



EPISODE 22: Getting Answers about Stephen Smith's Murder and How to Solve Cold Cases

[00:00:00] **Mandy Matney:** Hello and Happy Monday, COJ fans. Before we get started today, I just wanted to update y'all on some breaking news. After we recorded this episode, Sandy Smith retained Eric Bland and Ronnie Richter as her attorneys. I will be participating in a press conference on the Bland Richter Facebook page with Sandy Smith, Eric Bland, and Ronnie Richter. That press conference will take place today at 8:30 AM Eastern Time, March 20th, 2023. I am so happy to share this news and we will discuss details in this week and next week's episodes of MMP and COJ. Here is to hoping 2023 is Stephen's year for justice finally. So, cups up, everyone. Let's get into it.

[00:00:58] **Eric Bland:** Cups up, guys.

[00:01:00] **Liz Farrell:** Cups up. How are you doing? How are you feeling, Eric?

[00:01:02] **Eric Bland:** Kind of like a been run over by a train. As you know, I got my knee replaced and, you know, everybody always tells you what to expect but until you actually experience it, you don't really have an appreciation for it and everybody's different. I'm unfortunately in a lot of pain but I'm taking some oxycodone. I feel a little kindred spirit with Alex as I take my pills every day.

[00:01:27] **Liz Farrell:** We have so much to talk about today and it's funny that now that we're two weeks out from the trial, it just feels like that was the pinnacle of everything related to Alex Murdaugh. But I was describing it to somebody on the phone just a few minutes ago that, you know, this person gave me a tip that opened a whole new door. And I'm not ready to talk about it yet but it was like that spy movie where at the very end, the spy's taking a rest because they finally saved the universe and then they find out that the villain, you know, has a new shipment of uranium coming in. So, it's like we're now in the sequel portion of I believe our Alex Murdaugh coverage and it's gonna ramp up again. But first, I'm gonna start by talking about Russell, Russell Laffitte and what happened last week. But specifically, I wanna talk about the second motion for a new trial, Eric. They're basing this now — his second defense team because as you guys know, his first defense team dumped him for not paying his bill. His second defense team has filed a



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motion asking the judge to consider new evidence, which would be the Alex testimony exonerating Russell. Do you think that's a smart move? Is that a good thing for that defense team to do, Eric?

[00:02:46] **Eric Bland:** No, the judge is not gonna reverse himself. He's not gonna let that evidence in. Alex certainly was available to testify. He was on a witness list. The government or Russell's team was probably told he was gonna take the Fifth. He's now a convicted murderer. His credibility is shot. He's admitted he lied. I just don't think that there's value in that testimony that the judge would condone opening up the record to put it on, you know, put it in the record for his behalf. I just think it's a grasping, desperate act.

[00:03:22] **Liz Farrell:** Do you think this is gonna further upset Judge Gergel when it comes to Russell's sentencing? Like does this make him more prickly about the situation? It seems like they've sort of been trying his patience in the last few weeks anyway.

[00:03:36] **Eric Bland:** Oh, yeah. I mean, like you said, if you read the footnotes in the original order, you know, this isn't a tag team match. He quotes John F. Kennedy about, you know, critics. It's easy to be a critic except if you're the guy that's standing up. I think he's very upset at the position that Mark Moore is taking vis-a-vis the original trial, the decisions that were made on the night of the verdict. And I don't I just think there's gonna be a reckoning when the sentencing comes. It's gonna be a hard reckoning. I'm not sure. Has he granted Bart's motion to be released?

[00:04:14] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah, he agreed with it, which, you know, validates, I guess what they were asking for there. Mandy, do you think that Alex getting up on the stand would help exonerate — I mean, do you think that that's actually something that could possibly help Russell?

[00:04:26] **Mandy Matney:** No, it's insane like.

[00:04:30] **Eric Bland:** What do you really feel, Mandy?

[00:04:32] **Mandy Matney:** Well, okay. Remember back in November, which feels like years ago, back in November, there was all this chatter of like maybe we'll have Alex Murdaugh take the stand for the Russell Laffitte case and



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there was all those headlines that were like Alex might take the stand, blah, blah, blah. And back then, we were like, that's the dumbest thing like Alex can't — he has zero credibility. He has negative credibility. Like there is nothing that he could possibly say on that stand that could help anybody. That was before he was a convicted double murderer. Like now, his word is — and lied on the stand at all these other things like. It would honestly, thinking about it, I feel like it would make it much worse for Russell because if you are a jury member and you're like you are having this guy, this is the guy to talk about how you're fine and everything, there's something wrong here and you're even more suspicious.

[00:05:30] **Eric Bland:** The evidence belies the attempt to use his testimony. The evidence shows that Russell had the last clear chance to say no on all these things. He didn't have to loan money to himself. He didn't have to loan money to Alex. He never was able to prove that he had a reliance on counsel defense, that he was relying on advice that Alex had given him. So, all the positives to get by putting Alex on the stand doesn't help him out because he had the last clear chance just to say no.

[00:06:02] **Mandy Matney:** But it, really quick, isn't that like a Good Ole Boy thing that we're seeing over and over again? It's like there's a pile of evidence but they think that they can talk themselves out of it. They think that like that that's what Russell did of like I know there's a pile of evidence of, but hey, guys, I'm gonna here to talk to you on Russell TV and tell you how I didn't really do it. And that's what Alex did, too. And it's like a theme that we're seeing over and over that's like just because you say that it's true and there's all this evidence against you, you should just realize that there's evidence against you and realize that you cannot talk your way out of this anymore.

[00:06:39] **Eric Bland:** Well, look. We know that he apologized to Cory and to Chris Wilson in 2021 when he made that statement to Judge Lee.

[00:06:49] **Liz Farrell:** Not just apologized, Eric, but romantically apologized. He romantically apologized to them and in a way that he did not apologize at least publicly to his family or the court or anyone else whose time he's wasted because of his misdeeds. But to Chris and Cory, it was all X's and O's.



