina Plyler, one of Alex Murdaugh's financial victims. Like all of the other victims. Alaina's story shows that what was done to these victims cuts so much deeper than



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money and settlements. When you peel the layers back. It's about trusting someone during the worst time of your life. But my favorite thing about Alaina is how her story has a happy ending. Despite everything these men did to her. We're going to have Alaina tell most of her story dating back to July 2005 when she was just 12 years old.

Alania Plyler 04:25

Yeah, it was a Friday evening, my mom, my brother and my sister, and obviously myself. We have recently moved down to Hardeeville, South Carolina. My parents were in the early stages of getting a divorce. So my mom's family was from Beaufort Bluffton area and she wanted to be closer to them. So what we would do on the weekend is come back up to Columbia where my dad lived. There was a discussion where he wanted a TV so this particular weekend on July 16 of a Flies after mom had gotten off of work. We were bringing the TV back to dad's house. And so trying to give you the the setup of the vehicle, it was a Ford Explorer. And I think it was a 99. So it was one of the smaller SUVs. And I remember before we left, we left at around five o'clock in the afternoon. And I remember my mom, she hated the drive on the interstate, she hated traffic. And I knew she was already just nervous about getting on the interstate and all those cars and that it was going to take a lot longer than usual, my brother and I had actually gotten into an argument of who was going to sit in the front seat because I was 12. And he was 14. So I was at that age where I was ready to start sitting in the front seat. And so my mom had us agree that my brother would ride to Columbia in the front seat in the passenger seat. And on the way back down to Hardeeville, I would get the front seat. So I was super excited about that. So she that was her last time she had she got to



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parent us if you will. And make things right between my brother and I because you know, we were brother and sister and we bought like cats and dogs.

Mandy Matney 06:13

This fight the one everyone remembers having a million times with their siblings has stuck with Alaina for years. That decision that her mom made changed her life forever. And she'll never forget it.

Alania Plyler 06:29

Ultimately, he got in the passenger seat. And I remember getting on 95 We were on I-95 for it seems to be about an hour. It was yep, it was right at an hour. My sister was sleeping. My brother was sleeping. And I remember I was listening to one of ushers, CDs playing, had my own little headset, and I was listening. And I remember my mom asking me if I was awake. So I pulled my headphones down. And I told her I said yeah, I'm awake. And she was asking if there was anything we wanted to do that weekend in Columbia, and it's older now. And we were also going to Columbia, not only to give dad the TV, but we also sold newspapers. On the side of the road, mom had a little business with The State newspaper to make some extra money. This was the first time she was going to be a single parent. We talked about that and working that weekend and coming back to him on Sunday. And during that conversation, it got silent just for a moment. I remember looking up at the screen, the front screen and it said I want to say 5:51. And it was like immediately when I looked at the clock 5:51 we heard a loud pop. And I heard mom's scream. And that's when she lost control of the vehicle. And we left the road and we started spinning into trees, numerous



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trees, and then by the time the car has stopped. I remember seeing that Asscher CD that I was listening to hanging on a branch. I remember the smell of time from the pine trees. And my brother's seat has fell back into my lap. And I kept calling out for them.

Mandy Matney 08:29

And Alaina remembers every moment, even the most horrific parts. This next clip is especially graphic and hard to listen to. So just a warning to sensitive listeners.

Alania Plyler 08:40

I remember seeing you know just what a 12-year old wouldn't want to see coming out of anyone's head, especially their brother. So I would imagine that it would have been praying that or just from just from the impact. He wasn't talking or moving and my sister was pinned between the seat and my brother's seat himself completely into my lap. And then the TV kind of comes into play because it was put in between my sister and I so the way that the car has gone out and flipped. The TV landed on my arm so I was completely pinned into the vehicle that my sister Hannah has she was eight at the time. She was free to move.

Mandy Matney 09:34

They crashed in a single car accident and mile marker 38 on Interstate 95 in Hampton County, South Carolina. Alaina received injuries to her hip leg knee in arm she needed medical attention immediately. Her little sister thankfully was able to get out of the car.



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Alania Plyler 09:55

I sent my eight year old sister to the top of the hill of a busy interstate I just flagged downhill because I was afraid that no one would see it down where there's trees where and Hannah did is I told her to do. He, she walked up the hill, and she's, you know, this little eight year old girl flagging down cars. And I know that there was an 18-wheeler that pulled over. And it felt like an eternity before law enforcement and, and the firemen to come, but I'm sure it didn't, I'm sure it was a lot longer in just in the moment. But when they finally came, I saw that they had Hannah, Hannah was safe. And they started using the jaws of life on me to pull me out. But actually had a special moment with my mom in the car. To me, as the older I get, it sounds kind of childish, but I remember looking at my mom, and she had beautiful blonde hair. But she was, I remember telling people for weeks and weeks like my mom was glowing. And me have always taken that with me is that was her thought leaving her body. And that also helps secure my face. Because I know what I saw, even at a young age and 17 years later out, I'll never forget that image that I saw of Mom, where she was actually glowing. So I feel at ease of where she is. And again, like I said that definitely secured my face. But they did struggle to get me out of the car. It takes them a while. As they were using the doll for life to remove me from the vehicle. I remember looking over to my left side out the window. And they were putting my mom and my brother in a body bag. That was the last images that I saw of them with them being put in a black body bag. When we found them, we got me out a vehicle. I was airlifted to Savannah hospital. And that for I began numerous surgeries, and spent many times much time in the ICU. I don't remember how many pints of



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blood that I had to receive. I know it was a very, very good amount. That's kind of where my journey began to start healing.

