



EPISODE 62: 'Rich People Problems': The Victimization of Russell Laffitte

[00:00:00] **Mandy Matney:** I don't know why Alex Murdaugh has so much power over Russell Laffitte and Palmetto State Bank. But I do believe that they are not the victims in this. No matter how many times they claim to have been tricked by Alex Murdaugh, I will not let Russell or the bank try to claim a spot next to the actual victims here — the very people they betrayed by allowing Alex to call the shots. My name is Mandy Matney. I have been investigating the Murdaugh family for more than three and a half years now. This is the Murdaugh Murders Podcast with David Moses and Liz Farrell.

[00:00:56] First things first, we wanna make it abundantly clear that we severed ties with FITSNews. Those of you who follow us on social media can see our full statement about that. And moving on to better things, it is almost officially fall. And I can't believe I'm saying this, but we're less than one month away from our wedding day. Shout out to our unbelievable wedding planner, Kelli Corn, who has taken so many responsibilities off of our shoulders so we can focus on our work here. I'm literally the worst when it comes to planning things, so I really have to thank my sweet fiancée, David, and Kelli for working so hard to get everything in order for our big day. And man, there is still a lot of work to be done.

[00:01:41] We're also excited to announce that we have another special bonus episode for y'all this Friday. Eric Bland will be serving a hot cup of justice to start your weekend on the right foot. We are so happy the first bonus episode was a huge success, and we wanna continue the momentum of educating the public on the law so that none of us get taken advantage of. Stay tuned Friday for our second Cup of Justice bonus episode on the MMP feed.

[00:02:11] And speaking of our legal system and the power of podcast, this week, after 23 years in prison, Adnan Syed, a Baltimore man whose story was heard around the world, thanks to the hit podcast *Serial*, is now a free man. This is a huge moment for so many journalists like Liz and I out there. I've said this before, but *Serial* changed so many lives, ours included, and carved a path for true crime storytelling that none of us knew was possible. If it wasn't for *Serial*, we probably wouldn't be doing this podcast right now. You know, I've seen *Serial*'s host, Sarah Koenig, get a lot of heat online for her storytelling



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and journalism methods, particularly about not correcting some issues in her initial reporting. But when it comes down to it, what she did with *Serial*, how she made the story about a reporter's journey, and how murder investigations really work, she made Adnan's story impossible to ignore. Say what you will about Sarah Koenig, but her work, combined with the work from the *Undisclosed* podcast, was ultimately effective. It captured worldwide attention to not just this crime, but other wrongful convictions. It changed storytelling. And eventually, years later, it helped free Adnan. And that is a big deal. We hope that the news about Adnan, combined with the results that we're seeing from our podcast, encourages journalists around the world to pursue stories like Adnan's that no one is looking at and encourages them to shine a light until justice is served.

[00:03:58] So a few weeks ago, we told y'all about Russell Laffitte's federal hearing on September 6th. Because the hearing was held in Charleston on a Tuesday — and Tuesdays are always crazy for us because we have Wednesday podcast deadlines — neither Liz nor I could go to Russell's bond modification hearing, which, by the way, are typically uneventful and short. But surprise! Like everything in this story that is supposed to be procedural and boring, it turns out the hearing was the exact opposite.

[00:04:30] Last week, a 127-page transcript from Russell Laffitte's September 6th federal court hearing was made available to the public. And let me tell you, it is mind-blowing. And, of course, there is a lot to unpack. Liz and I have spent the past week poring over every page several times and talking about all of the new pieces of information. So much happened that did not get covered by mainstream media at the time. Part of this is because federal court prohibits recording, so reporters have to take note by hand. It is really easy to miss things. And another reason is reporters who work for corporate newspapers and news stations are on tight daily deadlines and typically aren't given the opportunity to take deeper dives into stories like this. But that is what we're here for.

[00:05:25] In this episode, we're going to tackle the biggest revelations from this hearing, and there's a lot to talk about. For our bonus episode with Eric Bland this week, we're going to talk about the legal strategy here because it's really interesting. There has been a lot of chatter recently about why Russell's attorneys would ever choose to put him on the stand for a pretrial motion and why they would allow Russell's wife to speak during the hearing. After reading



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the transcripts, we can see what people are talking about. I'm really excited to share that episode with y'all later this week.

[00:06:06] So this transcript has given us an even better picture of what was happening with Alex before and after the murders. It also gives us an insight into the mindset of Hampton County's wealthiest residents and what was going on with Alex, Russell, Palmetto State Bank, and PMPED during the time of these alleged schemes. Also, it gives us a really good look how Alex was able to allegedly steal millions of dollars and how a culture of corruption was able to thrive in Hampton County. And let me just tell you now, Russell implicates several other people during this hearing.

[00:06:49] So let's start with the reason for this hearing. Russell is facing 21 charges in state court and six charges in federal court. After having an ankle monitor put on him in May as a condition of bond for the state charges, he had a second ankle monitor put on in July as a condition of bond for the federal charges. That is two ankle monitors, which we've been told is very rare. As we've reported in episode 60, Russell's attorneys and the US Attorney's Office filed memos in the lead-up to the September 6th hearing that gave us a lot more information about what Russell is accused of doing. We knew that the hearing would be interesting, but we had no idea it would go in this direction.

[00:07:37] So the main issue was that Russell wanted to be taken off house arrest and have his federal ankle monitor removed. His attorneys argued that the court was confusing him with Alex and punishing him as a result of pretrial publicity. They also accuse the court of getting the wrong idea about Russell based on the, quote, crazy conditions associated with his state bond. Russell is scheduled to go to trial November 8th of this year on federal charges. This means that the hearing was held to shave off just eight weeks of Russell having to wear two monitors. He only had two more months — two months of discomfort to bear — but he apparently couldn't do it. Two months was too long for Russell Lucius Laffitte to be inconvenienced or alter his life in any way as he awaits judgment for his role in Alex's alleged crimes.