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[00:07:08] **Eric Bland:** But he didn't mention Russell. And then, the fact is he could have testified at Russell's trial and he chose not to. And then, when the devil's at the door in his own murder trial to just throw that gratuitously out, that Russell was a victim and he did everything, it just doesn't help. It was too little, too late. But like Mandy said, the guy's got negative credibility, not just zero, but negative.

[00:07:34] **Liz Farrell:** Well, don't you think that that's — so going back to that with the Good Ole boy sort of this is how they react to things. I just think that we see that in all facets of life, which is just members of this powerful group of people, whatever, however that manifests, whether it's the Murdaughs of Hampton County or the Kennedys I guess of Boston, like there's just a certain group of people that are so used to not having to answer to the same laws and rules as the rest of us. But also, I do think that like when you see leadership even at the basic level like at your workplace, there are individual members who sometimes go into things with that sort of mentality that if I say it's true, it's true. It doesn't matter that there's evidence to the contrary. It doesn't matter that that person's contradicted themselves. It doesn't matter that they have zero credibility. What is the bottom there? Like where does this — I mean, I guess we're in the bottom right now, right? Like we're seeing accountability start to happen and these guys are almost in denial about it.

[00:08:37] **Eric Bland:** Alex clearly is. He thinks still that when he speaks, people will listen. And it's got that force and authority that if I say that Russell's a victim, he's a victim. Like you said, despite what the evidence shows and now he is the emperor without clothes. When he talks, it's just it's naked words. They have no meaning. They have no force and power.

[00:08:59] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah. It's up to people in his life to tell him he has no clothes on and I don't think I'm seeing anybody in his life that's willing to do that and I guess that's what we have been doing for the last year and a half.

[00:09:10] **Eric Bland:** No, they keep fighting for him. Jim, Jim Griffin keeps giving interview and digs himself in a deeper hole and keeps fighting more and more about his innocence and he's picking Twitter wars with —

[00:09:22] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah. Let's talk about the Twitter wars. What is that about, guys?



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[00:09:25] **Mandy Matney:** It hasn't been with us, so that's been something. I've been waiting for it. I kind of called him out on Twitter this morning.

[00:09:30] **Liz Farrell:** You did? I didn't see that. What did you say?

[00:09:32] **Mandy Matney:** Well, I called him out for the what we talked about in the episode of saying that like Sandy was like — he was saying Sandy was being exploited for that *Court TV* interview.

[00:09:45] **Eric Bland:** What do you mean by that — that she was being exploited?

[00:09:47] **Mandy Matney:** He wrote on Twitter. He was standing up for Buster and saying that it's wrong that all of this media keeps dragging Buster into this and saying and you're exploiting into — who was that from *Court TV*? Do you guys remember?

[00:10:07] **Liz Farrell:** Chanley Shá Painter? Is it Painter?

[00:10:08] **Eric Bland:** Just a really nice woman.

[00:10:09] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah, she's cool.

[00:10:10] **Mandy Matney:** Yeah. I mean, she's not doing it and it's very it's horrible to for Jim Griffin to assume that Sandy is being exploited when she's just telling the truth that she knows and she's also not saying that she believes that Buster did it. She was saying I just kept hearing over and over and that's the truth and that's what's in the case files.

[00:10:31] **Eric Bland:** I got a news flash for everybody. Sandy Smith isn't sitting by a phone and waiting for people to call her and say do this, do that, do this. She's actually calling people on the phone. She wants action. This is a woman that wants action. She isn't being exploited. She is speaking loud through a lot of different people. And clearly, it's time that a true investigation be done regarding the death of her son. And to say that because we have a platform, mainly Liz and Mandy have a platform through MMP, and a GoFundMe page was started, that's not exploitation. That's using the power of the people.



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[00:11:11] **Mandy Matney:** Right. And it's just wrong to assume that she is just some person that doesn't have a mind of their own and that could just be convinced by any media that anything is true. Sandy knows the case file as good as anybody or better than probably most reporters. She knows like every single person. She knows the name. She can tell you their involvement. She knows it like the back of her hand. But that with Jim Griffin on Twitter really upset me because it's like I don't know what's going on with him. And for some reason, unlike Dick, I just see that he has a little bit of good in him and that there's something off that — I don't know. And I'm seeing less and less good as his behavior keeps on going after the trial. Eric, is it normal? None of this is normal, so why do I even bother asking? But if you're a lawyer trying to get an appeal, should you be doing this on Twitter?

[00:12:17] **Eric Bland:** You should not be engaging in Twitter wars. You should not be going on TV and criticizing the government, the jury, and the judge. If you want a receptive ear from the appellate courts, the best recommendation is do your talking through your pleadings. Do your talking through your briefs and basically, have no comment. But he's taking on everybody. He's taking on media. He's accused SLED in the interview with *Court TV* that somehow, they may have the seafoam blue shirt and that they secreted it. He's criticizing a lot of different people and it's going to hurt his client. Remember he still represents Alex and he's got an obligation to do what's in the best interest of Alex and getting on Twitter and getting on TV and slamming people is not in the best interest of your client.

[00:13:10] **Liz Farrell:** It's almost like what Jim is doing right now is a test of loyalty as opposed to an actual, strategic way of getting the best outcome for his client at this point, maybe because there is no hope there. But you saw these sort of tests of loyalty and these sort of attorneys who I think maybe just didn't do things the way attorneys normally do them. Just all in — it's all for, as they say, an audience of one, right? I think it's an audience of one with Alex Murdaugh because that's what — when we're trying to make sense of what Jim is doing here, there's no category to put it in except for that one. He is appealing to an audience of one right now.

[00:13:46] **Eric Bland:** Except Alex has no power. What is why is Jim going this deep for Alex? He's got no power anymore.



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[00:13:54] **Liz Farrell:** Well, this is a question that Mandy and I continue to ask ourselves several times a day. So, we literally right before the show, we're asking each other that question.

[00:14:03] **Eric Bland:** Unless he knows something. Unless there's, like you said, unless Alex holds some really good secrets in that vault and they wanna protect those secrets. That's the only thing I can think about.