Mandy Matney 12:30

Her mother Angela Plyler and her 14-year old brother, Justin Plyler died in the crash.

Alania Plyler 12:36

I immediately knew that they had passed away. There wasn't much that could have been said to me after seeing them put in the body bags. I knew what that meant. And unfortunately, even before the wreck, I had to grow up pretty quickly. I knew a lot more than what I probably should have known. But my mom was my best friend. And I think I was hurt as well. So she confided in me and a lot of things that I may not needed to have known. So I had already had a pretty bigger picture in life than what a typical 12-year old would have. But I was frustrated. Because my sister on the other hand was told differently. I believe family never told my sister that they had ended up passing away and that she found out from the news that they had died. Now I was airlifted to Savannah hospital and my sister was taken to MUSC by an ambulance. So we were separated and didn't see each other for weeks. So that was also hard, not being able to see her and seeing exactly how she was. And after I got out of the hospital, I did learn that Hannah found out through the news that mom and our brother Justin had died.

Mandy Matney 14:01

We asked Alaina to describe her brother Justin to us again. He was just fourteen. Two years older than Alaina when he died in the crash.



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Alania Plyler 14:10

We use a difficult brother, we definitely fought like cats and dogs, but we knew how to push each other's buttons. And we also knew what to say to to stay out of trouble. So my brother if he if he hurt me or if he said something means to me. He knew all he needed to do was offer to play babies with me or playing one of my favorite games and he was going to be he wouldn't get in trouble because I want you to tell on him. And then we would so I like to play babies in the house and play house and things he hated it but he would do it to stay out of trouble. And then on his defense. Whenever I did something wrong, I knew all I needed to do it so the football with him and then That would clear me from getting in trouble. So we knew how to push and pull each other's buttons. And that will save though, when it came down to where we understood that our parents weren't going to get a divorce. We got a lot closer, I really did see my brother mature quickly because he now knew he was going to be, you know, the man of the house. And Mom always reminded him that his dad's not here anymore. So I need you to be the man of the house. And he really did that he, he protected us and to the best of his ability.

Mandy Matney 15:36

Alaina said she had a strenuous relationship with her father, which is an important aspect in this story.

Alania Plyler 15:42

My relationship with my father has never been stable. There were a lot of issues even prior to my siblings, and I being born with alcoholism. Net goes a long way with in his family. And my dad had a rough



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childhood. So I don't think my dad really knew how to show love. And I don't think that my dad knew how to receive love, every time that someone show 10 Love, it was normally abused. So later on in life, when he had his own children, I think he just did. The only way he knew how to love. And so it was very, it was very unsteady. I wouldn't say the healthiest relationship at all.

Mandy Matney 16:33

Those months following the accident and 2005 are really hard on Alaina and her sister.

Alania Plyler 16:39

I'm not sure where my dad was living prior to the accident, because we had left to move to Hardyville with mom. But after the accident, he ended up moving in with his mother and stepfather who had always been dead to him. So his parents' house and they allowed Hannah and I to come live with them as well. So we were pretty crowded in a small home, there were several families that lived there was more of a, I don't want to say an issue more more of a pain because I couldn't walk I couldn't do anything for myself. So I had to have a hospital bed and the downstairs and I needed a required 24/7 help. I needed a lot of attention. I required a lot of a lot of attention just because I was in a sense paralyzed for several several months. I wouldn't say I definitely wasn't paralyzed. But it felt that way. I broke my femur in two different places in my, in my right leg and I completely blew my knee and my left leg where they were even talking about considering amputation for my for my left leg. So thank goodness that the doctors gave me a shot because my knee is it's functionable now so I crushed my left shoulder



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from the TV the just the impact that TV has totally crushed my shoulder. So I have three pins literally sticking out of my arm. So I required a lot of attention and a lot of around the clock help. I felt more of a burden than anything that was for sure.

Mandy Matney 18:25

Alaina and her sister Hannah were in a very vulnerable position in 2005 after their mom and brother died, they really didn't have any adults to turn to that is when Alex Murdaugh and Russell Laffitte in the picture.

Alania Plyler 18:39

So I know that my dad kept referring to this lawsuit that we were going to sue Ford and Firestone Bridgestone that whatever had happened in that wreck was it was a faulty tire. And so I just kept hearing my dad talk about that, but I didn't know a whole lot about it until one of his attorneys that he had used in the past. During a prosecution case. They ended up reconnecting and so my dad explained to him his name, Arnold Beecham. So my dad reached out to Arnold Beecham and explained the situation and what was going on. And I believe at the time this case was nothing that Arnold was really familiar with and real comfortable with, and I can appreciate him for that. And so he was referred to by friends from my knowledge of the Murdaugh firm, and that they they fight hard. They win good money, and he thought that this would be a perfect law firm to to get in on with us. So Arnold contacted Alex and Alex jumped on it. He said that he would absolutely do it. And so I talked to Alex just a few times on the phone at first and then there was a deposition held in Charleston.



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Liz Farrell 20:04

We'll be right back.