[00:08:36] **Liz Farrell:** After reading over the transcript, it's amazing to us how much entitlement and arrogance emerges from these guys when they're finally being held accountable. Russell is facing 27 charges and dozens of years in state and/or federal prison. And yet, he's trading the removal of an



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ankle monitor like he was denied the aisle seat on a flight to Hawaii. He is totally forgetting that jail was an option for him. He could be awaiting his trials in jail. The ankle monitors are actually a privilege. Nevertheless, Russell testified for two and a half hours. And afterward, his wife, Susie Laffitte, read a long speech in the hopes that the judge would change her mind. The judge ultimately decided to take him off of house arrest, but she wasn't buying the argument that Russell's ankle bracelet should come off.

[00:09:25] What's really struck me about all this is how Russell and Susie thought their words would impress the judge in any way; that the judge would hear what they had to say and think they're being treated unfairly. Their words ended up doing the exact opposite. Instead of coming across as humble country folk, which is the look they seem to be going for, they came across as really out of touch. There was no apology, no regret, no acknowledgment that Russell's actions, whether they're criminal or not, have caused a whole lot of hurt for the victims. Instead, the Laffittes tried to say that they, too, are victims here. The whole thing was basically a demand for the court to comply with their wishes. We often point out that without so and so, there is no Alex Murdaugh. Russell is one of those people. Without him, Alex could not have stolen a few of the millions he's accused of stealing. But in this transcript, it's clear that there are others, and Russell seemed to have no problem throwing them all under the bus.

[00:10:22] A major part of our mission is to give voice to the victims — people whose suffering gets prolonged and amplified because of corruption, incompetence, or both. So for this episode, we spoke with Alania Plyler. We wanted to get her perspective on Russell's and Susie's courtroom performance. Once again, she had some really smart observations and powerful things to say. So we're going to start with the end of the hearing first because we think Susie's speech to the judge really sets the tone for the whole hearing.

[00:10:49] To recreate the speech because, again, there's no recording, we had our friend, Maggie Washo, read it. Maggie is the longtime publisher of CH2 Magazine on Hilton Head Island and CB2 Magazine that covers the rest of Beaufort County. The speech was really long, so we picked out the most relevant excerpts. Here's how Susie's speech started.



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[00:11:12] **Maggie Washo:** Good morning, Your Honor, all counsel present, and ladies and gentlemen of the audience. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to say a few words. Bear with me. This is not my arena. I prefer kindergartens, third-graders, and anything below-sixth graders, and this is certainly not on my bucket list. However, I feel it is necessary that I share with you today. First of all, I want to express sympathy to each and every victim that has been taken advantage of by Alex Murdaugh. My family and I understand how it feels to be victimized by someone you trusted, and we sympathize with each of those victims.

[00:11:46] **Mandy Matney:** We asked Alania Plyler, a real victim who has been dragged into this mess through no fault of her own, about how she felt when she read the statement from Susie.

[00:11:59] **Alania Plyler:** That word "sympathy" has always gotten me like, don't feel sorry for me. And not in that aspect, like your husband did what he did and I feel like he needs to take responsibility for his actions. And Susie, as his wife, needs to take responsibility of her husband's actions and say, "Hey, he's not as perfect as I thought he was gonna be." Like people do make mistakes. Honestly, through this, and this is totally my opinion, reading this transcript of Susie, I don't think she knows her husband as well as she thought she did. It's very bland, and it's very, like there's really nothing really personable in it. So reading about that she sympathizes with him, but it's really that next line where she talks about that she's upset her family has been victimized and all, that's pretty shameful that you went to that level to begin with because she has no idea. She has no idea what it is to be victimized by her husband, Russell.

[00:12:56] **Maggie Washo:** Russell and I have remained quiet throughout this process for several reasons. One, we thought that was the expectation, the way the legal process was supposed to proceed, the appropriate behavior in legal proceedings. Two, we feared that our words would be spun and misrepresented by the media or attorneys. Three, we do not pray of being in the spotlight. We are simply a family striving to live each day with purpose and conscious integrity.

[00:13:21] **Liz Farrell:** Hm. Let's check with Alania about being forced into the spotlight.



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[00:13:25] **Alania Plyler:** For instance, when she talks about how her family has been negatively affected and her husband is viewed differently in public now, like that's not our problem. Like there's mounds of evidence that prove otherwise of what she says, and she's saying that, you know, there's misconceptions and that she doesn't believe he's done what he said he's done. I mean, even his attorneys have said that he's guilty of, you know, certain things. So it's like, it's mind-boggling. It really is. And the fact that she thinks that it's not an issue of what her husband has done, like literally taking money out of children's accounts. Like that's okay to her? And I just often wonder, like if the role was reversed, how would she feel? She talks about how her and her husband have raised two children. Like if the role was reversed and it was her son and her daughter whose accounts were manipulated and they had been used as funds for grown men, I wonder how she would feel about it and I wonder what she would say about that. But fortunate for her, fortunate for her, her children had never been through anything to be put in a position like that.

[00:14:32] **Maggie Washo:** However, due to multiple media inaccuracies and false statements by plaintiffs' attorneys and how those misconceptions have thus far negatively affected my husband's freedom and our family in general, I feel it is necessary to share some true facts with you all today. My goal today is to share a few facts with you that will make it clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that Russell Laffitte is not a flight risk and in no way is he a threat to society.

[00:14:58] **Liz Farrell:** Let's pause for some quick background on Russell and Susie. According to the transcript, one of the facts Susie shared with the court after this introduction was to say that she and Russell have been married for 29 years. Russell and Susie were married on February 17th 2001, according to their wedding announcement in the state newspaper. Their wedding reception was held at Lake Warren Community Center and they honeymooned in Cabo San Lucas. That was 21 years ago, not 29. It's possible Susie got a little confused by the date. Russell is actually her second husband. In August 1994, 28 years ago, she married a man named Mark Allen Rotenberry of Coldwater, Mississippi, according to their wedding announcement, which also is published in the state newspaper. Russell and Susie have a daughter who is in college and a son who is a senior in high school. Here's Susie with some misconceptions she says that we have about them.



