



EPISODE 73: What happened to the money? Part Six + The Only Case Alex Prosecuted

[00:00:00] **Mandy Matney:** I don't know where the millions of dollars that Alex Murdaugh allegedly stole went. But as we get closer to the double homicide trial, I feel like a large piece of the puzzle is still missing. Where was this money going? How many other people were involved? Where does drug trafficking fit in, and what exactly were they up to? My name is Mandy Matney. I have been investigating the Murdaugh family for almost four years now. This is the Murdaugh Murders Podcast written with Liz Farrell and produced by my husband, David Moses.

[00:01:01] In the last week, the South Carolina Attorney General's Office has given Alex two last-minute Christmas surprises. On Friday, they announced new charges and on Tuesday, Alan Wilson announced that he would not be seeking the death penalty in the double homicide case. This does not surprise us considering that the death penalty would make this very complicated case a thousand times more complicated. And also, South Carolina hasn't executed anyone since 2011. But what was disappointing is that Attorney General Alan Wilson's statement said so little. I'll have David read that statement.

[00:01:41] **David Moses:** After carefully reviewing this case and all the surrounding facts, we have decided to seek life without parole for Alex Murdaugh. Because this is a pending case, we cannot comment further.

[00:01:53] **Mandy Matney:** And speaking of life without parole, Alex Murdaugh now has a total of 99 charges after the latest round hit last Friday. On December 16th, Alex was charged with nine counts of tax evasion for failing to report more than \$6.9 million of unreported income from 2011 through 2019. In total, Murdaugh owes nearly \$500,000 in state taxes, according to the indictments. And yes, you do have to report all income, even if it was illegally obtained. So while this wasn't really surprising, the indictments gave us a better idea of the money that Alex was making through his job at PMPED. I'll have David read a few of the highlights to give you guys an idea of just how much money we're talking about.



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[00:02:50] **David Moses:** In 2011, he claimed over \$2.3 million income and allegedly stole over \$630,000. In 2012, he claims more than \$5.2 million income and allegedly stole over \$25,000. In 2015, he claimed over \$2 million and allegedly stole over \$330,000. And in 2019, he claimed over \$655,000 in income and allegedly stole over \$3.7 million. So altogether from 2011 to 2019, he claimed more than \$13.9 million in adjusted gross income, allegedly stole more than \$7 million in those years, and owes the state according to them \$486,000.

[00:03:46] **Mandy Matney:** \$13.9 million in income and he still stole, allegedly. Think about this. During his worst year when he reported over \$218,000 in income, he was still making nearly six times more than the median household income in Hampton County, and he still allegedly stole from the poor, from the vulnerable, from the disabled. Seeing just how much money Alex Murdaugh was making from his PMPED income alone makes this entire mystery even more perplexing. What would incentivize a person to steal when they were already making so much money? And during this time, Alex Murdaugh often had a negative balance at Palmetto State Bank and was borrowing hundreds of thousands of dollars. And here lies a large part of the puzzle piece that the state has not yet revealed in the murder case. What happened to the money? Where did it go, and what was Alex really up to? What was he trying to cover up? The prosecution's narrative as to why Alex Murdaugh allegedly murdered his wife and son does make sense, but only if you're looking through the eyes of a sociopath who has never faced accountability his entire life and who is desperately searching for a way out of his problems. However, at the same time, the narrative would make a lot more sense and would be a lot clearer if the state knew the full picture of what was going on, not just the half of it.

[00:05:31] But before we dive into what we think was going on into Alex's chaotic world and where those millions went, we need to tell you about a memo that the defense filed this week. The memo filed was an attempt to convince the court to not allow evidence of the financial crimes into the double homicide trial. So to recap, a few weeks ago, the defense filed a



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motion asking for the state to share its theory on motive in the double homicide. That was the bill of particulars motion. And then, Creighton was like, oh, you want the motive? Bam. He filed a 23-page response explaining why the state believes that the financial crimes are directly linked to the double homicide. Now, Dick and Jim are like, oh, actually, we're gonna ask the judge to exclude all of that silly financial evidence and the motive, and here's why. So on Monday, the defense filed a fiery 12-page memo arguing that the financial evidence isn't relevant to the murders and arguing why it should not be allowed into this case. You, too, might be wondering, was this the plan all along? Is this why Dick and Jim and the crew were actually laughing during the last hearing when Judge Newman was talking about their ridiculous and ancient bill of particulars motion, which ultimately led to this memo? We will unpack that in a later Cup of Justice episode. But now, we'll quickly go over the memo because like most of Dick and Jim's legal filings, it appears to be created solely for the purpose of grabbing favorable headlines, which it did, and planting seeds of doubt in the potential jury pool. Here is David reading a part of the first page of the memo.