Mandy Matney 20:09

So on November 8, 2005, Ronnie Crosby and Alex Murdaugh filed lawsuits against Bridgestone Corporation, Firestone, Ford Motor companies and a few other parties. They filed a lawsuit in Hampton County, South Carolina. We asked Alaina, what was Alex like, how did he make you feel this next part is so important because it illuminates just how exactly Alex with the help of his co-conspirators stole millions of dollars from his clients.

Alania Plyler 20:41

I felt very comfortable. But I was also very timid. I remember him being very loud, but he was very confident. And so that made me feel good. Like, I think we got the right you know, I think he's gonna, he's gonna do good, you know, like, he's gonna want us a lot of money, because that's what everyone kept telling us that we'll never have to work another day in our life, we're gonna be set for life. And when you tell a little girl that has pretty much came from nothing like that was exciting. That was, that was an exciting point. But then, it was also hard to know that like, these people are kind of putting a price on my mom and my brother's life. Yeah, and me and my and my injuries that I went through, and just all the trauma, if you asked me \$1 sign, it's infinity, like, there's no amount of money, absolutely no amount of money. But when they start talking about millions of dollars, that, you know, we were just learning those big numbers in schools not too long ago from this. I felt like it was going to be definitely life changing. And it was felt like he in a



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sense, seemed kind of cocky. But I also took that as a good thing because he knew what he was doing. He he was very firm, talking to the other people in the room that I couldn't tell you who exactly was those people I would imagine from the other side, but he was very, very confident and cocky when when speaking to them to where he got his point across. I remember he looked at me and he told me that he was going to make this right that he was going to make those people pay for what they've done. And those were really helped me I felt I felt comfortable. And I felt protected with him saying that to me.

Mandy Matney 22:29

A quick note about PMPED here, and Alaina 's probate file in an expense sheet form from the law firm, we found something interesting. In addition to the \$1.9 million in lawyers fees the girls had to pay, they paid more than \$90,000 in expenses. A lot of that money was spent on experts, but a portion of it was also spent on flights on private planes and Alex's meals. Ronnie had a few meals on the expense sheet but nothing like Alex Murdaugh who apparently ate often on the girls dime. We've seen a lot of head shaking things over the past three years but seeing Alex charge two little girls for his meals at the Columbia Hooters which he went to twice, by the way, is a new type of headshake. Also one of the private plane trips was through an aviation company owned by one of the PMPED attorneys Mark Ball, which seems like something investigators should question if they haven't done so already. So around 2006 Alaina was introduced to Russell Laffitte.



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Alania Plyler 23:43

I do remember Alex explaining to me that he he basically put it that he didn't feel like there was anyone that could be trusted in my family to be in protection of the amount of funds that I was going to be getting. So he thought it was in the best interest. And he said even the court agreed that it was in my best interest to have a conservator appointed to me. And then his name was and his name would be Russell Laffitte. And then Alex also informed me that hit that Alex is or Russell's a good guy that he's known him for years and years. They grew up together. One of his good friends. So I like Alice's personality and that just that go getter mentality. So I felt good about this. I felt good. Like we were in good hands. And when I met when I met Russell, I remember just one of my first things thinking about him is like this guy is very businesslike. He wears the suit. He's very professional. Like, I'm in good hands. I'm gonna be taken care of and I can trust these guys. And that's what they were there for. But like I said, there was a lot of back and forth talking between me and Russell But one of the issues that we ran into a lot was, he was so far away. And I didn't have family to drive me to go see him. So it was really a lot of cat and mouse phone calls. Sometimes it can be hard to get in touch with him via text or email, or phone call. And I think a lot of that has to do with just them being that I was in Lexington County, and he was in Hampton County, we ended up talking a lot via those those ways. It was never really in person maybe just a few times in person.

Mandy Matney 25:36

This might be one of the reasons there's a state law about how conservators need to open their conservatives estates in the same



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county where conservatives live, having that kind of local accountability is a sign that conservator wouldn't be in some far off land with stunning here is that throughout all of the years that Russell and Alex were connected to the Plyler's, they shared next to nothing with the girls. Both were kept in the dark before the money came in, after the money came in. And even after they were sent on their ways. When they turned eighteen.

Alania Plyler 26:14

I had Alex and the other attorneys and even my own dad and my head telling me you're going to get all this money, you'll never have to work a day in your life, like you're going to be set for life and telling a little girl that, you know, I was like 1415 at this time because we were getting closer to settling. I was excited. Like I was like I want a pink. Little small little pink car. Like I had all these bizarre things that I wanted. And I thought that was really cool. Like they literally told me it feels like it was going to be a bottomless pit. And at first it was kind of strange like asking Russell, like, hey, I need school supplies, because normally you would ask your parents those things. And I will say, when I lost my mom, I basically lost both parents. She was a good mom. She was a very good mom. And she didn't have much, but she loved her children. And she always, always made sure her kids had what they needed. We didn't have the best of everything, by no means but she always came through. And so it was different. Not having mom there to help with school supplies or Christmas gifts.



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Mandy Matney 27:34

Again, Alaina and her sister were basically left to their own devices during this horrible time where they not only were grieving the loss of their mother and brother, but they were trying to figure out how to navigate life on their own.