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[00:15:51] **Maggie Washo:** Misconception number one, that we live an extravagant lifestyle. We do not live an extravagant lifestyle nor do we have access to a mountain of cash. We presently live in a vintage, at best, double wide trailer on our family farm. We have lived a comfortable life because we work hard.

[00:16:10] **Mandy Matney:** Okay, a couple of things here. One, Hampton County is incredibly poor. There are plenty of people who would be grateful to be able to afford a double wide trailer, so Susie's flippant comment about being vintage at best is completely tone-deaf. Two, her saying "We have lived a comfortable life because we work hard." This statement is infuriating because the Laffitte family is extremely powerful and wealthy and has been for generations. Russell's ability to earn six figures is inextricably tied to his birth rate. He was born this way. He was born into a family of bankers. His upward mobility at the bank was his to lose, which, ultimately, he did. Susie lives a comfortable life because she married a rich man who has millions of dollars in assets and is expecting to make \$230,000 this year alone, according to court documents, despite losing his job.

[00:17:14] Of course, this does not mean that they do not work hard, and there is nothing wrong with being rich. But that is a heck of a statement when her husband stands accused of helping a lawyer steal millions of dollars from children in trauma and taking very large fees for, by his own admission, not managing their money. Russell made \$60,000 off Hakeem Pinckney, \$35,000 off of Arthur Badger, who he didn't even represent, and \$15,000 off of Natasha Thomas for doing nothing. Actually, they all had their money stolen, so he really did less than nothing.

[00:17:59] **Maggie Washo:** Next misconception, we tried to hide the sale of our home of 18 years. We did not try to hide the sale of our home. We listed it with a realtor. We are responsible people.

[00:18:10] **Liz Farrell:** I want you guys to remember this word "responsible" when we share Russell's testimony, especially as it relates to certain IRS filings. So the Laffittes' five bedroom, six bathroom house was put on the market in April for almost \$550,000. It sold for \$510,000, according to an online listing. That is high for Hampton County. Also, according to a lien filed by attorney Justin Bamberg, who represents Natasha Thomas and the Pinckney family, this house was one of six properties the Laffittes owned. That said, we do not



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remember anyone in the media accusing the Laffittes of hiding the sale of their house. The issue, as we remember it, was that they put their house up for sale one day before he was indicted by the state grand jury. The timing of that sale was discussed because it was used against him in his state bond hearing as potentially supporting the notion that he could be a flight risk. According to Russell's testimony in this hearing, the proceeds from that sale are sitting in escrow with Nelson Mullins law firm. He's not allowed to spend large amounts of money or waste any assets per his state bond agreement, so we think that's why it's there.

[00:19:18] **Mandy Matney:** Anyways, apparently, Susie thought that was a big deal. She went on to tell the court about the next misconception she claims was made in the media about Russell being on that infamous private jet to the College World Series that Alex and his buddies allegedly took on the Pinckneys' dime. We think Susie is confusing media with social media because no one in the media that we know of has ever accused Russell of flying to the College World Series with Alex, Cory Fleming, and Chris Wilson in 2012. She also mentioned that her husband does not have a pilot's license, which we also don't know where this came from. She brought this up as if the entire public hated her husband for that pesky trip to Nebraska and nothing else. This gives us a really good look of what was actually bothering Susie and Russell in the lead-up to the hearing. They are really hung up on what people think of them. And we'll be right back.

[00:20:23] And still, Susie continued with her long list of grievances toward the media, which seems like it would've been more appropriate for a press conference instead of federal court, but here we are.

[00:20:35] **Maggie Washo:** Next misconception. We socialized frequently with Alex Murdaugh. That is not true. Alex Murdaugh was a bank customer. We attended the funerals of Maggie and Paul Murdaugh, as most members of our community did. Other than that, I do not remember exactly when I last saw Alex Murdaugh. My best recollection was several years ago in a local restaurant.

[00:20:56] **Mandy Matney:** Russell also testified that he is not friends with Alex. So stick a pin in that for a minute when you hear Russell's testimony because you're gonna be like, really? You did all of this for somebody that you're not friends with? Hm.



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[00:21:11] **Maggie Washo:** Most importantly, Russell Laffitte is not a danger to society. He's not cold or callous. He is kind and caring. He has never once been accused of any act of violence. He is a hero to his children and many of their friends.

[00:21:26] **Mandy Matney:** We'll let Alania take this one.

[00:21:28] **Alania Plyler:** "He's a hero to his children and many of their friends." Okay, that's great. Like I'm glad he's being a dad. That's great. But what about the children that he has signed up for to take responsibility of their finances and to grow their money? Or not even to grow their money, just to protect their money, just to simply protect it? He's not a hero to those children or who were children. He's not cold or callous, but yet he's willing to eat lunch on a child's dime without her consent. Me, like the whole sandwich thing, I still go back to. That takes a cold-hearted person to do that. Knowing the situation that he was in while he was in Columbia here to help me and what put us in the position to be able to eat lunch face to face, that alone shows that he's cold and callous; that he had the, that he took advantage of the situation to buy a \$7 sandwich and not even have permission or consent to use my money. So if you're willing to do that in front of me, it just goes to show like the roots grow deeper than what we thought.

[00:22:29] **Maggie Washo:** He is the person who anonymously purchases football practice clothing for the kid who's running laps, holding up his pants because he does not have a belt to keep them up. He is the person that our friend, who is a single mom, calls when she is out of town and her car breaks down and she does not have a family close by. He is the boss who drives to Augusta in the middle of the night to support an employee whose son has gotten into a very serious and later fatal car accident. He is the friend that drives to Florida and back in a day to attend his friend's mother-in-law's funeral, not his mother, but mother-in-law.

