



EPISODE 68: MMP Live from Charleston: Bombshells and Breakdowns in The Russell Laffitte Trial

[00:00:00] **Mandy Matney:** I don't know why Russell Laffitte insisted on dragging everyone, especially the victims, into court for a long and painful trial. But I do know, after sitting in court for more than a week now and seeing all the evidence stacked up against him and witnesses to back up the paper trail, that the odds are overwhelmingly against him so far. My name is Mandy Matney. I have been covering the Murdaugh case for nearly four years now. This is the Murdaugh Murders podcast. Produced by my husband, David Moses, and written with Liz Farrell.

[00:00:58] Let's start this episode with a huge highlight of our last week that we are so happy to finally announce. Hulu is officially developing a scripted series based off the Murdaugh Murders Podcast, and that is a big deal. It is absolutely surreal saying this. We are all honored to be working with two of the best in the business: filmmaker Erin Lee Carr and South Carolina native Michael Fuller, who will both be executive producers on the show. After the announcement dropped on Friday, I was asked a couple times why I decided to do a scripted series and didn't participate in a documentary. The answer comes down to this: it's the people who work on these projects who matter. I have gotten to know Erin and Michael over the past year and I trust them implicitly to write a show that is as respectful to the victims as we are on this podcast. Erin and Michael are both kind and gentle souls, very much opposite of so many other Hollywood folks we have met in the last year. We know the show that they create will be powerful and capture all of the complicated emotions of this true crime saga in a way that we didn't do on this podcast. We will keep you all updated as this project moves forward, so stay tuned.

[00:02:29] But before we get into that insanity that we covered this week, and there is a lot, there were a few other crazy things going on in Murdaugh news while all eyes have been focused on the Laffitte trial. Okay. So, a jailhouse phone call update. Dick and Jim have apparently been very busy preparing for their big murder trial but not busy enough to forget about those pesky bloggers that they hate AKA Liz and me and those darn jailhouse phone calls. Last week, as everyone else was covering the Laffitte case, Dick and Jim filed a very sassy motion asking the court for an injunction preventing Richland



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County officials from releasing Alex Murdaugh's phone calls. They're basically asking the court to refile a new complaint suing a different guy since the other jailhouse director that they previously sued quit. And now, they're trying to justify their reasoning for the injunction with what they should have said all along: that the tapes are a part of an open and ongoing investigation that could compromise Alex's right to a fair trial. It's a better argument than last time. I will give that to them. But I still don't think it gets there. The thing I noticed about these filings, which as several people pointed out on Twitter read honestly like an SNL skit, is how upset Dick and Jim are at Murdaugh Murders Podcast for releasing the tapes. But apparently, they are not upset at any other media. The word "blogger" is used six times in this motion, which is hilarious, and an intentional dig at Liz and I apparently. I'll have David read my favorite part.

[00:04:22] **David Moses:** The recordings are used to embarrass, humiliate plaintiff and his family members and portray them in a false and negative light, denying them basic rights to privacy and human dignity that are enjoyed even by convicted criminals in prisons. Even a convict in prison can have a conversation with his son that is not posted on internet sites selling T-shirts and dog bowls. Yet because of defendant's unlawful actions, plaintiff cannot, even though he has not been convicted of anything.

[00:04:55] **Mandy Matney:** Yes, they referred to this podcast, the one that was named a top five new podcast by Apple itself in 2021 and has more than 45 million downloads. They called us an internet site selling T-shirts and dog bowls. And by the way, we do sell merchandise and 100% of the proceeds go to victim-focused charities in the Lowcountry. We have donated over 10 grand so far to both Mal's Palz, which is Mallory Beach's charity, and Hopeful Horizons, which helps victims of abuse in the Lowcountry. This quarter, we're donating all merch proceeds to Gloria's Gift Foundation in honor of Gloria Satterfield, which will supply Christmas gifts to people in need in Hampton County this holiday season. So, unlike Dick and Jim's client who stole from the poor people in his own county, we will actually be helping them with our silly dog bowls and T-shirt sales. But we appreciate the shout-out on this motion because merch sales have been up this week. For once, Dick and Jim might have accidentally done something good for the people of Hampton County. And another part of this motion that I cannot believe that they actually put in



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writing was their reason why it took them so long to file this. I will have David read this part.