Alania Plyler 27:50

So it was very uncomfortable at first, even though I knew that this was my money to had to ask this man that I didn't know, like a start school. I have no school supplies, having a school clothes. And I needed those things. So he would tell me, I gotta get it approved from the judge. And all I'll get back with you. And the majority of the time, things like that were approved because I had to have them I had to have the school supplies, I had to have clothes, had to have, you know, medications I had, you know, there was a lot of things that I needed. But then it got to a point where I guess we were asking and we compensated so much about me always needing money. He ended up turning into like a father figure to me. I mean, it got to a point where I got comfortable telling him hey, I need laundry detergent. And he would obviously he was telling me it needs to be approved by the judge. And I could never imagine the judge saying no, don't send her money for laundry detergent or groceries. So it really became more of a father figure. There's really no other way to put it. I get kind of annoyed at myself that I let my brain go there. But I also don't blame myself because I maybe it was a a thought that I needed to steal after basically losing mom and dad and one person. He was that person that I could go to because I would have normally went to my mom. And since she wasn't there, Russell kind of turns into that person. unintentionally. But yeah, I would.



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I would go to Russell for just about everything. And he would sometimes he would tell me no. And just like I guess a normal father would say you know, that sometimes he would tell me yes, I could do this or I could get that and I was I was extremely happy and he knew how thankful I was I would always thank him.

Mandy Matney 29:54

As a conservator Russell was supposed to manage the girls for finances, he paid himself handsomely to do this. When the settlement came through, he paid himself more than \$140,000 from Alaina 's account in over \$90,000. From Hannah's every year, he took another 5% From what each sister earned an interest from the bank and annuities. When he made his initial investments. For the girls. He held back a portion for expenses. This is something that Eric Bland and Ronnie Richter brought up at Russell's bond hearing, because holding back that much was unnecessary. The annuities provided more than enough for the girls monthly expenses.

Alania Plyler 30:40

Basically, when the money really started coming in, and I knew it was there, I could get a new bedroom suit for my dad's house, because I didn't have a bed at my dad's house. So he allowed me to get that. And then I needed, I mean, just a lot of random things. But it was not saying I was looking for his sympathy at all. But I think he knew like, we didn't have anything. And that has supposedly millions of dollars sitting in an account that he's supposed to be conserving and protecting and preserving. I didn't think anything else of it.



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Mandy Matney 31:15

And again, Alaina was kept in the dark and relied entirely on Russell to be the adult in her life making all the financial decisions for her and her sister to her Russell acted like he was being responsible when in reality.

Alania Plyler 31:31

Yes, there was many times where we were denied fun, just because the judge Well, we were told that the judge denied it, or we didn't need it, or it didn't seem like it would give beneficial. And so when we were told no, we were told no, there was I couldn't go to a second person, I can't get back, you know, and find like my other parent and tell him I needed this. So no meant no. And we just learned to live with that.

Liz Farrell 32:00

We have no way of knowing whether Russell actually asked the judge all those times Alaina and Hannah asked for their money and were denied. What's frustrating is that we know Russell had a standing order with the judge where he could give each girl up to \$24,000 a year without having to ask the judge for permission. In the probate files. There were emails from both Alaina and Hannah timidly asking for the basics, money for food and clothing.

Mandy Matney 32:28

A good example of this was when Alaina was 17, she needed to get her own home for her own safety.



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Alania Plyler 32:36

The biggest one that I remember, I was having a very rough time jumping house to house between family members. For years, both my sister and I, it was always very unstable. And it got to a point where my dad was getting, he and I were the best way to put it butting heads pretty bad tend drinking way too much to where it wasn't safe and bringing people home that I didn't even know when I thought I'd wake up one morning, then there'd be people in my house that I didn't know who they were. And it just got very uncomfortable being in my own house with my dad. And I was explaining that to Russell. And Russell said that well, maybe we can maybe we can work something out to see if the judge can approve you for a house. And then and think that was in 2010. Yeah, the beginning of 2010. I was told that the judge did approve me to to be able to buy a house. So I was any kind of gave me a ballpark I want to say it was under 200,000 was what my limit was. So I found several houses that I liked in the area that I wanted, but a lot of them got denied. And the reasons why they were denied was Russell said either the kitchen was too small, too much yard work for me. And there's gonna be things that can be changed later on. Like at this point, I just need a safe home.

Mandy Matney 33:58

Think about it being 17 years old and having to make a big decision like this.

Alania Plyler 34:04

It was very, very, very overwhelming for sure. Especially because, one I knew I was about to have a place of my own to call home because I lost



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that feeling of home when mom died. I mean, I had stuff at every family member's house. And if we did something wrong, we had to we essentially got kicked out and we just kind of got tossed around from house for a few years. During and we weren't the perfect kids. I wasn't just an extra mouths to feed now. My family did receive my my mom's Social Security and assess. So every house that I went to it was basically for money. So if I lived with this, this family member they had to get that Social Security check or I couldn't live there. So Hannah and I always grew up thinking they didn't want our best interest they wanted that oh For those funds that they were getting, and that kind of leaves a bad taste in your mouth as you get older, you feel like you are nothing more than \$1 to some people. But when I did turn 17 And I got approved to get a house, I had no idea what I was hoping I was doing really. But I knew I needed to get out of my dad's house as quickly as possible. But there was about two or three houses that I absolutely loved. But Russell really had the the last day so and so the house I ended up buying, Russell's saw it before I did, I believe I guess he saw it online. He's like this, this is this is going to be the house. So there were things about the house that I wasn't crazy about. But I also felt like beggars couldn't be choosy. So we just went on and bought the house and and life was better.