[00:23:05] **Liz Farrell:** Okay, I'm just going to say it. Does this not seem suspicious to Susie at all? Single moms? Augusta in the middle of the night? Russell drove to Florida and back in a day to attend the funeral of someone's mother-in-law. Obviously, we don't know the depth of Russell's relationships with the mothers of the people his friends married, but everything Susie says here is a red flag given the context. Alex Murdaugh borrowed millions from Palmetto State Bank. He treated it like his own personal piggy bank. He is



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accused of stealing and laundering millions, and no one knows why yet. Oh, also, he was charged with drug trafficking. In the meantime, Russell told the court that he had no idea how Alex was spending his money or how he, how Russell spent the hundreds of thousands he loaned himself from Hannah Plyler's account. As you'll see in a bit, there's so much that went on at that bank with Russell and Alex. So these midnight out-of-state trips that Susie thinks are so nifty, I hope someone is looking into them.

[00:24:05] **Maggie Washo:** He is the son-in-law that granny brings her cellphone to anytime she has an issue, and that's pretty often. In fact, he is a gentle giant.

[00:24:15] **Mandy Matney:** So Alania made a really good point about this.

[00:24:20] **Alania Plyler:** So if I was in his position and all granny had to say about me was I help with the phone, I'm not doing a very good service to granny. If that's all that you can say I do well at is fixing a phone, I have failed her as her grandson or great grandson or whoever he may be to granny.

[00:24:39] **Maggie Washo:** He is involved in his community and has been. He is respected in his community. He is the dad that delivers tables for the children's school spring fundraiser and hangs out into the wee hours to clean up those tables and return them at the end of the event. He is the booster club member that has been active in booster club since his children began sports at a young age. He is the organizer and the manager of the Little League concession stand. And what some of you that are not familiar with small-town life do not realize, that's a four-day process for each home game. That means traveling to Savannah with a covered trailer to purchase a plat, preparing, icing down multiple, probably about 10 coolers of drinks, working about 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. for home games, cleaning up, and then removing those supplies after the game. As I mentioned, he is a respected member of his community, so respected that he was requested to speak at his daughter's senior class's baccalaureate service. We turned that offer down, but he was requested as one of their top choices.

[00:25:39] **Mandy Matney:** I'm not sure if out-of-state, all-cash sales is a thing for Susie to tout about at a bond modification for her banker husband who



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was on house arrest and accused of mishandling millions of dollars. But anyways.

[00:25:53] **Maggie Washo:** He has also been celebrated by bank employees with a surprise birthday party several months after his employment with the bank ended.

[00:26:02] **Mandy Matney:** Oh, Susie. This is not the flex you think it is. Russell's birthday is in March, a time when Palmetto State Bank was really trying to publicly separate itself from Russell Laffitte and his shenanigans with Alex. In fact, on January 28th, a spokesman for the bank told me that the board of directors fired Russell immediately after information about his involvement came to light in January, which is kind of true. The bank did fire Russell right after the Hakeem story, quote, came to light publicly. However, it's very clear that the bank knew about Russell's sketchy loans to Alex Murdaugh for months before that, and they did nothing.

[00:26:47] Anyways, Palmetto State Bank has been on a major PR campaign over the last nine months in an effort to tell the public, "Hey, we're not all like Russell. We're different. Trust us with your money. It's fine." Meanwhile, according to Susie, Palmetto State Bank employees were still supporting and praising Russell Laffitte despite the clear paper trails that showed his involvement with the Pinckney case.

[00:27:13] **Maggie Washo:** That, to me, shows that he is a respected member of his community.

[00:27:18] **Mandy Matney:** To me, the fact that the bank employees threw Russell Laffitte a birthday party after so much came to light about his involvement with Alex Murdaugh scheme raises a lot of questions about how far and wide this scheme stretched. How many people were still working at the bank, knew about it, did nothing, and continued to support Russell Laffitte? But as Alania pointed out, several members of Russell's family work at the bank still. So this could have just been a family birthday party. Either way, Russell's birthday party is not at all an indication that he is a respected member of his community.



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[00:27:59] **Maggie Washo:** In summary, Russell is a man who has worked tirelessly with conscious integrity to support his family, serve his community, and give back to his community. He would never in a million years intentionally put his family's future at risk or his family business at risk. In addition, he would never willingly and intentionally harm another family in any way. He, like so many others, has been taken advantage of and manipulated. I look forward to a trial where his legal team has the opportunity to share his side of this nightmare.

[00:28:30] **Mandy Matney:** Ah, Russell was, quote, taken advantage of and manipulated, according to his wife. Let's see what Alania has to say about that.

[00:28:40] **Alania Plyler:** Honestly, I was searching for some sort of empathy. I know in the readout it says "sympathy," like nobody wants their sympathy. But I didn't see anywhere where they felt sorry. It felt like they were trying to make Russell sound out to be this great guy as if good deeds will triumph what's wrong, you know? And the law doesn't work that way. It doesn't matter if you're a stand-up citizen, which is what she makes them out to be, that's great. But stand-up citizens, they commit crimes, too, whether they know it or not.

[00:29:14] **Maggie Washo:** Also, please keep in mind he has never been convicted of a crime. Therefore, he should be presumed innocent until proven guilty. However, that is not the treatment he has received thus far. He is presently wearing two ankle monitors, which we are paying a total of over \$400 a month for the dual monitoring systems. We have made four trips so far to Columbia to service these devices. He spends approximately two hours per day hooked up to two chargers in order to charge his multiple monitoring devices. He has difficulty sleeping at night because he often gets tangled up with all of this equipment. We've received calls at all hours of the night concerning his monitoring system — 4:20 a.m., 12:57 a.m. — to verify his location when, in fact, we were asleep in the bed with both monitors fully charged.

[00:30:02] **Mandy Matney:** So keep in mind, Alania Plyler is a deputy who is constantly dealing with and helping people in highly stressful situations. Unlike the Laffittes, Alania is very much in tune with very real problems



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among very real people. So we asked Alania what she thought of Susie's speech here that was really trying to get sympathy from the public.

[00:30:29] **Alania Plyler:** So reading about how they got the phone calls at like four o'clock in the morning, waking them up when they were asleep in the bed, those are very rich people problems, just like Eric said. Like I wish that was all I had to worry about is my ankle monitors waking me up. That just goes to show like they're, it just shows pettiness, really. That's what you're complaining about? Your husband's facing several charges, state and federal charges, and you guys are up there whining about your ankle monitors going off, or his ankle monitors going off and having phone calls? That means that the courts are doing their job and checking it and making sure you are where you say you are because I realized that she emphasized that they were both fully charged and they were where they needed to be. Well, that's great. But there's also people on the other end who have a job to do, too. So if, again, if that's all they were worried about was a phone call at four o'clock in the morning, like life is okay.