[00:06:24] **David Moses:** Being indicted for the murder of one's own family is an extraordinary circumstance that surely provides good cause for missing an amended pleading deadline where the only burden the amendment would impose on the opposing party is the need to file a new summary judgment brief.

[00:06:44] **Mandy Matney:** Ah, yes. Extraordinary circumstances. It is not every day when a person is facing more than 80 financial charges, more than a dozen ongoing lawsuits, plus being charged with the murders of his wife and son. Remember they put that in writing. So, why are Dick and Jim even wasting their time on this lawsuit, especially when it appears that they found a three-way call workaround, which seems like it's against the rules, and we have not been able to obtain any jailhouse phone calls for a while? Nowhere in this motion do Dick and Jim ever mention that HBO Max, a much larger company than the Murdaugh Murders Podcast, also used the phone calls for their for-profit documentary because, oopsies! That would not work for them. Remember Jim Griffin willingly participated in that documentary and he told the world a very detailed alibi that does not at all line up with evidence. So if we want to talk about Alex's right to a fair trial, I think his lawyers might wanna worry about that instead of these silly phone calls. Finally, the other highlight that I have to point out is their big argument that the court's decision affects every inmate everywhere. I will have David read this part.

[00:08:14] **David Moses:** The proposed amended complaint states that a meritorious claim of a continuing violation of a constitutional right that affects every inmate in south. Richland County's decision to give recordings of inmate's private family conversations to internet bloggers seeking something to sell has opened a Pandora's box. Reporters have already made FOIA requests for personal telephone calls of other persons associated with Mr. Murdaugh. The issue raised will be raised again and again until resolution. The interests of justice and judicial economy favor resolving it now.

[00:08:57] **Mandy Matney:** Ah, yes. The Good Ole Boys are worried about South Carolina inmates everywhere, justice for all, and the judicial economy



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except oopsy again. Dick and Jim said that Alex's case is extraordinary in their own motion. Newsflash: reporters aren't going to be FOIA-ing for 99% of jailhouse phone calls because 99% of South Carolina inmates didn't use, abuse, and taint the state's judicial system while hurting a countless number of innocent victims. And Alex, their client who is a former public official, is the one embarrassing himself in front of millions of people. His actions have made these phone calls newsworthy and public information. But the question is, why are they fighting this? Are they worried about Alex making calls to family leading up to the trial? Is their little three-way system no longer working? Richland County officials responded to the motion this week and basically said your arguments don't matter and the court needs to dismiss this. We will keep you updated on that front, so stay tuned. And we'll be right back.

[00:10:19] We are in week two of Russell Laffitte's Federal trial for his alleged role in Alex Murdaugh's financial crimes. We're recording this episode on Wednesday morning. And even though we do not foresee any major surprise twists happening before we publish, you never know, so we will update you again in an upcoming Cup of Justice bonus episode with Eric Bland. So, whew. What a weird two weeks of trial coverage. To be honest, I had a moment yesterday when I just realized how Russell's trial is just giving us a little taste of the insanity that we are going to see in the upcoming double homicide trial if it actually does happen in January. That made me panic for a minute, and then Liz and David reminded me that we're learning what to do and what not to do for trial coverage and it's always good to practice. And they reminded me that our team is the best of the best and we can do hard things and carry this case to the finish line, which we will. Anyways, like I said, a very busy week covering Russell's case alone. And for live updates and super fun commentary, be sure to follow Liz, Eric, and me on Twitter.

[00:11:34] And I need to say something positive before we get into all the details. I have been extremely impressed with local media in these last two weeks. I know that I have been critical in the past, but it was really good to see South Carolina's largest newspapers and Charleston TV stations sending reporters to cover the Russell Laffitte trial all week. It is expensive for newspapers and TV stations to cover a trial like this one, especially considering that no one can record or film and the subject isn't sexy on the surface. I mean, it is about bank fraud and financial crimes. But the fact that



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we've seen around a dozen local journalists in the media room every day covering Russell Laffitte's case has been really good to see. Several local news outlets actually have multiple reporters. Their coverage has been accurate and insightful. And as we've said before, the more sunlight in this case the better. So, great job.