Mandy Matney 35:51

So when she did purchase the house in 2010, Russell played more of the role of the father figure than a conservator and he went furniture shopping with Alaina.



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Alania Plyler 36:02

We came to Columbia one day after we closed on the house, and we went and bought furniture and you know, things that you would need to start a house basically. So to make it somewhat of a home. So we went and bought couches, bed furniture, you know those your typical home items. That was by far the coolest thing ever. I really enjoyed that. Because I never really had anything that was mine to know that those couches that I'm taking out, are going into my home like my safe place. And that was the ceiling I don't think I'll ever forget.

Liz Farrell 36:43

We saw the receipts from the shopping spree, which costs around \$18,000 Russell put the items on his credit card and got reimbursed from Alaina 's conservatorship account. In the files. We found a single receipt for a sandwich at Charlie's grilled subs in Colombia. Russell as it turned out, was like Alex and that he saw no problem in charging a child for his meal.

Alania Plyler 37:07

I was blown away by that not the reason why I was blown away by that if I had spent all day with him, probably paying for his time as it was. And when my attorney Eric told me that I ended up paying for this man's lunch, the man that was in a fancy suit, and and just presented himself well is wealthy. And I'm a 17-year old girl. And when I found out that I bought his lunch knowing that he was already getting paid to be up there, I don't think he wasn't shopping for his house. So I don't think he has the best time like I did. But that bothers me in in a lot of ways. Because it would have been different. If I would have said hey, I'll pick



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up the check that's in technically, I wouldn't have been able to do that. Because I was only 17 I would have needed judge's approval. So even if I were to offer to an I didn't but I'm just even saying if I would have offered to buy his lunch by what Russell's always told me, I always need court approval. So I that was kind of a slap in the face to me that you put your food on my bill. I don't know. I just I was I was kind of I was bothered by that. Like that wasn't even right. No one everything that I've been through, I told wrestled that I have been in and out but not me being a criminal. But as I had to call the police on my dad numerous times, like get my belongings like I have been through a lot those just even in those few weeks. And he couldn't take the time to just sit down and let us be normal people. And let me buy you, you know, can say what? I've got lunch this time. Like I just It's bizarre to me.

Mandy Matney 39:01

Around that same time, in May 2010 Alaina 's dog was attacked, and the dog had to go to an emergency vet in the middle of the night. But remember, Alaina always needed to ask permission every time she needed money, even in an emergency situation. This often put her in a tough spot, especially this time.

Alania Plyler 39:23

And so what I ended up doing was I took her to the vet and the next day I had let Russell know what was going on and like I was putting him in a position where I don't have the ability to wait on a judge to approve this \$500. Like I can send you my vet bill and my dog was gonna die and my dog. I was it she wasn't just a dog like that was that was really the only family I had. So I was extremely close to her. She was I got to



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mother her so it kind of made it. It was kind of a weird relationship with the dog. The dog was literally like my child. And I got to mother her. So she's very, very, very special to me. And when she was hurt, I did take her to that emergency that, and it was at a point where I couldn't call Russell, hey, I need money for my dog. So I went ahead and told them like, hey, this will be paid, I assure you, but you're just going to have to wait until in the morning when I can contact my conservator to get the money in my account. And they were kind of fishy about it. So what I ended up doing was writing a check and told them just to process it the next morning, like during business hours, and I knew that the funds would be there, but the funds were not there.

Mandy Matney 40:43

In reality, there was supposed to be \$24,000 a year for Alaina's living expenses that did not require a judge's approval. Russell never told her that for a reason.

Alania Plyler 40:55

Yeah, it's strange, because even though I had to how life was getting easier to save, I'll say life was getting safer for me. But I still was living in a position on this like poverty. Like I had to ask for groceries, I had to ask for money to take my dog and I was still in school. So I couldn't get a job. And so I had a lot going on. So I felt confident it was kind of a split moment decision. I'll write this check at four o'clock in the morning. But please don't process it until nine o'clock in the morning to where I can get the funds put in the account. I had notified Russell about it during business hours and he was aware of it. But obviously it was not taken



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care of as fast as it should have been because that's why I received the letter from the solicitor's office.

Mandy Matney 41:44

That is a big deal. It was Russell's job to make sure Alaina didn't get threats of arrest from the solicitor's office, but he was tight with the money he gave Alaina. \$150 a week as an allowance for food, gas and daily expenses. That's all he seemed to have put on one account that she had access to \$150 a week; there was no cushion there and no overdraft protection. Apparently, this mistake of Russells costs Alaina \$121 in fines to avoid getting arrested. Meanwhile, Alex Murdaugh had overdrafted in the six figures in a week. Guess how many letters he got from Solicitor Duffy Stone about it? Zero. And for a person like Alaina who have no resources, getting a letter threatening criminal charges from a solicitor is scary. People go to jail for bad checks in South Carolina all of the time.

Alania Plyler 42:44

I was scared. I was very scared that I've never wanted to get in trouble with the law. Hence that's why I got into law enforcement. But I've always been a rule follower. And that's that's something about if you know me that I'm very much a rule follower to the best of my abilities. And I do right by people. So when I got that letter in the mail, I was scared. I was I was freaking out to be honest with you. I remember sending it to Russell and Russell just said I'll take care of it. I'll take care of it. And I found so much comfort and that seemed like Russell between Russell and Alex like they were the magic men like they could



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make my problem go away something bad happened, like just calls it I'm a call away. And I'm gonna make things right.