[00:14:16] **Mandy Matney:** Or there's more secrets. We'll be right back.

[00:14:33] **Liz Farrell:** Mandy, what are some of your concerns right now as it relates to the Stephen Smith case? And we talked a little bit about Jim's accusation that *Court TV* had exploited Sandy Smith, which is very patronizing and, you know, we saw this last year on social media. There were people coming after you in particular, Mandy, about your relationship with Sandy and acting like Sandy had no agency in deciding whether, you know, who she wants to be have a relationship with, who she trusts, who's — and it's just you're basically stripping this person of her own free will when these people make these characterizations. But I will say, I mean, as far as exploiting, what worries me with the Stephen Smith case is that there is this nature of a lot of people who may be well-meaning or not well-meaning but it's hard to know at this point that sort of come in from the outside or learning about the story now. And in some ways, maybe my fear is always that they're gonna further complicate this investigation and change the direction of law enforcement. So, not that I think that they're gonna drop it. I don't. It's just we can we're gonna talk about this later in the show about just the sort of how the public interfacing with an active case, how that can change things and affect things. So, that's my concern. I didn't mean to cut off 'cause I asked you that question first but that's what I just to get the conversation started.

[00:15:56] **Mandy Matney:** Yeah. I mean, going back to what you said, something Sandy and I have related to and you too, Liz, of the last couple years of just being betrayed by a lot of people and it is extremely hard. I've realized that this whatever we're in — true crime? Liz, what would you call it? You're the magic word person. It's an access of evil of some sort. Like there's so many people that want to get closer to it who are bad, who are have nothing to do with the crime or anything like that but just want to exploit other people and complicate things and get attention for it. And there's just a



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lot of bad people that I've come across in the last couple years and same with Sandy and I'm sure you too, Eric. Like there's just a lot of bad.

[00:16:42] **Eric Bland:** I'm coming across them on TV. I've been on some TV shows where they're factually wrong about, you know, that Alex called up Sandy and said that he wanted to represent her. Alex never called Sandy and they're just wrong on basic material facts about the accident, about the wallet in his car, the gas cap being open. He had a phone. Why didn't he use the phone? Now, they're saying, well, probably the cell towers didn't work. I mean, it's just pure utter speculation that they're doing and that doesn't do any good in furthering the legitimate investigation in what happened.

[00:17:16] **Mandy Matney:** Yeah, I saw a really dumb TikTok a couple months ago, which I know some TikToks are good, whatever. But there was one that was like focused in on the fricking paint chips of a car and saying it was connected to the Stephen Smith case, blah, blah, blah. He was not killed by a car. Like there is no evidence of that. And the paint chips could have been from a fricking baseball bat or something else and they were tiny. But it's people that haven't even looked at the file that are just going off of hearsay and then coming up with these crazy theories. And it's definitely complicated and it's hurtful to Sandy. Like she calls me all the time saying like, is this something? Is this something? And that's like, no, this is just some lunatic on the internet who just found out about this. And so, not only is it hurtful to the investigation but it's hurtful to the victims. So, I just would really like people to keep that in mind and also when they're talking about the boat crash. All of these victims in the Satterfield case, all of these victims are victims and they did not choose to be here by any means. This is not their doing. This is not their fault. And people are placing them in these scenarios and their stupid little theories like they're characters of a book. Like what if she did this because blah, blah, blah? And it's just it's hurtful and rude and horrible.

[00:18:36] **Eric Bland:** I think that there can be good evidence out there. If SLED wants to do it, they could get search warrants. I think the post-death communications on telephones is going to be very important because I think that somebody has talked about this in this Murdaugh orbit. Not saying that Alex, I'm not saying Buster, but in the orbit. I think the evidence that will answer a lot of questions isn't necessarily before the accident but after the accident. If they were able to access these phones and do a search warrant of communications, it may yield some very good evidence because people



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probably have talked over the last six years and I think SLED should be pursuing that. What are your thoughts on the post-death evidence?

[00:19:31] **Mandy Matney:** Well, even pre-death, I mean, we never found out what was in Stephen's phone. We don't know the last like real steps of his night. He was at school in Orangeburg and came back but we don't know who he's hanging out with. We don't know who he's communicating with. The phone would've held so many secrets and it's like it got shoved around from agency to agency and then no answers and —

[00:19:58] **Liz Farrell:** By design.

[00:20:00] **Mandy Matney:** Right. It had to be by design. And that's something that if people haven't like read the entire case file from front to back, it's really hard to understand. And I was trying to articulate this on Twitter today 'cause people want like a one-sentence explanation as to why the Murdaughs are their names are involved in this and it's just really complicated. But the biggest evidence that we have in the whole case is that something very corrupt and someone super powerful had to have interfered with it. Otherwise, it would be complete police incompetence and like that would make me worried for every case that the same police departments would solve, you know? Like something had to have occurred. There was just too many — there was thing after thing after thing that went completely wrong on purpose.

[00:20:50] **Liz Farrell:** I think there are officers with the South Carolina Highway Patrol who hold the keys to this. They know what they were told by their superiors. They know what their chain of command how their chain of command regarded this case. Those are things that are important to share with SLED and if you have any shred of humanity inside of you, you will do that. I say that to not just South Carolina Highway Patrol but to the people in SLED as well who — this is the thing it's like I don't think that we've talked about this enough and maybe not even at all, I can't remember. But when after the murders, when SLED took the case, it's often been portrayed as reopened or they took over the case. But Sandy spent so much time trying to get SLED to take the case. They were the proper agency to have investigated that death from the beginning. I understand that there was some confusion and that happens on the crime scene where you're not really sure what an