[00:12:39] **Liz Farrell:** Here's a little insider information on what it's like to cover a trial like this. It's not always fun or easy. First, there's the little issue of this is the Laffitte trial, meaning this is happening in large part because of reporting we've done and because of repeated pushes we've made to get the government not to ignore the massive corruption that we know exists in South Carolina and in Hampton County, in particular, and that investigators have ignored for generations. So, it can be really awkward at times. Sometimes, we run into people who definitely don't wanna see us. For instance, we see Russell's family every day. And let's just say it, they're not fans. On Monday, we also saw Johnny Parker, who is one of the major partners at PMPED and whose name is being used for PMPED's new agency, Parker Law Group. He was walking on Meeting Street near the courthouse. We probably should have yelled out, "Why were you giving such big loans to Alex and Russell?" But we were too fascinated by the fact that he was surrounded by six young but very grumpy-looking women, and who can blame them for that?

[00:13:45] So, like I said, the trial has been hard. Not only do we both miss home and having access to coffee and seltzer during the day, the subject matter is very complex and very detailed. It can get really dry sometimes. But luckily, we were very prepared for this. In the middle of all the numbers, names, and dates, there have been some fun nuggets that we've caught beyond day one, when we were shocked to learn that Alex had been confronted by PMPED on the day of his wife's and son's murders, and beyond day two, when it was finally confirmed on the record that PMPED knew about Alex's stealing long before September 2021, when Alex called 911 from Old Salkehatchie Road, pretending to get shot by a mystery man.

[00:14:31] Here's what we found out in week two. First, according to testimony from Charles Laffitte III, Russell's older brother, Alex Murdaugh was trying to get the Edisto beach house appraised by him so that he could get a second mortgage on it. But Charles III wasn't able to appraise the house because,



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according to Alex, Maggie kept changing the date and leaving town. But guess what? I went through the Colleton County Registry of Deeds documents right after hearing this testimony and found out that Maggie and Alex already had a second mortgage on the Edisto house, which they took out in 2006. The first mortgage was taken out in 2002. Both of those loans didn't get paid back until July 2022, when the house sold. So, surprise, surprise. There is confusion surrounding Alex's properties and loans. It's all real shady. Anyway, this is Alex we're talking about, so it's possible that Maggie didn't even know her house was having a so-called "second mortgage" taken out on it, and he was lying to Charles III because he didn't want Maggie to know about the loan. But if she did know, and if she was making it difficult for him to take more money out on the house that was in her name, then this seems like even more motive for her murder, no?

[00:15:50] And let's pause for perspective here. In late March or early April 2021, the state grand jury had subpoenaed to get Alex's financial records in relation to an obstruction of justice investigation into Alex's apparent interference with the boat crash case. In May, he had apparently diverted \$792,000 from PMPED by having Chris Wilson pay him directly for alleged work done on one of Wilson's cases. During this time, he was apparently trying to take out a second but actually third mortgage, which there's no such thing as that, on a house he didn't own. Then, on June 7th, PMPED confronted him about the missing Wilson money. Later that night, Maggie and Paul were murdered. Three days later, Alex was scheduled to go to court so a judge could rule on his refusal to open his financial records to the Beach family. Obviously, that got canceled. By early July, he apparently had no money to pay back Chris Wilson for the \$792,000, so he had to take out a loan from Palmetto State Bank and Johnny Parker to cover \$600,000 of it. He didn't have the money to pay Chris back for the remaining \$192,000.

[00:17:00] So, question: when Jim Griffin told HBO Max that the double homicide case would be, quote, easier to defend than the boat crash case, was he even referring to the Alex Murdaugh murder case? Because this seems like an awful lot of motive and mounting pressure and very damning mitigating factors. Not sure how a jury is going to look at that and think this wasn't a man on the verge of something really bad.