Mandy Matney 43:28

This should have been the time when Russell realized he had gone too far. The solicitor's office was being alerted of a bad check in an account he was managing should have been a red flag to most people, but not too elegant Russell, who apparently plowed ahead. Russell didn't explain to Alaina what happened with the check. He just said he would take care of it. That's a big part of their MO, keeping clients in the dark and making them feel like these large, complicated settlements are just too much for them to understand. Alaina said it was never explained to her by Alex or Russell how much money she was actually getting.

Alania Plyler 44:08

I had no idea. They just kept telling us that there was what was the terms that are like more than enough to live off of that you were set for life. That was what we were always told you're going to be set for life set for life. What that meant. I don't know because I've seen people have money, a lot of money go through it, and a year and a half. And then I've seen some people be able to make you know to live a normal life off of a good bit of money. So I didn't even know what I was getting into honestly.

Liz Farrell 44:36

In October 2015. Alaina turned 18. In September, Russell started closing out her accounts, but didn't give her the money until March of the next year. According to the court filings we asked Alaina how that went. Did



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Russell give her a roadmap for her investments? Did he explain her monthly bills to her and important household expenses? Did he stay in touch with her afterward to make sure she was doing okay?

Alania Plyler 45:01

He dropped me pretty quickly. I met with him at his thing. And it was a very quick conversation. I expected it to take a lot longer considering the amount of money that was there and the paperwork and stuff. But no, he dropped me like a hot plate. And the only time that I did have a conversation with him was when I reached out to him.

Mandy Matney 45:28

Russell left Alaina with a parting gift. Well, turns out, he never paid her property taxes before the conservatorship ended.

Alania Plyler 45:34

So I remember coming home, and it was like a bright orange letter on my garage and it scared me because they were talking about taxes weren't paid, and they were gonna take my house and I didn't know any of that I didn't. I never got to experience real world issues like that. So I was scared now have somebody coming to take my house. So no one explained taxes to me, no one explained to me because the house was paid for but also, obviously still had to pay property taxes. But again, since it's the Russell, and he said, I'll take care of it.

Mandy Matney 46:13

And we'll be right back. In 2015, Alaina had another awful tragedy to deal with about a year after the birth of her twins, her house burned



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down at this point she was renting out the house wrestle bought with her money, and she was living in a new home, but the house was a total loss in that fire. She also lost vital paperwork related to her annuities and all the files from her case for six years. She asked Russell for copies of those files.

Alania Plyler 46:48

I had sent Russell in text message, September 4 thof last year asked him if he had any updates on Alex because that was when he had just gotten shot. And he said that he was waiting to talk to his family and he wasn't sure how he was going to do. And then I had told him so that kind of started a new conversation. It's been it's probably been years since I've talked Russell since then. I just added the blue Athan because I knew that they were best friends. Because he I was reminded that they grew up together. So I knew if he had information that you'd be the guy to ask. So more things started coming out about Alex and his addictions and stuff. And Russell talked about how he was still in shock, and he couldn't believe it. And then, so I talked to him then. So then September 28. So even after we were talking about Alex, September 28. I'm asking Russell again, the three things that I still need copies up. So this is 2021. I'm still asking for documents that I requested in 2000. Because either 15 or so 16, the house buyer, I want to say it was 15. So then he just says no problem. And then October 6, he says he is shipping all of my stuff to me that day. So I know it took up until October 6 of last year to get all of the paperwork that I've been requesting. So I that kind of raised the red flag to me like why isn't he sending me this stuff? Like it's that kind of had me flabbergasted because that I've requested for years, and I never got it. But um, he was



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very interested in if I've spoken with SLED or FBI wanting to know what they've said. And I was like that it didn't really say much to me just saying that they are going through my cases, along with everyone else's cases that Alex and Russell had had dealt with. So I felt like we were going to turn up okay, because we can and I did receive money when we turned 18. I thought we were one of the I hate to say like one of the lucky ones that they didn't mess with. And then when Eric was hired, and he started looking into our accounts, we saw a lot of discrepancies and that are still finding so it's been overwhelming for sure. And it's been kind of scary. And a lot of emotions are resurfacing that I thought I have gotten over and taken care of. But it's kind of reliving the worst days worst years of my life. It's kind of like reliving them again.

Mandy Matney 49:17

And then Alaina had to make a difficult decision. Does she go to a lawyer and find out what really happened and reopen wounds that have been healing for a long time.

Alania Plyler 49:28

It was very hard for me to want to get involved basically, because I saw where like the fat or Satterfield brothers, they didn't even get any money. So I knew rightfully so. Those were the people who needed justice any even with the Pickney case, the start started looking into their cases like those guys were done. Absolutely wrong. That didn't receive any money. And so, on the other hand, I look at me So, my sister and I, we both received money. So I think we're okay. And so again, I just I wanted an attorney just to look just to look over it to see if there was any discrepancies and, and wow was was my world turned upside down



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when I found out that we were done. I wouldn't want to say just as wrong but we were we we became victims quickly.

Mandy Matney 50:24

Here is Alaina's attorney Eric bland.