[00:31:25] **Mandy Matney:** To articulate just how hard this experience has been for Russell, Susie tells the court about the things that her husband has missed out on while on his double ankle monitor house arrest.

[00:31:38] **Maggie Washo:** He's missed out on hunting with his children. Most recently, Russell sat at home last Friday night and missed the first football game of his son's senior year. Even more disturbing, he was given permission that day by federal counsel to attend. We told our son that his dad was going to be able to attend his game. We were all extremely excited, only to be disappointed when we were notified at 8 p.m. on Thursday evening that Russell would not be allowed to attend Luke's game because it was too far from our home.

[00:32:05] **Mandy Matney:** I had to read this a couple times because I really couldn't believe, considering all of the lives lost in this very tragic and horrific saga, that this woman had the gall to talk about her disappointment for her husband missing a high school football game. Now, I don't know Susie, but this reads like someone who has never really faced any real disappointment in her entire life. She thinks that she is being relatable, but this is anything but relatable. Think about it. Alania's brother didn't get the chance to play high school football because he died in a horrific car accident. And she really thinks



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that people are going to feel bad about Russell missing out on a football game? Come on.

[00:32:54] **Maggie Washo:** We could never get back the memories we've missed at this very crucial time in our lives: our son's senior year of high school and our daughter's college years — the last years before they venture out into the world on their own. I ask you all today, do not allow this injustice to continue.

[00:33:10] **Mandy Matney:** So who wants to tell Susie what the word "injustice" really means? Or who wants to tell her that a lot of victims in this never got the opportunity to go to college in the first place?

[00:33:25] **Maggie Washo:** I ask all judicial members involved, number one, remember that you are here today to focus on Russell Laffitte, not Alex Murdaugh. Number two, remember that Russell is innocent until proven guilty and has the right to fair and just treatment and a fair trial. Above all, please remember that these, the proceedings of this court, affect real life.

[00:33:46] **Mandy Matney:** If any judicial members didn't understand these very basic facts of Russell's case before Susie's speech, we have a much bigger problem. Susie concluded her speech with one last plea to give Russell a fair trial. You know, his constitutional right. She claims, again, that inaccurate statements were made about Russell. And then, weirdly, she says this.

[00:34:12] **Maggie Washo:** The morning after Russell's third hearing, a newspaper headline read "Ex-Palmetto State Bank CEO Russell Laffitte" and was published alongside a photo of Alex Murdaugh during his bond hearing in Columbia. Let me be clear: No photo of Russell Laffitte was published. It's imperative that this is stopped. If it is allowed to continue, it will be impossible for Russell to have a fair and just trial. Thank you.

[00:34:39] **Mandy Matney:** Does Susie think that judges have control over what photos are used in newspapers? Again, I can't believe that Russell's lawyers allowed her to make these demands to a judge. Also, Susie talks a lot about being a responsible person and teaching her children to be responsible. Yet it's clear that she is missing teaching her children a very valuable lesson that my parents taught me when I was a teenager. And that is



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you are who you associate with, meaning if you do business with bad people, you can't be mad when you're blamed for their actions. And we will be right back.

[00:35:26] Okay. So now that it has been established that Russell is a great father, a pillar of the community, and a, quote, responsible man, and definitely not friends with Alex Murdaugh, let's talk about his two and a half hours of testimony. Russell's attorney, Bart Daniel, who was a super expensive defense lawyer and a former US Attorney, began his questioning by asking Russell about his background. One sentence stuck out about that testimony, quote, I've always worked and lived in Hampton County. Because that is a whole problem, right? Things work differently in Hampton County because of the generations of unchecked corruption. All of this, everything Susie said, everything Russell said sounds a lot better to their ears because their worlds are so small. Her total lack of awareness is because of this. And also, when you look at all of the alleged crimes here, they have an element of because of the local culture, meaning that laws got broken, norms were defied, rules were overlooked because in the world that was created by the Murdaughs and the Laffittes and others, it was all okay.

[00:36:47] So Bart takes Russell through a battery of standard questions that speak to his flight risk and potential danger to the community. But then, he asked Russell about his role as conservator and whether he fully paid back the loans he took from the accounts. Russell says that he did. And this is what opened a big door for Assistant US Attorney Emily Limehouse. During cross-examination, she walked right through it. One of the first things she asked Russell was about his banking relationship with Alex. David will read Russell's parts from the transcripts.

[00:37:28] **David Moses:** He had always paid as well, so we didn't have any issues with him. We would always watch, just like everybody else, talked about his overdrafts, and we watched them. We spoke with him many times, emailed him about them. You know, we stayed on top of him, loaned him money sometimes to cover them. Sometimes, he would cover them with his own funds.

[00:37:49] **Mandy Matney:** So as we've reported before, Alex seems to be constantly and seriously overdrawn in his accounts while getting millions in loans from Palmetto State Bank and allegedly stealing millions. But sure,



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Russell had no issues with him as a customer. A good portion of his overdrafts were paid off by loans and/or allegedly stolen money, which, according to the testimony, Russell helped facilitate. Russell says he wasn't aware that the money was stolen, and we'll get to that in a second. It seems like Alex took at least one personal loan from Russell's father, Charlie Laffitte, who was CEO of the bank until 2020 and is chairman of the board. That loan was for \$125,000, according to Russell. And for what? Who knows? But the point is this, do bankers have to, quote, stay on top of good customers? Do good customers take out additional personal loans from the owners of the bank while also in overdraft at the bank and in debt for millions?

[00:39:00] From 2011 to 2015, Russell told Emily he made about \$100,000 to \$150,000 every year. During that same time period, Russell made about \$400,000 in fees from, quote unquote, managing the accounts of Alex's clients. Here's where things get really interesting. We're gonna have Liz read the part of Emily while David reads the part of Russell.