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[00:17:33] **Mandy Matney:** And speaking of that bombshell PMPED encounter, we learned more about it in trial in the last week. A big question we had going into this trial was how much would be revealed about PMPED's knowledge of Alex's crimes in 2021. So two testimonies, PMPED CFO Jeanne Seckinger, who is Russell's sister-in-law, and PMPED partner Ronnie Crosby, so far in this case have focused on what PMPED knew about these thefts when they knew it and when they reported it.

[00:18:13] Ronnie told the court that in May 2021, PMPED CFO Jeanne Seckinger had a meeting with law firm partners Ronnie Crosby and Lee Cope. In that meeting, she said that she was concerned that Alex was hiding fees, \$792,000 worth, to protect him from the Mallory Beach boat crash lawsuit. In court, Crosby said that he cursed and said "Hell, no!" and said that that would be a major ethics violation that the firm could not be a part of. And he told Jeanne to find out more and find out where that money went. See, Crosby has been described multiple times to us as the smartest lawyer at PMPED. It was clear that he was well prepared for his testimony, and he carefully said every detail. He made it clear that he didn't know enough about the situation in May to report it to the ODC because if he admitted to knowing that Alex was stealing money back in May, he could definitely lose his law license.

[00:19:23] So according to Jeanne's testimony, PMPED asked Alex over email about the fees, and Alex said that Chris Wilson had the money and not to worry about it. They did this dance for weeks. Then, Seckinger approached Alex on June 7th, the day of the murders, and asked to get the fees, and Alex suddenly got a phone call during that meeting, said his dad was being placed in hospice care and he was dying and that he had to go. Ronnie confirmed what Jeanne said. The murders immediately overshadowed their concerns about the \$792,000. Ronnie said that his partners at PMPED were grieving the loss of Maggie and Paul, too. And he basically said that no one wanted to be the person to ask about all of that missing money to the guy whose wife and son were just brutally murdered on the same day they confronted him about missing hundreds of thousands of dollars, which apparently they did not see as suspicious in any way. Ronnie said that he really wasn't worried about it. He was assuming that the money was in Chris Wilson's account and figured they'd get it by the end of the year, which by the way he said is the time of the year they divvy up all the partners' big bonuses.



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[00:20:42] In other words, Ronnie testified that PMPED was fine to let the question of whether a partner — someone who was still responsible for an untold number of cases, who was continuing to do work on behalf of the firm, and whose trust on which victims were relying — was stealing from them. He was willing to let this very big ethical question go unaddressed. And now, \$790,000 is a lot of money to push aside until the end of the year, which makes us wonder: if that is true, how many millions of dollars is PMPED bringing in every year? According to Crosby's testimony, they didn't get proof of the actual theft until September 3rd 2021, when Alex admitted it to them. And then, they fired him, according to Crosby. And this whole time, the firm was missing \$792,000. I can't stress this enough. What company in one of the poorest counties in one of the poorest states in the nation finds that they are missing \$792,000 and that all roads lead to a single person whose wife and son were murdered on the same day he was confronted about this? What business still allows that person to work for them for more than three months? That story does not add up.

[00:22:14] Crosby testified that they notified the ODC, the agency in charge of policing lawyers in our state, before they notified SLED. Crosby said that they wanted to get a package of information together for SLED and they were taking the weekend to do it. But then, Alex pulled his shooting stunt on that Saturday. So Crosby said that PMPED partners actually went to the scene and told SLED that they had just found out that Alex was stealing from clients. To say the least, it seems like PMPED partners waited until the very last minute to tell law enforcement about this, which doesn't seem technically illegal but is problematic. And we are still trying to figure out more about this timeline. And we hope the Office of Disciplinary Counsel is paying attention.