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injury to the head means. Does it mean this person committed suicide? Is this a murder? Were they hit by a car? Did they pay Cousin Eddie to shoot at them or not? Like you just don't know what that head injury is about. But they knew soon enough after that this looked like a murder and it felt like a hot potato that these agencies didn't wanna deal with because of who was involved. Now, we have people who are saying, well, the Murdaughs weren't involved. Well, explain to me that. Explain to me how in this file, not only are they mentioned so many times, but this agency that had no business investigating a murder ends up with this case and it languishes there. So, SLED was supposed to have taken that case. SLED has many positive attributes. They've done a great job in so many ways. But let's face the facts there. SLED owes Sandy this right now because they should — had they involved themselves in 2015, we wouldn't be having conversations like Eric is having with us right now, which is these phones are important, so we need that data and, well, where's the data? So, we couldn't even get Maggie's GPS because that data had been overwritten again as a result of an intervention by an agency that probably shouldn't have been involved: the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office. So, that stuff gets me very worked up and that said, it becomes hard I think for all of us, the three of us, to trust what we hear and trust that people have the best of intentions here when it seems so simple. It seems like there are people who could simply speak out and be brave and know that there's a community out there that will support you in your bravery by speaking out about what happened to Stephen. But also, just what are people's intentions with Sandy? So, Sandy is has raised money to exhume Stephen's body privately rather than rely on SLED to do so. Mandy, do you wanna talk a little bit about that and just why that's important and the genesis of all of that?

[00:23:49] **Mandy Matney:** So, Sandy realizes that Stephen's case had to take a backseat because simply because of agents at SLED. There's not enough. And as a lot of people don't realize, like SLED had a job to do before this whole Murdaugh mess and they could not possibly investigated all of these cases at the same time. That said, now that Maggie and Paul got their time and they got justice, she wants to start making noise. And no one just had bandwidth and she realized that, including me. I hated it but there was just no there was no room in the last few months for Stephen. But now, everyone has room and space and energy and everyone wants to focus on Stephen and the best way to do that after a lot of long talks, I told Sandy like, fundraiser. If you — don't worry about money. People will help you with money. Like what do you need,



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and what will be the good step for you guys? And exhuming the body was what she's wanted and I felt bad 'cause she'd always just kept saying like but it's this much money and I'm worried about that. And it really sucks how much money can get you further in justice, you know? Like having money to exhume a body and get a private autopsy is huge because it gives you power in a lot of ways and it probably will show SLED that like the Smith family isn't going away anytime soon and they're trying to get answers and she's doing an independent — And Liz, do you wanna explain like why she's doing an independent autopsy and not — everybody keeps asking that.

[00:25:34] **Liz Farrell:** Right. And this is a question — first I just wanna say real quick though, Mandy, like yes, there has not been room for us to go deep on investigating Stephen's case to the degree that we wanted to. But I honestly think that this murder case not only had to happen first because that's the way it went, but now that it's happened now that we've seen that a Colleton County jury agrees that a Murdaugh did this, that opens so many more doors and gives a lot more incentive and motivation and just optimism, I guess. So, when law enforcement officers who might feel like the ones that are doing the job and doing well, they might feel that there was no hope before and I'm hoping that this will give them some hope. But as far as the independent exhumation, this goes back to one obviously trust in the system that Sandy has. The system has given Sandy no reason for her to trust it, so this is what makes the most sense. The second part of that is that one of the biggest issues in Stephen's case was the medical examiner report. And what we learned, what Mandy and I learned back in 2019, we met with a friend of ours who's an investigator and he went over the autopsy with us and the photos and the report and he sort of explained how it worked. This medical examiner, Erin Presnell, who has connections with the Murdaughs from what we understand and connections with the 14th and what have you because she is the medical examiner in Charleston and gets many of the suspicious deaths and what have you, she, based on the coroner's information, said that this was a death caused by a vehicle versus pedestrian. And it's those words that condemned Stephen's case to South Carolina Highway Patrol, whether or not Dr. Presnell realized that. But the problem is is that Highway Patrol came back to her and they said that's not what this body tells us and we are literally the subject matter experts in vehicle crashes as they relate to citizens in South Carolina. That is what they're trained in. That is — they have teams all over the state. That is their specialty. They know what crashes do to bodies. They know what crashes do to cars. But she basically told them to pound



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sand and get out of her hospital and that, you know, she's tell — and then she even said something obnoxious like tell me what to write and I'll write it. Like that's not the point, doctor. Like the point is —

[00:28:05] **Mandy Matney:** Twice she said something obnoxious.

[00:28:07] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah.

[00:28:08] **Mandy Matney:** She said — the first time she said, that's your job to figure out, not mine. Which is just so crazy. And you could tell in the reports the way that the Highway Patrol wrote it was just like this is weird. This is so weird.

[00:28:21] **Eric Bland:** See how something goes down a rabbit trail when it starts off with the wrong premise and it goes so deep that it almost takes it away past the time that you could do a legitimate investigation.

[00:28:34] **Mandy Matney:** And it's exactly what happened because the Highway Patrol was not there at the autopsy at the time to ask questions directly to her when she made that decision because they were told that it was not their gig. They were told that it was not a hit-and-run, so you guys, you boys can go home. And then, like thing after thing after thing was just interfered with and the investigation went completely sideways.

[00:29:01] **Liz Farrell:** Well, Mark Tinsley has said, as it relates to other things with Alex Murdaugh, that there are a whole lot of coincidences that always break in Alex Murdaugh's favor. So, when you look at this case, there are a lot of weird and I don't mean coincidences necessarily but like anomalies or what have you. There are a lot of little things that happen that break in Alex's favor and that just when you look at them in totality, it's not a natural break. But to sort of talk, too — I've been asked this so many times over the last two weeks is why SLED doesn't exhume Randolph's body or check his casket for the weapons. And we've joked before like you better not be wrong if you're gonna dig up Randolph Murdaugh's body. You better not be wrong. But you can't just go digging up bodies. So, there's a process and you have to get a judge to agree to this, right, Eric? So, there's gonna have to be a court order, even in a private exhumation that justifies that exhumation because we're not trying to



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disturb the dead. There has to be a good reason for it. I don't see any reason why there this would be held up for Sandy but.