[00:39:31] **Liz Farrell:** So during this time, you were making a substantial percentage of your yearly income on fees in your role as conservator or personal representative.

[00:39:42] **David Moses:** Right. 25%. Yes, ma'am.

[00:39:45] **Liz Farrell:** Did you report these fees to the IRS?

[00:39:47] **David Moses:** Yes, ma'am.

[00:39:48] **Liz Farrell:** Every year, you included the fees on your tax returns?

[00:39:51] **David Moses:** I went back and paid all of them. We didn't do it. I did not do it at that time. I did some, not all of them, but I went back and I have amended all my tax returns to include them.

[00:40:04] **Liz Farrell:** So between 2011 and 2015, you never reported the income to the IRS?

[00:40:09] **David Moses:** I would have to go back and look at my tax return.



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[00:40:12] **Liz Farrell:** When did you first report the income to the IRS from these fees?

[00:40:15] **David Moses:** We —

[00:40:16] **Liz Farrell:** You just said you went back.

[00:40:18] **David Moses:** I did — some, I did then. Some, I didn't. And I would say 2021, I corrected all of them. We amended all of my tax returns.

[00:40:30] **Mandy Matney:** Hm. I wonder what prompted Russell to go back in 2021 and make sure he reported the fees he got from Alex's clients. 2021. What happened with Alex Murdaugh during that year? Russell tells Emily that he doesn't remember which fees he didn't report until last year. But he also says that he's certain he reported his fees from the two cases where the vast majority of his fees were earned. I'm not sure why Russell doesn't remember this stuff. It's possible he doesn't want to remember it because he knows how this is about to look for him. So he's right. The vast majority of his fees did come from two cases, Alania and Hannah Plyler. So he's saying he reported those fees and that he knows he paid taxes on them. Now, as far as we know, the Plyler sisters didn't have money stolen from them, technically. The alleged scheme was to borrow the money and pay it back. And according to Emily Limehouse, Hannah is still owed about \$8,000 from Alex.

[00:41:44] It is worth noting that the Plylers are white. The rest of the clients Russell is accused of defrauding are Black. Those fees that he apparently didn't report to the IRS were for Black clients only, meaning Russell didn't legitimize those transactions. Why? Well, we don't know. Maybe it is just a coincidence. But one thing to mention is that those Black clients also had money stolen from them by Alex Murdaugh. Also worth noting, like we said earlier, Russell admits that he basically did nothing to earn the fees in those cases. So we took fees for doing nothing for clients he did not interact with who had lots of money stolen from them. And he did not report that income to the IRS until 2021. Remember that word "responsible" that Susie used to describe Russell?



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[00:42:42] So after the big reveal that Russell didn't report select fees to the IRS, which sounds like tax fraud, Emily Limehouse then asked him about the loans that he took out.

[00:42:56] **Liz Farrell:** During the course of the time you served as their conservator, you took eight loans from the conservatorship account to yourself. Is that correct? And those loans totaled \$355,000?

[00:43:07] **David Moses:** Yes.

[00:43:08] **Liz Farrell:** You testified that, at the time, your salary was about \$100,000.

[00:43:13] **David Moses:** Somewhere right in there, yes.

[00:43:15] **Liz Farrell:** And you took out a loan for about \$250,000.

[00:43:19] **David Moses:** That's correct.

[00:43:20] **Liz Farrell:** What did you take out the loan for?

[00:43:22] **David Moses:** Actually, my lawyers and I were discussing. We have to research. I don't remember at this time.

[00:43:28] **Liz Farrell:** So you don't remember taking out a \$250,000-loan?

[00:43:33] **David Moses:** No, ma'am. I remember taking the loan. I don't remember exactly what the money went to.

[00:43:40] **Liz Farrell:** Raise your hand if you think he knows what that money was for.

[00:43:45] **Mandy Matney:** Mm. People who don't live extravagantly as the Laffittes claim typically know why they take out six figure-loans. So let's pretend Russell does actually know what this money was for. One reason not to admit knowing might be if he happened to make a large purchase or investment with that money and that purchase or investment, in turn, made



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him money because that might become problematic for him in the Plyler civil case. And we might get to that on Friday. And here's Liz and David again as Emily and Russell.

[00:44:25] **Liz Farrell:** Did you request permission from the probate court to extend these loans to yourself and the conservatorship account?

[00:44:31] **David Moses:** I spoke to the probate judge, originally. She said it was okay; that we could loan money. So yes, I did.

[00:44:38] **Mandy Matney:** I think it's about to get even stickier with Russell because, according to Emily Limehouse, Hampton County Probate Judge Sheila Odom denies telling Russell that any of this was okay. And sadly, well, for Russell, there's no signed order from Odom memorializing whatever approval he thinks she gave him. And here, again, are David and Liz as Russell and Emily.

[00:45:09] **Liz Farrell:** Tell me about those conversations with Judge Odom.

[00:45:12] **David Moses:** I went over. Alex had come to me and asked. He said, you know, can we, said I need to borrow some money, or whatever. He said, "Can I borrow it from the girls' account?" And I said, "Look. I don't have any idea." I said, "You know, we have a lot sitting here." But I said, "I will have to talk to the judge." So I went over, walked across the street to the courthouse, went to Judge Odom, sat down, and talked with her, and she said it wouldn't be a problem.

[00:45:47] **Liz Farrell:** So your testimony is Alex came to you needing a loan?

[00:45:51] **David Moses:** Yes.

[00:45:52] **Liz Farrell:** Why didn't you loan him money from Palmetto State Bank rather than from the conservatorship accounts?

[00:45:58] **David Moses:** I could have. Well, I say I could have. I couldn't approve these loans. I had to go through the executive committee.



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[00:46:06] **Liz Farrell:** Why didn't you extend loans from Palmetto State Bank rather than from a minor child's money?

[00:46:12] **David Moses:** I still feel that it was a good investment for the girls. They made money off of that investment, a lot more than they would have made sitting there in a money market or CD.