[00:23:09] From there, PMPED apparently went into cleanup scrambling mode to find cases where Alex stole money, spending the next few months up to February 2022 figuring out just how much liability they had when it came to Alex Murdaugh. But the weird thing about that story that Ronnie told on the stand is that on September 6th, just three days after they say that they fired Alex, a PMPED employee told *The New York Times* that Alex had actually stolen millions from them. How did PMPED know that number if they were still finding cases, big cases, for months after this? For instance, Ronnie specifically said that they didn't find out that the Pinckneys were missing funds until November 2021. And more importantly, how did they go from



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trusting that they could put off their investigation into the suspicions that Alex might be stealing from them to discovering proof of it on the first week of September and then a few days later, somehow knowing that he stole millions and being comfortable enough to tell *The New York Times* that? I said this before and I'll say it again. It is hard to believe that they were able to figure out all of that in such a short time.

[00:24:34] And during his testimony, Ronnie placed a lot of blame on the bank for not finding Alex's theft sooner, saying that he believes through his investigation that Palmetto State Bank has responsibility in this. But yet he testified that he still has a personal account at Palmetto State Bank and that his law firm, which weirdly he called PMPED — it's now named Parker Law Group, by the way. They renamed it at the beginning of this year due to bad PR — they, the law firm, still has an account there. And if PMPED/Parker Law Group believes that the bank has any responsibility for allowing their partner to steal from clients, then why would they still bank with them?

[00:25:21] I say all of this because after listening to two PMPED employees and several members of Russell's family who were also board members, I got this really weird sense that they were all protecting each other in certain ways. Remember when it came to money, the bank needed PMPED and PMPED needed the bank. Collectively, they all told a story that really didn't make much sense. But one thing was very clear. It would be hard for anyone to accept that Russell was tricked by Alex for all of these years. And here's Liz back to Russell's trial.

[00:26:01] **Liz Farrell:** The third thing we learned this week was that Russell was in a lot of debt at the time he took out the loans from Hannah Plyler's account. So that leads us to ask the same two questions we've been asking with Alex, which is, why so much debt, and where was all this money going? Russell owed hundreds of thousands of dollars in loans to other banks and was being charged what were normal interest rates for that time, like 5% and 6%. So according to testimony from an FBI forensic accountant, what he did was this. He helped himself to hundreds of thousands of dollars from Hannah's account and wrote up promissory notes, giving himself a 3.25% interest rate at first. He then renewed those so-called loans a few times at even lower rates — one was 1.25% — while shorting Hannah on the interest money every year and not charging himself or Alex late fees. Cool, huh?



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Meanwhile, he was making it difficult for Hannah to get money for a trip to Disney World and putting the kibosh on Hannah's request for a car to help her get to and from school, help her ailing grandfather, and maybe even get a part-time job. Why? Because according to the FBI analyst, after every loan taken out of Hannah's account, she was left with very little money.

[00:27:16] Third, during the defense's cross-examination of Arthur Badger, we learned that Alex Murdaugh was apparently sending Arthur to a doctor for no reason. Nevertheless, Arthur was charged \$1,400 for this. That doctor's name is Dr. Vega. And from what we've learned from sources, Dr. Vega's name is a familiar one when it came to the expenses that were being billed to Alex's clients. And, of course, that raises questions. We've heard that Alex routinely inflated expenses and charged clients. Was the defense suggesting that Alex was inflating this expense? It seemed like it. But before we could find out more, the government shut down that line of questioning right as the defense revealed that Alex had been taking private planes on Arthur's dime. The defense was like, would there have been a reason for Alex to travel on a private plane for your case? And Arthur was like, no. We're gonna look into this more because we feel certain that medical fraud and fraudulent legal expenses could end up being yet another dirty avenue in Murdaugh Town.

[00:28:19] **Mandy Matney:** Which brings us to our fourth big point. Russell has so many cousins. Y'all, of the first 10 witnesses against him, six were related to him. And also, let's not forget cousin Sara, the quote, investigative journalist who created Russell TV and somehow thought it was a smart idea to post episode two during the federal trial. We will talk more about that in a minute and in a later episode of Cup of Justice. But basically, here's how the cousins testified: what he did was bad. He didn't cooperate with our investigation. He was not forthcoming. He didn't tell us about how he was a conservator for all of these other people. He decided to pay back Alex's law firm for half of the stolen money without talking to us or looping us into that decision. But also, we love him. Some of the cousins got a little emotional when they admitted that they had voted to fire him last January.