[00:30:10] **Eric Bland:** The dead have an independent right to not be disturbed. So, even if a family member or a loved one wants further answers, the court protects the dead. And so, there has to be a real good showing on why a court should grant the ability to disturb the remains of someone who died. Because if that's the case, then everybody would be coming to court all the time and digging up somebody and, you know, I want the jewelry. Somebody she was buried with jewelry that should have gone to me and you just go down a bad rabbit hole there.

[00:30:45] **Mandy Matney:** That's really interesting. I never considered that — that the court protects the dead. And that makes sense though 'cause if you wanna be buried with your jewelries, you can't just go digging. So, for Sandy, what is that process?

[00:31:01] **Eric Bland:** Well, we would make a showing. We would bring in crime scene investigators, whether we go to somebody like a Dr. Kinsey or we get a similar credentialed person who would look at the evidence and give us an affidavit to say there are very curious circumstances that, you know, I've investigated hundreds of highway fatalities where pedestrians are hit by a car and in 99.9% of them, this is what happens. There's a piece of the car that falls off. Shoes are blown off in 80% of them. Someone's whatever the remains are in their pockets are put out on the street. All these different things that would go into a good showing that the court would grant that permission to disturb the remains of somebody who died. Again, it's not just Sandy's desire that will control the day because the court has a duty to protect Stephen.

[00:31:57] **Liz Farrell:** So, can law enforcement piggyback off of what Sandy's doing in the sense that you're not gonna wanna exhume his body twice? So, she pays for an independent exhumation and a medical examiner to do a second autopsy to the extent that they can. Can law enforcement then have their own person do it or would they just use whatever the findings are that she gets from hers?

[00:32:21] **Eric Bland:** It depends on who we get. There's somebody in Greenville that I have in mind who is highly respected that the government



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respects. Whoever's going to do this autopsy should be somebody that the government respects.

[00:32:33] **Liz Farrell:** And this person in Greenville has done exhumations before, correct?

[00:32:38] **Eric Bland:** Yeah.

[00:32:38] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah. I think I know who you're talking about.

[00:32:40] **Eric Bland:** A medical school in Greenville, the USC medical school. So, if it's somebody that SLED has familiarity with and they've used before then I think that they either will participate or they'll accept the findings. But if we go higher, you know, Dr. Vinnie Boombatz, they may not put any credence into his findings or her findings.

[00:33:00] **Mandy Matney:** And that's another thing I wanted to bring up. Sandy in our interview talked about that. It means so much for — she wants that death certificate to say "murder." She needs that. And I think that when we talk about how important validation is and how people like Sandy have been pushed around by the system and gaslit and just bullied, Sandy all this time just says my son was murdered and she has not had a single document that says that. It's not solving it but it's a big step for her.

[00:33:38] **Liz Farrell:** It's a big step because also and I think we learned this early on about the family, Stephen would've had to have been dumb to walk in the middle of the road at that point and get hit by a car. Like he would've had to have a death wish or just not paying attention or addled in some way. And by the way, his toxicology was clean so, you know, he was fine. So, the family doesn't want Stephen's memory or some action that he didn't do assigned to him. So, the truth is he was murdered. The death certificate should reflect the truth. It's that simple. There's a dignity involved with it that I think until you talk to people you don't realize what they're thinking and when once we understood that, like this was a huge insult to the family, not only to have Stephen's death certificate reflect not the way he died, but for it to have been the result of his own actions when it wasn't. And that's always been something that I point out to people.



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[00:34:35] **Eric Bland:** I don't think the death certificate will be changed to say murder unless there's a coroner inquest. What it could be changed to is death unknown or blunt force trauma to the head; that it was not caused by an automobile. I don't think they're gonna go so far as to say murder unless there's a coroner inquest but —

[00:34:52] **Liz Farrell:** They could though, right, Eric? Because homicide is just means death by another, so homicide is one of the —

[00:34:59] **Eric Bland:** It could.

[00:35:00] **Mandy Matney:** I'm not even sure what it says at this point. There — she had three. Do you remember the last one? They got the date wrong and one. It was crazy, I mean.

[00:35:10] **Eric Bland:** Is that the one, Mandy, the one that I got from Andy Savage? She sent it to me.

[00:35:15] **Mandy Matney:** Probably. Does it say vehicular?

[00:35:17] **Eric Bland:** Yeah, it does.

[00:35:18] **Mandy Matney:** Yeah. There was three different ones.

[00:35:20] **Eric Bland:** Which is curious in and of itself, right?

[00:35:22] **Mandy Matney:** Right. It's just another thing with this case and it's one of those things that like I bang my head against the wall when people are like I don't understand like. And it's like it's just the everything went wrong in this case and there had to have been someone powerful to make it go so wrong and I don't know that many powerful people in Hampton who could do that. But I'm just I can't wait to see the results and I can't wait for the day that Sandy gets answered.

[00:35:52] **Eric Bland:** Do you believe Stephen was romantically involved with somebody of power and prestige?



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[00:35:56] **Mandy Matney:** I don't know and I also don't know if — I think it might be a lot different than what we think it is and I think that it might be not necessarily like a relationship but some sort of a criminal ring that Stephen did not get wrapped — not his fault for entering but —

[00:36:16] **Liz Farrell:** I think there's just a lot more. There's something more nefarious happening.

[00:36:20] **Mandy Matney:** There's just something going on where a lot of people do not want this case to be solved.

[00:36:26] **Liz Farrell:** Yes. And I don't think it's drugs as we're hearing. I don't — I mean, I'll stand corrected if it is but I just don't. I think that maybe that's an element of it in some respect but I think what we're finding out is it's gonna be more — I don't even know the word I want to use right now. Just more nefarious.

[00:36:45] **Mandy Matney:** Right. And I wanna say this again but like, Liz, you made a really good point about when we were investigating this in 2019 and several friends and family members of Stephen said over and over he was not stupid. Stephen was smart. And the conclusion that the Highway Patrol had to come up with was that he got hit by a truck mirror in his face, which was just —

[00:37:12] **Liz Farrell:** It didn't make sense based on where he was standing.