Eric Bland 50:27

A conservatorship account means to conserve, to preserve, and it's meant to be an account that will be there for when the person turns 18. Or whenever it is that they're going to get their money. It's not to make, you know, turn \$2 million in \$8 million. This is an options trading. It's not trading, you know, puts and calls and things like that this is to preserve money. And I can never imagine that a judge would permit somebody to loan money unsecured to people who are credit risks like Alex Murdaugh, he would want to be honest, he would have to say, you know, putting aside lending money to yourself, that's just an absolute no, no. okay for him to be able to do that he would have to have an independent loan committee review it if they would ever approve a conservator loaning money to themselves, because there's no oversight. It's only the conservator who would be doing the oversight on repayment. It's not like that the loan committee is going to take over the conservatorship account, he would be the one who would have to keep up with well, or interest payments being made if they repaid according to the terms and the note, but he's the one who determine the interest rate charge Oden's and determine it, you know, a loan committee that determine it, but it's to Alex, he was a total unsecured credit risk. He wasn't putting up any collateral. And Russell knew that his loans were non performing loans with the bank, and he was



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overdrawn in his checking account. We're talking as if it's appropriate to even entertain the discussion of doing these loans. It's not you can't get even to the point of well, what kind of interest rate should we charge? You don't loan money from conservatorship accounts.

Mandy Matney 52:07

Alaina is still trying to wrap her mind around what Russell did remember, both Alex and Russell were sworn officers of the court and had a fiduciary duty to act within their client's best interest for 15 years, she had no reason to think that they hadn't done that. She also had no idea that the entire time Russell was her conservator. He was racking up overdraft fees over and over. And they were getting charged back to her at the bank. His family owns two of those fees for \$5. Each came on the days after Russell had paid himself a conservator fee of over \$1,500 He overdrew her account because he was paying himself for the work he was doing or not doing an overseeing her finances.

Alania Plyler 53:03

I've put a lot of a lot of trust in both Alex and Russell. I feel very, very betrayed. The trade is a good word. I would also say disappointed because these men like they knew they knew that they were they should have known that they were getting into situations that were very sensitive. And that these people, man, even including myself, like these victims, they they've already lost a lot and have gone through a lot. It just It amazes me that they had the audacity to come up with these crimes.



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Mandy Matney 53:37

And in July, Alaina faced the man who had betrayed her when he stood accused on federal charges in her sister's case and others.

Alania Plyler 53:48

So when we walked into the court, well, right outside the courtroom elevators open, and I stepped off the elevator and I looked to my right, and I immediately saw Russell, I guess not, not many people around me knew what he looked like, but I dealt with him for so much. I knew. I mean, I was like a father figures new, like family. So when you see him, you know him. And I was I was for a second I had a feeling of sadness, because I had never seen him and that aspect. He looked sad. But he also looked at me like he didn't know me, but seeing him for the first time right outside the courtroom. I had this feeling in my like, like a pit in my stomach. And I almost felt like I was doing. I wasn't sure if this is the right thing to do with me being in there. But I started remembering about things that had already been covered and had already been found. And what we discussed had gone wrong. All the discrepancies and I knew I needed I needed to be in that courtroom. So when I walked in the courtroom he walked right past me. Didn't didn't look at me again. That's ours I know, he talks to his family. And I know when the judge called Russell up to stand, his kid kept looking his son and his daughter, they kept glaring over at me and the attorneys and they would say something to each other. And they've looked back and I just thought that was very unprofessional being in that environment because nobody told Russell to go dip into our funds and to spend our money. Nobody told him to loan Alex and whoever else our my blood money like that was my my mom and my brother's blood money. It



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wasn't a lottery winnings. It was, it was blood money. And for them to feel like I was I was the bad guy. That's the way that his family made me feel like I should be ashamed of myself for putting him in this position. But I was not even aware he was doing these things. I was never asked about, can I use your money for loans? As far as I know, there was never ever a court order, saying that he can loan out to Alex and each other to himself. So I felt like they had me as the bad guy when I was just there to show that No, I'm the victim here. I'm the I'm the face for the money that he was dipping into. So it was very uneasy, I almost felt like you could cut the the tension with a knife for sure.

Mandy Matney 56:33

One of the things that came out in the bond hearing was that not only had Russell given himself and Alex 22 loans from Hannah's account with a PRs that were far below market rate, he took out three lawyer loans on Alaina 's behalf. without her knowledge, these loans from Palmetto State Bank were routinely arranged for clients a PNP. D, the loans are backed by letters from PNP ed that were hand delivered to the bank. Turns out while Russell was giving himself an Alex, 1.5 and 2.5% interest rates, you've just given Alaina rates that were more than 20%.

Alania Plyler 57:16

So no, I was not aware. And it's frustrating that I got the short end of the stick in the long run too, because I still got overcharged while he who is a successful man who has a good career who has a good life, who has all the life in front of them. He I mean, he's very, very successful. And I'm here 15 1617 years old, trying to figure out where I was gonna get my



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next meal from. And it just blows my mind that even though it was a good amount of money, in that account, I didn't have access to it, he did. And it was his job to protect it and preserve it, and to use it in a way that would benefit me. And that was clearly not what happened.

Eric Bland 58:07

Russ is supposed to be the checker, The Guardian at the gate, he's supposed to be the big bouncer outside the ballroom door and prevent anybody from coming in, that doesn't have a proper ID that's not of age, that is not intoxicated. You know, he's supposed to be the guy that pushes people away, and he let the wolf into the henhouse. And that wolf was Alex. Alex is, you know, Typhoid Mary, you let him in, everybody's going to be infected.