[00:29:25] We've definitely learned that family ties are huge in Hampton County and that people are reluctant to speak out against their kin no matter how horrible they are. It was clearly painful for some of the cousins to be testifying against a family member to an extent. But also, we couldn't lose



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sight of this: the cousins are all on the board of Palmetto State Bank. And right now, their number one goal would be to save the bank. And a quick reminder. Russell wasn't fired from the bank at first. He was allowed to step down. Also, no action was taken on Russell's employment until attorney Justin Bamberg made public a letter he had written to the bank's attorney outlining what had happened to his clients, the Pinckney family, which included Natasha Thomas, who testified on Tuesday. We will tell you more about that testimony in a minute. And also of note, the prosecution really stressed that while every member of the bank's board was related to Russell, only three of them, Russell's sister, Gray, Russell's brother, Charlie, and Russell's father, who is also named Charlie, did not vote to fire Russell. The rest of the family did, and this might be important at some point down the road.

[00:30:47] Anyway, from where we sit, it looks like those very same cousins were initially more concerned with how things might look to the public and covering the bank's butt than they may have been about doing the right thing when no one was watching, which seems to be a theme. Maybe it's a family trait. In addition to all of this, there were several big moments in this trial that we wanna talk about.

[00:31:16] **Liz Farrell:** On Monday, the government's testimony began with Alania Plyler Spohn, who, because she's an amazing person, went to work as a patrol deputy with Lexington County Sheriff's Department that same night. When she was explaining to the jury how, because of an annuity that had been purchased with some of her settlement money, she didn't have to work per se but instead chose to work because she felt called to, quote, healed people are the best to help hurt people, she said in her testimony. It was such a powerful moment when she said that because here we are talking about a wealthy man who was born with everything he'd ever need in life and who had everything pretty much handed to him, even though I'm sure he believes he worked really hard for all of it, who is accused of helping himself to money that belonged to hurting people and using money that belonged to other hurting people to pay off that money. And here, Alania is being dragged back into the worst time of her life because of the selfish and greedy behavior of this man. But nevertheless, she was selflessly going to work on that same day because she feels called to help others.



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[00:32:27] If there is one thing that has been made clear over this past week and a half, it's just how traumatic testifying can be for victims. Not only are they reliving these horrific fatal crashes or crashes with catastrophic injury to themselves and other loved ones, but they're learning what was done to them while they were so vulnerable at a time when they needed people to be decent to them and they needed to be able to rely on and trust people. Think about how that would feel. Finding out your lawyer, who swore up and down that he'd help you, and his banker buddy thought so little of you as a human being, that they figured you didn't deserve your own money. They did.

[00:33:05] Russell has insisted over and over again in testimony during his September bond reconsideration hearing through letters from his wife and daughter that have been read in court and from two full episodes of the hit YouTube show Russell TV that he is a good man. When Alania was a teenager, she was a millionaire. But because of Russell and Alex, she had no idea. After her mother died, Alania and her younger sister, Hannah, had a difficult and complicated living situation that they needed to contend with. Alania told the jury that when she was 16, there were times she was living out of her car. Russell didn't necessarily know this, she said, but he certainly didn't make her life better or easier when he could have done so in other ways, such as when she asked for more of her money and met resistance. Russell had told the probate court that both Alania and Hannah could live off \$2,000 a month each. Instead, he gave the girls around \$400 a month each, which, according to their testimony, they used to buy school lunch, clothes, to help family members, and for other basic necessities that the \$2,000 a month had been set aside for. Where did that money go? For Alania, it sat in a bank. For Hannah, it basically went to Alex and Russell. And we'll be right back.