[00:37:14] **Mandy Matney:** Right. You would see the headlights coming and it's the craziest thing but it's insulting.

[00:37:19] **Eric Bland:** He never talked about suicide. He was very optimistic about his future becoming a nurse and getting educated. He was very happy and excited about going away that weekend on vacation to go deep sea fishing. He had every reason in the world to live, so he would've seen headlights coming. He was cautious by nature. He knew where he was. He would've called somebody on the phone to come get him and he would've taken his wallet.



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[00:37:45] **Liz Farrell:** Can we also talk about the gas cap? Mandy and I were talking about this other day. His little yellow car was left on the side of the road and somebody unscrewed the gas cap as a signal to passers by that he had run out of gas. Now, Stephen was a young man and that feels like a very 1970s, 1980s way of communicating with the world when you didn't have a phone. So, like what was he doing? Like opening the gas to check it and be like is there gas in there? I don't know. No. So, whoever unscrewed that gas cap and I don't like to say these things without having the facts but visually, that's just not something people do unless they are older.

[00:38:25] **Eric Bland:** Remember when we were younger? We used to put white T-shirts on your antenna. When I was young, I had a 1967 Ford Falcon that had an antenna that come from the hood that came from the hood because of the radio. And if your car was broken down, you put a white T-shirt or something white on it to signify that your car had broken down. Nobody does that today because people have cellphones.

[00:38:48] **Liz Farrell:** Right. Exactly. Exactly.

[00:38:51] **Mandy Matney:** Yeah. And I don't think we should also — I wonder if there's a way to check if people would know where his car was found at the time if it had cellphone service.

[00:39:02] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah.

[00:39:03] **Mandy Matney:** Because that would be the only reason. But still, because I did hear that people have said the gas cap thing, people in rural communities, it's an old school thing but also like your dad teaches you to do that if you grow up on the farm.

[00:39:19] **Liz Farrell:** Sure.

[00:39:20] **Mandy Matney:** Away from cellphones and things like that. But still.

[00:39:24] **Liz Farrell:** Stephen was used to operating though with little gas, remember? He was very much go — like he would go from \$20 bill to \$20 bill



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when it came to filling his tank, much like every teenage boy I have ever known in my life as an adult.

[00:39:38] **Mandy Matney:** Remember that?

[00:39:41] **Liz Farrell:** Well, yeah. Just even my stepson, I just remember that always being a thing. It's just, you know, why aren't you filling up your tank? So, yeah.

[00:39:50] **Mandy Matney:** Yeah, he had problems with that and he had to drive to Orangeburg for nursing school a lot so.

[00:39:55] **Liz Farrell:** Right. So, just saying he has experience in probably running out of gas or, you know, so I don't know that that was his protocol and I don't think that his sister would agree that that was his protocol. He would've just called her.

[00:40:08] **Mandy Matney:** Right. And I don't see I do not see a scenario where Stephen, from everything that I know about him, would be driving home from something and I feel like he would realize that he was running out of gas and call somebody. If his cellphone was dying, you would call somebody or you would hurry. Like I feel like he would've found a plan, you know?

[00:40:29] **Liz Farrell:** He would've stopped it at the gas station and even if he didn't have money, yeah.

[00:40:33] **Mandy Matney:** Right. You'd stop at a gas station and call somebody something. It just doesn't make any — this story of somebody just walking on the side of the road 'cause their car broke down is so 1980. Like it just doesn't happen.

[00:40:49] **Liz Farrell:** Can we talk about the coincidence of that though, Mandy? That because what you just said just hit me and I know this has probably hit people before and I'm just coming to it but we have a victim with head trauma. We have a victim who, there's an element of something on the side of the road, a vehicle on the side of the road à la the alleged roadside



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shooting. We have a facade, which is, you know, in the roadside shooting, it was the punctured tire. In this, you have the gas cap out, which might be a facade. You have things that just don't make sense when it comes to how the investigation was handled in both the double homicide and this one. So, again, like we're just ticking boxes it seems like in terms of what lawyers I think Eric would call common scheme. There's just elements here that just almost seemed like a modus operandi, to be honest.

[00:41:40] **Eric Bland:** Well, it seems to me that the government would like to get full closure on Murdaugh. The worst thing that could exist for our state is there's still to be open-ended questions about Murdaugh-related matters. I think the state has every incentive in the world and every goal in the world to close every loop on Murdaugh — the major loops. And this is a major loop. The fact that Randy Murdaugh showed up to the scene, the fact that Randy Murdaugh called Sandy Smith and offered his services to her. I'm sorry. The Murdaughs just don't get the benefit of the doubt anymore and these things are not just coincidence. They could have a nefarious spin to them and I think the government should get closure on this.

[00:42:27] **Mandy Matney:** And it's also the oldest case involved in this, too. Like these people have been waiting since 2015 for answers. And even besides the Murdaugh connection, even if it has nothing to do with the Murdaughs, as Liz said, which this is a great point, SLED should have taken possession of that case a long time ago. It is a SLED case. It is not a Highway Patrol case. They owe that to Sandy no matter what the connection is to Murdaugh. So, I just hope, hope, hope, hope and I have faith that as many resources and as much time spent, we'll really be dedicated to this and finally, the Smiths will get the answers that they deserve. We'll be right back.

[00:43:24] **Liz Farrell:** Eric, you're saying that, you know, we don't want open-ended questions when it comes to the Murdaugh stuff and I think one of the open-ended questions that I fear could slip by all of us is the obstruction of justice investigation into Alex his behavior surrounding the boat crash, his brother's behavior, calls they might have made, all of that. So, my fear is that that's going to they're going to think, well, Alex's in prison now and so, we don't really have to worry about that. But we do have to worry about it because we're talking about not just, you know, it takes two hands to do a handshake, right? So, Alex's hand we already know is not great. Who is the other side of that handshake on all of those things? And then, the other



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thing is just we don't know the extent that there might have been obstruction in the murder case. And before the charges, before all of this, we had heard that there were issues of obstruction of justice like perhaps that might come down the road. So, we would like to see that too because I think there are a lot of questions that were raised by some people's testimony.