[00:46:24] **Mandy Matney:** Remember, Russell's job was not to invest the money. It was to keep it from being misused and to help the girls with their living expenses. Also, he was giving himself and Alex below-market interest rates. So I'm not sure if Russell's math would actually work out here. It's important to know that Russell maintains that Alex was the first to ask about taking loans out from Hannah's accounts. But for some reason, Russell was the first to borrow money. Emily Limehouse then asked Russell if, for all intents and purposes, he and Alex took these loans out secretly, what would've happened had either of them defaulted on the loans? What recourse would Hannah Plyler have had to get her money back if no one knew about them? But the judge knew, Russell said. So it's important to say here that Russell did make these loans official, some of them anyway, by filing the paperwork with the probate court. He also noted the loans in his annual accountancy to the court. It is clear that there is going to be a showdown between Judge Sheila Odom and Russell Laffitte should this case actually go to trial in November.

[00:47:50] And another point that Emily Limehouse made in her questioning is that over the years, Russell never actually paid back the money he borrowed from Hannah with any of his own money, meaning his salary from the bank and/or his dividends. Instead, he used the fees he collected and didn't report to the IRS to pay back some of the loans. And then, when Hannah turned 18, he got a loan to help pay off that loan. Listen to this part carefully, again, with Liz as Emily Limehouse and David as Russell Laffitte.

[00:48:29] **Liz Farrell:** And you've got a loan from Johnny Parker?

[00:48:32] **David Moses:** That's correct.

[00:48:33] **Liz Farrell:** And did you use a loan from Johnny Parker to pay off the remainder of those loans?



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[00:48:38] **David Moses:** To pay off the remainder, yes, ma'am. I've been paying during, over the years.

[00:48:44] **Liz Farrell:** So did you get that? Johnny Parker, a lawyer, a partner at PMPED, the titular partner at the Parker Law Group, which replaced PMPED, loaned a banker, a man whose family owned the bank, in fact, money to pay off a loan he took from a client of his law firm, and not just money, but a significant enough amount to where Russell is still making payments on it. What is going on in Hampton County? It's hard to know where the law firm ends and where the bank begins. It's hard to understand why Russell, a pillar of the community, according to him and his wife, has found himself in such a pickle where he has to borrow money from a partner at PMPED, which is the bank's biggest private customer.

[00:49:29] According to Russell, Johnny Parker has been making lots of personal loans to people in the community. So that's interesting, right? What does that look like? How are these loans memorialized? How does he collect on those loans? Remember the confession of judgment Alex immediately filed last fall after his brother and Johnny Parker filed complaints against him for money he had allegedly borrowed from him? According to the complaint, Alex owed Johnny \$477,000 as of October 2021. Also, Emily Limehouse revealed that one of the money orders Russell made using allegedly stolen money was for \$388,687.50 from Alex to Johnny Parker, ostensibly to pay back another loan. At any rate, Russell better hope Johnny is cool with him testifying about those loans.

[00:50:18] So Johnny Parker and Sheila Odom aren't the only people Russell seemed to throw under the bus. He spilled some tea on how some of the lawyers at PMPED were apparently using Palmetto State Bank. Apparently, the bank extended them loans that they paid off annually when they got their bonuses after the first of the year. He also threw his sister and father under the bus by admitting that the three of them made decisions about loaning Alex hundreds of thousands of dollars independent of the executive committee of the bank. According to Russell, this trio also made the independent decision to pay PMPED \$680,000, which is half of the \$1.325 million that was stolen from Arthur Badger. We'll talk more about this in Cup of Justice because, as you might have guessed, this is not how banks are supposed to be operating. It really seems like it was a free for all for Russell's family at Palmetto State Bank.



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[00:51:08] Whatever was going on, Russell's testimony might have further implicated him. We now know he wasn't reporting taxes and that he and his father and sister were operating outside the parameters of the bank's board. Oh, and there were three more things. In his testimony, Russell admitted that he allowed Alex to use his \$250,000 share of the Green Swamp hunting property multiple times as collateral for multiple loans at the same time. He also admitted to this.

[00:51:35] **Mandy Matney:** And again, here is Liz as Emily Limehouse and David as Russell Laffitte.

[00:51:42] **Liz Farrell:** So you knew he came to you and asked, did he ask for money for farming or it was your idea to make it for farming?

[00:51:49] **David Moses:** I'm not sure whose idea it was to put farming. He owned a large property, 1700 acres, plus or minus, that had timber growing on it, so dust farms sort of. But it's common practice in banks to put loans onto the commercial side for ease of regulations or regulatory burden.

[00:52:10] **Liz Farrell:** Less oversight, right? You make a commercial loan, there's less oversight.

[00:52:14] **David Moses:** Yes, ma'am.

[00:52:15] **Liz Farrell:** And you do know as CEO of a bank that you have to put the accurate use and purpose of the funds in the loan documents and use those funds in the way that the loan is intended. Correct?

[00:52:28] **David Moses:** I know —

[00:52:29] **Liz Farrell:** That's not the way you did it.

[00:52:31] **David Moses:** I know that's what's supposed to happen. But that didn't, in reality.

[00:52:35] **Liz Farrell:** It never happened with Alex, did it, in reality?



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[00:52:38] **David Moses:** In reality, I am not saying it didn't happen with Alex. Didn't happen with a lot of instances.

[00:52:46] **Mandy Matney:** So there's that, which sounds kind of like bank fraud. But there's also this. Russell admitted on the stand to helping Alex structure his cash withdrawals so he does not trigger the mandatory federal reporting limit of withdrawing cash in amounts of over \$10,000. It is not clear whether the statute of limitations has already run out on this. But if not, Russell could be facing additional charges. Maybe he'll also see some charges for tax evasion. This will likely depend on whether the US Attorney's Office feels the need to pursue those charges. Russell is already gambling by not pleading out his case. Emily's questioning of Russell is related to something we've talked about a lot on this show: the apparent lack of curiosity from people who dealt with Alex Murdaugh. Emily paints a picture in which Russell seems to be helping Alex pay back the bank, meaning something was in it for Russell, something was in it for the bank.