[00:34:30] **Mandy Matney:** Collectively, we heard from four victims: Alania Plyler, Hannah Plyler, Arthur Badger, and Natasha Thomas. Through these witnesses, the government showed that there was a pattern here. The victims told their tragic stories of the car accidents that rocked their worlds in the lawsuit that tied their lives to Alex Murdaugh and Russell Laffitte. They were all vulnerable, they were all grieving, and they all trusted Alex to handle their case. And Russell was in charge with protecting their money and he failed entirely to do that. Russell's role in this, which he was paid over \$400,000 for, was essentially doing nothing but allowing a bully lawyer to play with his



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clients' money as he pleased and not ask any questions about what this bully lawyer was doing with that money.

[00:35:31] The victims' testimonies collectively felt powerful, emotional, and very damning for Russell. The prosecution also smartly started with the heart-wrenching stories of Hannah and Alania Plyler and then went to an FBI forensic accountant who painstakingly painted Russell into a corner by explaining every little thing that he did with his own money and with Hannah's and with the money that was stolen from Natasha, Hakeem, and Arthur. When the FBI analyst was done, the prosecution brought in Natasha and Arthur, who reminded the jury that Russell's actions had real human consequences. And even worse, Natasha and Arthur didn't even know that Russell was handling their money. And yet Russell took money from them to do so.

[00:36:33] **Liz Farrell:** These emotional testimonies were further backed up by FBI agent Brian Womble, who specializes in financial crimes and public corruption, and started investigating this case along with SLED in October 2021. Which brings us to our next big takeaway: how Russell enabled Alex and should have known 10 years ago that Alex was not a person anyone with any integrity should associate with, according to testimony. The FBI agent was straightforward in saying Alex was in overdraft all of the time and constantly getting unsecured loans by Russell to get him out of overdraft. Then, his account would go right back into the negative. He said that Russell gave Alex more than \$900,000 in unsecured loans just from Hannah Plyler's settlement money. And this overdraft loan repeat cycle was a pattern up until Hannah turned 18 and they couldn't do it anymore.

[00:37:25] Agent Womble was a very lively and assertive witness. He was loud, emphatic, and didn't seed any ground when Russell's defense team cross-examined him. We don't wanna get into all the checks and the dollar amounts and the dates, so the easiest way to say this is that the checks that PMPED made out for Natasha, Arthur, and Hakeem were directed to Palmetto State Bank and had the clients' names and the memo lines. Several times, Bart Daniel tried to lead Womble into what seemed like accidental rhetorical questions because as soon as Womble would try to answer the question, Bart would be like, whoa, whoa, whoa. Bart would get the agent to admit that the checks were made out to the bank and not an individual or



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get him to admit that Alex took an unusually long time to cash the checks that Russell wrote out from the stolen money or get him to admit that damning emails between Alex and Russell never actually mentioned the name "Arthur Badger." After the agent agreed with him, Bart would then be like, well, how could Russell have known there was a problem? How was he supposed to remember where the money was coming from when Alex was taking weeks and months to cash those checks?

[00:38:29] Invariably, the FBI agent was like, oh, thanks for asking. I'll tell you how Russell could have known and why that's a dumb question. One, Russell testified in September that he was Alex's personal banker and that Alex was one of the bank's best and biggest customers. Seems like he'd know what was going on with his biggest and best customer no matter how long it was taking him to cash checks that he'd negotiated. Two, Russell is a banker and it's his job to put money in the right accounts. He could have known by doing his job. Three, Russell was supposed to be protecting Natasha, Hakeem, Arthur, Hannah, and Alania, and he took \$450,000 in fees from them for that, quote, protection work. So, he could have known by checking up to find out why he signed disbursement sheets saying his conservatees would get amounts of money that coincidentally are in the same amounts as the weird checks he was depositing and then doling out to Alex. That is how he could have known. The defense had a really difficult job because even though we have always found what Russell did indefensible, seeing it all laid out like this has just reinforced that opinion.

[00:39:38] In defending Russell, Bart and his co-counsel, Matt Austin, were repeatedly shut down by the judge, whether it be on their pretrial motions or their objections or the prosecution's objections or their repeated attempts to testify for the witnesses in an effort to sneak some reasonable doubt onto the record.