[00:44:32] **Eric Bland:** I think if we look at the Mallory Beach case, you know, they've been denied justice. The justice was gonna come with Paul's DUI boating trial and Paul unfortunately got murdered. So, what we didn't find out was the conflict that existed between DNR and some of the local agencies that investigated that boating accident. The Beaches have not gotten their justice. Everybody's getting justice and Mark Tinsley's gonna get it in a civil realm, but Mallory's justice has not come yet. And there are a lot of questions that existed of obstruction of justice by Alex and his father at the hospital and by turf wars, by local and state investigative agencies, DNR and the local police force. And I think those things kind of fell by the wayside and they're very important because obstruction of justice is really something that goes to the heart of our system. We cannot have people of power and privilege manipulating investigations or pushing law enforcement officers away from certain pieces of evidence. That cannot be done.

[00:45:43] **Mandy Matney:** Right. This really all hit me. It's like that's probably why I feel so like there's just so much to be done because Alex like Alex is going to jail forever no matter what. That's one person. That's great. That's accountability. That's awesome. But this is the system. This is the people that made Alex Murdaugh that need to go down, too. This is the people that helped them. This is the people who used their position and power and either looked the other way or helped him in his very horrific deeds and that's how you change a system. It's not just put one person away from murder. It is get all of the rot out, including the Mallory Beach case, including — I mean, I was just another question dawned on me again, which is, why didn't Duffie's office why did Duffie's office not have any knowledge of the way that he was abusing the badge the night of the hospital? And why weren't they deeply — like they should have known about that and they should have done something.

[00:46:50] **Liz Farrell:** Excuse me but they did know about that because in 2019 we brought that up to them and we were told that they had never — well, we don't, we've never heard any of any incidents like that. Well, I'm



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telling you there are. Like we're hearing that there are. So, I don't know what internal investigation they did if any, probably not any. But that was brought to their attention right after the boat crash case when we started hearing that he was using his badge to affect civil cases or to persuade people to do what he needed them to do.

[00:47:22] **Eric Bland:** What are your sources telling you, ladies, about any grand jury investigation and obstruction of justice, either in connection with the murders or with the boating act? Is there any ongoing grand jury investigation in that? I've heard some rumblings on the street but what are your sources telling you?

[00:47:43] **Liz Farrell:** Well, the things that I've heard are making me scared. So, just that they that people within those circles believe that now that the murder's done, the obstruction stuff is not as important and that is the opposite of what we believe for everything that Mandy just said because it's the rot that's internal. But SLED, the South Carolina Highway Patrol, DNR, local agencies, they all need to have a real honest look at themselves. I know that it's not something that they want to do because this is the thing that's terrible is that we're not talking about people that are making tons of money at these jobs, as we've said before. These are people who rely on their jobs and rely on their paycheck and it's not always fair that they're now entangled in whatever they're entangled with with Alex. But that kind of message that it's going to be okay. We'll just ignore it. We'll, not, you know, we looked into it but, you know, it doesn't seem they did anything, so we're fine. No. You need not work in law enforcement if you did something to help facilitate whatever Alex's unstated scheme was or how do you trust law enforcement if you know that they're just —

[00:48:54] **Eric Bland:** The dispensation that they gave to Paul after the police arrived on the scene and law enforcement arrived on the scene all the way through his arrest and his release on his recognizance was disgusting. I mean, I don't know any other word of saying it. There's no other kid that would get that kind of benefit but from privilege. It is repugnant what happened.

[00:49:22] **Liz Farrell:** I do wanna talk a little bit — you guys had David had mentioned that people were asking about cold cases and what they can do to help resurrect these cases in their own communities or, you know, I guess



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what can they do to make things move faster there? Mandy, do you have any advice for people?

[00:49:43] **Mandy Matney:** I mean, be pesky but not — don't be rude. I will say that there's like a there's a line. I had to say this on Twitter yesterday because I get so many people who are like I think you're the worst but will you look into this case? And it's like that's not how you get it. I think my thing is like don't be afraid to speak up to the system. Don't be afraid to make noise. And there is a lot more power in regular everyday people speaking up and demanding justice for something that is important than we think that there is. And the government belongs to us. We have to remember that.

[00:50:22] **Liz Farrell:** Do you guys remember that movie *Three Billboards*?

[00:50:26] **Mandy Matney:** Yes.

[00:50:26] **Eric Bland:** Yes.

[00:50:26] **Liz Farrell:** Where the mom takes out the billboards and it just has like a very unsatisfactory ending because justice does not get served?

[00:50:32] **Mandy Matney:** That was a great movie.

[00:50:33] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah.

[00:50:34] **Eric Bland:** What's her name? She's a great actress.

[00:50:36] **Mandy Matney:** Yes, I know who you're talking about.

[00:50:37] **Liz Farrell:** Frances McDormand.

[00:50:38] **Eric Bland:** Frances McDormand. Oh, you're the best, Liz. Good job.

[00:50:41] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah. But that sort of — so, I'm on the cold case committee technically for Beaufort County and have been since 2018. And I haven't, because of the Murdaugh stuff, I have not been going to the meetings lately. But I will say this. So, in Beaufort County, we're lucky enough



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that the sheriff's office has a cold case committee and what that is is a group of citizens, private citizens who are either former law enforcement, there's former prosecutors on there, there's former medical examiners, I believe there's or at least there was one I don't know if he's still on there. But investigators from all these agencies in the area will come and present a case and then this group of retirees will then look at the case. They're allowed to ask questions, do interviews, things like that. So, if your area doesn't have a cold case committee, it might be something worth talking to your local police agencies about like having one 'cause they might have a team of people dedicated to cold cases but we all know that the Golden State Killer, a lot of that work legwork was done by Michelle McNamara and former law enforcement officers who were reinvestigating the case sort of on their own. So, there is so much value in that smaller agencies don't always have the budget for cold cases to do the DNA testing or to like re-look at evidence and such. So, that's another way to be able to do that through the cold case committee. And I think the other thing is we want you to be pesky, of course, but there's a fine line between interfering in an investigation, so we're just talking about obstruction of justice. But there's a fine line between helping and getting answers for your loved ones and then stepping on the investigation in some way. And I've always said that law enforcement officers need to be better about their bedside manner sometimes with their communication with victims just because they're not really putting themselves in their shoes and saying like, oh, I get it because I didn't I haven't called them in a while. They might want to talk to me. So, that's another thing. We need to improve the communication about these investigations.