Mandy Matney 58:36

As Alaina and Hannah's new attorney, Eric has recently gone through the files and explained to these women what Russell and Alex did with their settlement.

Alania Plyler 58:46

It just does not sit well with me at all, and does not sit well with me at all. You know, you feel like when you are how I feel when I lost my family in the car wreck that we lost it all. But it really didn't. It wasn't until Russell and Alex came into the picture. And that's when we really lost it all. We lost our mom and our brother basically traded it in for money. And then they took the money so it was like a double loss for us and it doesn't feel right that they paid it paid the loans back with other with other victims monies like that just I have a heart and I have empathy



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and that just bothers me so bad. Knowing that that's what they were doing. And I just I can't imagine doing dirty work like that. It just I could never I couldn't I don't have the conscience to do that. I I don't understand where these men thought that it was okay. It's okay. And so it's not okay. We're seeing that.

Liz Farrell 59:53

In the probate files. We found an email from Hannah asking Russell for money to buy a car she told Russell that she needed the car to have a way back and forth to school. Here's a passage from it, quote, most importantly, I would help my family out with financial problems by me getting a job and having transportation, I would also be helping my grandfather out tremendously by taking him where he needs to go considering he is on 100% Oxygen. Russell told her no explaining that Judge Odom didn't feel like she was mature enough for the car and that it wouldn't be considered, quote, educational. But was that the reason? Or was it because he an Alex had been treating her account like their own piggy banks, and there wasn't enough money in the accounts to get her a car.

Alania Plyler 1:00:37

I needed Hannah to have a car because she was living with. I want to say she was living with me at that time, because I had my children, August 4 2014. And it was just me and Hannah, kids ourselves basically taking care of two babies because their father was not in the picture. We didn't have family to help take care of my twin. So it was me and Hannah, like we we don't, a lot of times, I look back and I wonder how we how we're still here, how we made it and all in one piece. But they



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would have been really convenient for Hannah to have the car when she asked for it because I ended up having a c-section. And I couldn't drive for so long. And Hannah was the only one that could drive. So she was driving my car as much as as much as I needed or two. And actually, Hannah was the one that drove me in the babies home from the hospital in my car because she didn't have one. So I'm not sure what click to to allow Hannah to get a vehicle but we were very disappointed. And it's frustrating. And it created even more family problems for us. For her being denied it like yes, school was very important. But we had bigger issues at the at the time too than just school. So I was I remember being just at wit's end with with everything, like I got a car, why didn't she get a car like this? It was insane. And then I actually find coincidental now, when Hannah did get a car it was delivered to my house because she lived with me and I remember the guy that delivered the vehicle told me that he also was the one who towed away the vehicle that my mom was driving in the wreck, so I kind of thought that was special at the time. But even now I think back I'm like, was that a coincidence or not that the same person that pulled my mom's car out of the trees is the same person who delivers my sister's car to our house.

Mandy Matney 1:02:46

This is the part we need to tell you about all the ways elegant wrestle use the pilers case and the pilers money to enrich their friends both Hannah and Alaina 's car came from a Hampton county mechanic with the tow company whose sources have told us is incredibly close with Alex Russel paid the daughter of a bank employee to sit with Alaina when the electric company came to our house to turn the electric on



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Alex paid the father of one of his partners daughter in law's 1000s of dollars to act as a chauffeur for the girls between Hampton and Columbia. One of the private flights Alex took was through an aviation company owned by a partner but the most shocking one was Maggie Murdaugh's father in the girls probate files are emails to and from Maggie's father Terry brand Center. In one email, Russell tells Alex that they should go with Maggie's father's proposal because quote, I just feel like we have a hard time justifying how we left that much money on the table. But the thing that you need to know about Alaina story is this. She doesn't want your sympathy. She just wants people to be held accountable. Alaina now has a beautiful life. She has twins a boy and a girl named after her mother and brother.

Alania Plyler 1:04:10

Who I will add I do not think it is coincidental that they are boy and a girl I think God knew what He was doing when he gave me those babies. So they are both named after my mom and my brother. My life is beautiful now even even through all the all the ashes I say and God does turn DD in the ash and that beautiful children and I got a wonderful husband. So my life is not all terrible anymore. I came from a rough a rough time but man I've got stories to tell and definitely life lessons to take along the way. That's for sure.

Mandy Matney 1:04:46

The most beautiful part of all of this Alaina took everything she learned growing up about loss, tragedy, family and faith and she created a life filled with hope and love. She is a proud Debbie. At now and Lexington



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County, South Carolina, she knows firsthand how difficult life can be sometimes. And she chose a career devoted to helping others.

Alania Plyler 1:05:10

I got into law enforcement because I my whole life, I felt like I was in survival mode. And that's where I worked best that I wanted to help people. I feel like that's the cliché answer sometimes. But for me, God really lit the way and showed and directed me exactly where I needed to be and how to get into law enforcement and I just followed it and that was my calling and it was helping my community whether I saw the the worst in people and I've been in that position many times and I knew how to react because I knew what I would have wanted.

Mandy Matney 1:05:56

The Murdaugh Murders Podcast is created by me, Mandy Matney and my fiancé David Moses. Our executive editor is Liz Farrell, produced by Luna Shark Productions.