[00:39:58] **Mandy Matney:** On Wednesday, the first day of the defense presenting its witnesses, two bank employees, Russell's brother, father, and sister testified. Also, there was a controversial cameo by John Marvin Murdaugh. Right before lunch, the prosecution was basically like, judge, we need to talk about John Marvin and whether he should take the stand. After lunch, John Marvin took the stand and, very much like Alex's lie about getting shot in the head, his testimony did not last long. And everyone was like, what



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just happened here? John Marvin was asked four questions by the defense. One, was he friends with Russell? Two, does he know Russell to be a man of good character? Three, did he know Maggie Murdaugh? And four, who is the beneficiary of Maggie's estate? The prosecution only asked one question: do you know anything about this case that we're talking about right now? And the answer to that was "no." Then John Marvin got off the stand and presumably left the building with some man who looked a lot like him walking by his side.

[00:41:12] Anyway, the bank employees didn't seem to help Russell's defense very much at all. The first witness for the defense, who was the son of the deceased PMPED partner, has worked for the bank for 35 years and was charged with flagging the bank's suspicious activities. Bart Daniel asked him whether there was any suspicious activity that he remembered over the years involving Russell and Alex, and the employee was like, "Nope. All good." And then under cross-examination by the prosecutor, that same employee was shown several activity reports he had filed about Russell and Alex after their bad behavior came to light, meaning when he found out about what had happened, he sure did report that that behavior was suspicious. The second employee did not move the needle much at all for Russell but certainly did not hurt him like his family did. Shortly before we finished up this episode, Russell's sister admitted to some shocking and possibly criminal actions during a brutal cross-examination. We'll get into all of that during our next Cup of Justice episode.

[00:42:27] We don't know yet if Russell will take the stand on Friday. But if he does, we do not think that it's going to help him much. Why? Because we all saw Russell's part two tell-all on YouTube, again, featuring an interview about his alleged innocence with his self-proclaimed investigative journalist cousin asking very softball questions. And that interview was not the Hail, Mary they all thought it was. We think Russell is going to need a miracle to walk away with this without any prison time. Basically, the only question left right now is how many of these charges will Russell be convicted of and how many of the up to 180 years would he have to serve in federal prison?

[00:43:17] And speaking of Russell TV, which we will talk about in our next Cup of Justice, Russell launched episode two in the middle of his federal trial and ended that episode by asking the very question that we now have for him:



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where did all of that money go? Now, that dramatic ending of Russell TV has stuck with me all week as I've watched witness after witness testify of just how involved Russell was with Alex's finances; how alarm bells should have been ringing about Alex Murdaugh a decade ago; how he was hemorrhaging large amounts of cash for years; and Russell, with the help of the bank, was always cleaning up his financial messes.

[00:44:08] You know, a lot of people connected to this could say that they did not know that Alex was stealing from his clients. A lot of people could say they didn't know he was taking advantage of innocent people who trusted him. A lot of people could say that they had no idea Alex was in such deep financial troubles, so bad that it apparently led to the murders of his wife and son. A lot of people could say they didn't know. But after hearing all of this testimony and seeing all of this evidence, there is just no way Russell could say that.

[00:44:50] And then I get angry. How many people could have been saved from all of this heartbreak if Russell did the right thing a decade ago and said no to Alex? How many people could have been different now if Alex didn't have a bank of play money to constantly fall back on when he was doing whatever he was doing with other people's money? Russell, how dare you ask where the money went right now? You should have asked that question 10 years ago. If you did, you could have stopped this. And you didn't. Instead, it appears that you bent the rules for someone who was powerful while steamrolling the innocent who trusted him and trusted you. Russell cannot ask where the money went, but we can. And we will continue to follow it and find out just how many people knew about this and didn't do anything to stop it. And we will not stop until we get answers. Be sure to check out our next episode of Cup of Justice later this week because there is just so much to talk about and we know Eric Bland is so ready to let loose. Stay tuned and stay in the sunlight.

[00:46:43] **Outro:** The Murdaugh Murders Podcast is created and hosted by me, Mandy Matney, produced by my husband, David Moses. And Liz Farrell is our executive editor. From Luna Shark Productions.