[00:52:54] **Eric Bland:** Wouldn't SLED say to assuage or give Sandy some answers without revealing where they're going, can they is there can they bridge the gap and thread the needle by providing her with enough information to make her believe that they are doing something without revealing what they're doing? Is that done?

[00:53:14] **Liz Farrell:** I think some investigators are better than others. Largely though, what I hear from victims in general is that they just don't get answers, whether it's from after an arrest or before an arrest that they're very much left in the dark and the retort to that has always been, well, we have victims' advocates and we have this victims' advocacy program. Well, sure, and that's great. But that's not I think what victims are necessarily looking for. Like victims' advocates are great at explaining the system and being there with



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the Kleenex and what have you during certain parts of the case itself and they're not there over the entire case necessarily. And this isn't to just throw a net over all victims' advocates but just to say that they perform a very specific role and I think that can get confused. I also think that there's a lack of education about what the system is — knowing the difference between law enforcement and the prosecutors and what they do individually since a lot of people, it's just law enforcement. They're all the same. I think that there needs to be some sort of training as it relates to communicating with people who are going through trauma. How can they instill trust in you if you're keeping them in the dark? I do think that law enforcement — I do think investigators could do better, generally speaking, when it comes to communicating with victims and it doesn't mean giving every little detail of the investigation or necessarily any investigation. It's literally just letting them know that I'm still working on the case and I'm thinking about you. Making that call to them and just saying that, Hey, whether it's monthly at first, weekly at first, quarterly as time goes on, touching base and just saying there hasn't been any new movement. Have you heard anything? Because I think that that the number one complaint that I feel like I've heard both from outside and inside of a law enforcement agency is just lack of communication and just lack of feeling listened to. So, those are things that I would say need to be improved. But, yeah. Certainly they could do better in communicating. I don't know the level of communication with Sandy necessarily as it exists right now today, but I'm sure it could be more. I'm sure it could be better.

[00:55:19] **Mandy Matney:** Yeah, and I mean, I think that that would be as we have talked about police reform, it would be great if they had more, not victims' advocate but just a go-between, a person that could just be a communicator between those two parties, I think that that would be really revolutionary because, I mean, I've heard that many times with victims. They're just like I've heard nothing. I don't think — even if they could say, Hey, this month, we interviewed X amount of people. We got pretty far. I'll check in with you next month. And like you said, are you hearing anything new? Just basic communication and decency and getting a relationship built is so important when you're trying to find the truth and answers in situations like this.

[00:56:11] **Eric Bland:** Well, I got some I got the weirdest thing that happened to me, guys that I think ever and I, you know, I'm a guy that believes in the cosmic universe and karma. So, I chose to go to a hospital to get my surgery



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in Charleston. And there's 400 rooms in the hospital and I had to do my first walk the night of the surgery and I go out and I take a left and Renee's walking with me with the physical therapist and Renee's just stopped dead and I see her eyes are like Bugs Bunny. And I'm like, what? What? And she just she can't even get any words out. She just points to the sign of the room next to me. And believe it or not, a Murdaugh was in that room. How is that possible guys in the universe that God would put a Murdaugh next to me in the hospital and that person was related to the Murdaughs?

[00:57:13] **Liz Farrell:** Did you sleep that night?

[00:57:14] **Eric Bland:** Yes. Yes. Well, everybody told me I should get a guard or whatever but she was a lovely 85-year-old woman, so I didn't feel threatened. But, I mean, isn't that the weirdest thing in the world? Can you imagine that?

[00:57:27] **Liz Farrell:** No.

[00:57:28] **Mandy Matney:** That's a nightmare. That's a nightmare situation. I would be — I don't know what I would do.

[00:57:33] **Liz Farrell:** Well, guys. That said, I think we've talked about a lot today.

[00:57:38] **Eric Bland:** We did. We covered a lot of territory. We got a lot of exciting stuff though that's coming in the next couple weeks. David and Mandy and Liz have been working with different guests and different things and we're we got some real exciting news. I know that's gonna come down on the horizon.

[00:57:55] **Mandy Matney:** Yeah. Some really fun guests. I can't wait to announce. And stay tuned, stay in the sunlight. And we're adding "Stay pesky: to that because that's an important.

[00:58:04] **Eric Bland:** It is.

[00:58:04] **Mandy Matney:** An important message. Stay pesky but don't be annoying.



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[00:58:08] **Liz Farrell:** Yeah, don't be annoying. Cups down, Eric. Feel better.

[00:58:12] **Eric Bland:** Cups down.

[00:58:12] **Liz Farrell:** I hope that —

[00:58:13] **Eric Bland:** You guys are so nice. I appreciate it.

[00:58:15] **Mandy Matney:** Yeah, feel better. You did great.

[00:58:17] **Liz Farrell:** The show must go on, yes.

[00:58:18] **Mandy Matney:** You're a champ.

[00:58:19] **Eric Bland:** The show must go on.

[00:58:20] **Mandy Matney:** I love it.

[00:58:21] **Eric Bland:** Alright, guys.

[00:58:23] **Mandy Matney:** Cups down.

[00:58:35] **Outro:** This Cup of Justice bonus episode of the Murdaugh Murders Podcast is created and hosted by me, Mandy Matney, with co-host Liz Farrell, our executive editor, and Eric Bland, attorney-at-law, AKA The Jackhammer of Justice. From Luna Shark Productions.