[00:53:58] One of the most telling parts of Russell's relationship with Alex and of his father's and sister's apparent relationship with Alex is this. In June 2021, after the murders of Maggie and Paul, Alex asked either Russell or Charlie, who is Russell's father, for a \$750,000-loan. That loan would be on top of the millions he already owed the bank. Also, he was in overdraft. Emily asked Russell by how much. And Russell was like, I don't know. A lot. And when Emily gives him a dose of reality, a lot can be \$50. What is a lot to you? He tells her hundreds of thousands.

[00:54:42] **Liz Farrell:** Okay. So a man whose wife and son were just brutally murdered, who is hundreds of thousands of dollars in overdraft, owing the bank millions of dollars, comes to you for cash to fix up his house.

[00:54:55] **David Moses:** He was, to my knowledge. It was already a work in progress prior to the murders. I don't, can't say that that timeline is perfect. But —

[00:55:06] **Liz Farrell:** So it's a priority of Alex Murdaugh to renovate the beach house under these circumstances.

[00:55:13] **David Moses:** I don't know what his priorities were.



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[00:55:16] **Liz Farrell:** Enough for you and your father to loan him money from Palmetto State Bank.

[00:55:20] **David Moses:** Yes, ma'am.

[00:55:22] **Liz Farrell:** This is how Alex got that \$750,000 commercial loan after the murders that he used to pay back some of the fee he allegedly stole from his friend, attorney Chris Wilson, and \$400,000 of which Russell put into Alex's account to cover his \$300,000-plus overdraft. To give him this loan, Russell, Charlie, and Russell's sister Gray, apparently operated outside the standard procedure with the board again. Russell apparently had a bank employee backdate the loan forms after a member of the board began asking about Alex's finances. And Russell apparently knew that \$350,000 of this loan for house renovations was going not to a contractor, but to a Bamberg County lawyer. And then Alex went to jail and the bank had to write off the loan as a loss. It's hard to imagine what power Alex Murdaugh had over Russell and Charlie Laffitte that they would've allowed things to get this bad for them and their family business.

[00:56:18] Okay, so this is a lot to follow. But to recap, during a hearing where Laffitte's team was trying to prove that he is responsible and doesn't deserve to be on strict ankle monitoring, Russell managed to tell the court on the record that he was not responsible enough to report what was likely more than a hundred thousand dollars in fees to the IRS until it suddenly dawned on him in 2021 to pay his taxes. He was not responsible when he was the conservator for the Plylers nor was he responsible with Badger, Pinckney, Williams, and Thomas's money. He was not responsible when he took out \$355,000 in secret loans from a little girl's account, and then had to turn to a PMPED partner for a loan to pay it off. He was not responsible when he didn't get it in writing when Judge Odom allegedly told him he could loan out and hand his money to himself and Alex. He was not responsible when he and his sister and father were making loans to a derelict customer without fully informing the bank board. He was not responsible when he mischaracterized the reasons for Alex's loans to avoid banking regulations, or when he allowed Alex to use the same collateral for different loans at the same time, or when he took \$680,000 of the bank's money to pay back PMPED for the money Alex allegedly stole.



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[00:57:34] **Mandy Matney:** And we could go on. And the thing that's the most frustrating out of all of this, as the Laffittes play victim before the court, there are still victims out there who are deeply hurt and devastated by this scheme; victims like Alania Plyler, who have to relive the worst times of their life when they lost family members. And now, they have to come to terms with the fact that grown men with so much more money and power and privilege than they had took advantage of them during that time.

[00:58:07] **Alania Plyler:** On an emotional level, the word that, or the term, the feeling that comes to mind is just simply heartbroken. And I say heartbroken because Russell was my and my sister's conservator, not because of the amount of money. It was because there was nobody that could be trusted with that amount of money that was on my end to my family. The attorneys felt like my family couldn't be trusted with that amount of money, so they felt a conservatorship would be the safest thing. And I would agree with them. That would be the safest thing until I can't even be protected by somebody who was appointed to me to take care of and guard my finances. And it just goes to show, like I said this at his first bond hearing, like it goes to show you just really can't trust anybody, especially when like, like I said, like you were put in a position, you were appointed by a judge to be conservatorship. You have very high expectations, and that's a really big role to have. It wasn't just my sister's account. It wasn't just my account. There were several other children and disabled victims that he had. And not to mention, just his clients, period. Just other clients. That's a lot of responsibility. And the fact that he got to a level and a position where he felt like it was okay to take money and to move money around like a chess game is unreal. It's unreal. So yeah, it's heartbreaking. It's frustrating. It's embarrassing. It's, I mean, there's several things that would describe it, but very disappointing.

[00:59:42] **Mandy Matney:** Even after so much was revealed in the hearing, there are still so many questions in Alania's case that need to be answered, like why Russell was holding back all of that money — money that could have been life-changing for her and her sister. And they still don't know where that money went and the real reason behind stealing all of this money and hurting all of these people. But Alania isn't dwelling on what answers she doesn't have. Alania, with the help of her attorneys, Ronnie Richter and Eric Bland, is learning a lot about the legal system in this case. And the really good news, she is focused on standing tall, using her voice, and leading by example to



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show other victims that they can stand up for themselves and tell their own stories.

[01:00:36] **Alania Plyler:** I would like to continue to stand up for victims. I mean, I do in a different capacity, but still, it just, it shows that you, tomorrow you never know what, where you're going to be, you know? So it, I've learned a lot from this case, just even pursuing hard cases, even when you think that you're at the end, like don't assume that you're at the end because there's always another page to be turned. And at the end of the day, it just is a reminder. Just let people talk and listen. Just listen to what people have to say because you learn a lot that way. And it just encourages me to wanna tell, you know, to show people, like stand up for yourself, and don't stop until you're at where you need to be.

[01:01:25] **Mandy Matney:** The Murdaugh Murders Podcast is created by me, Mandy Matney, and my fiancé, David Moses. Our executive editor is Liz Farrell.

[01:01:33] **Outro:** Produced by Luna Shark Productions.