[00:07:16] **David Moses:** The state's claim that Murdaugh murders his wife and son to divert attention from his alleged financial misdeeds and garner sympathy from members of his law firm to buy additional time before his misconduct was discovered is illogical and implausible. This motive theory is simply created out of whole cloth. There is zero evidentiary support for this motive and it is nothing more than a transparent effort to improperly persuade the jury that Murdaugh is a person of such bad character that he can commit the most heinous crimes imaginable.

[00:07:58] **Mandy Matney:** The entire memo reads like this — full of drama and loaded language. We will get into the legal technicalities in a later Cup of Justice episode, but essentially the memo solidifies what Jim was arguing in court earlier this month, saying that there isn't evidence to support the state's theory that Alex murdered his wife and son to evade the inevitable consequences for his financial crimes. The defense's motion says that, quote, the state's claim that 15 years of financial crimes were about to be exposed



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due to the boat crash hearing and the Chris Wilson missing fees is, quote, absurd. But what's really interesting, Dick and Jim are claiming that the whole September 2nd discovery of Alex's financial crimes went down differently from what PMPED said happened. The defense wrote that, quote, by happenstance, the law firm discovered a canceled check written to Forge in Murdaugh's office on September 2nd, 2021. Here is David reading what the defense claims happened on that day.

[00:09:08] **David Moses:** By happenstance, the law firm discovered a canceled check written to Forge in Murdaugh's office on September 2nd, 2021. This is what prompted the law firm to investigate payments to Forge on Murdaugh's clients' matters, not the alleged diversion of attorney's fees.

[00:09:28] **Mandy Matney:** This is not what PMPED said happened in their lawsuit. PMPED said that on September 2nd, 2021, a check was found on Alex's desk from Chris Wilson's law firm that was made out to Alex Murdaugh, Esquire. And that check was deposited into Alex Murdaugh's personal account when it should have been made to PMPED and deposited into PMPED's account. The difference might sound silly, but the devil is always in the details here. PMPED's story that they discovered the Chris Wilson check on September 2nd, which led them to quickly discover the Forge scheme on the same day, has never really made sense to me. But also, Alex's story claiming that PMPED's discovery of the Forge scheme had nothing to do with the \$790,000 in missing fees — well, that doesn't add up either. We just hope that prosecutors find the truth with this. Now, I wanna have David read another significant part of Dick and Jim's recent memo.

[00:10:38] **David Moses:** Here, there is absolutely no evidence that Murdaugh's wife, Maggie, or his son, Paul, were a threat to expose Murdaugh's financial crimes. Maggie had not consulted with a divorce attorney and had not hired a forensic accountant. Contrary to rumors and innuendos that have been irresponsibly reported in a national gossip magazine and repeated in various online outlets and chat rooms, Murdaugh did not have life insurance on either



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Maggie or Paul and would not have gained a financial benefit from their deaths. In fact, the opposite occurred.

[00:11:17] **Mandy Matney:** Chat rooms? What year is this, Dick? Anyway, Dick and Jim are arguing that the whole beach house appraisal thing now works in their favor. For a reminder, in the months before the murders, Alex was trying to get Palmetto State Bank to appraise the Edisto beach house for a \$750,000 mortgage, likely so he could pay PMPED back for those \$790,000 in missing fees. According to Charles Laffitte's testimony at Russell Laffitte's federal trial, Maggie was hesitant in scheduling the appraisal for the home, which was ultimately collateral for the loan. Well, unfortunately, we will probably never know Maggie's reasoning for hesitating about the loan. It's a lot to think about. If she knew what was going on, she might wonder why they need a third mortgage for a home that they bought years ago for a lot less money. And maybe she would wonder, too, why the loan stated that it was for remodeling when they just remodeled the home. That sounds like problems for Alex Murdaugh. However, in the memo, Dick and Jim say that after struggling to get Maggie to commit to the appraisal for months, she finally scheduled it for June 8th, 2021, which was obviously canceled after the murders. And then, Alex got the loan anyways. It is interesting that Dick and Jim are trying to use the appraisal. Another strange financial event on June 7th has something that points to their favor. If the judge allows for the financial evidence to be entered, and I believe he will, I'm not sure how Dick and Jim are going to explain that all of these major events were going on with Alex right around the time of the murders and that those events had nothing to do with the double homicide. That is a lot of coincidence to explain to a jury. And as to Paul, he was a major financial liability for Alex. And we will talk about that in a minute.

[00:13:29] But finally, I want to point out one solid argument that the defense made in their memo that we should mention. Here is David reading from that memo.



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[00:13:40] **David Moses:** Evidence of Murdaugh's roadside shooting for which he has been charged for insurance fraud is not admissible to prove motive for murders occurring three months earlier. In the two sentences devoted to this evidence in the state's motion, the state contends that this roadside shooting was just a sympathy ploy and Murdaugh did not intend to die. However, this theory directly contradicts the state's criminal charges against Murdaugh arising from this incident. The state charged Murdaugh with attempted insurance fraud for arranging an assisted suicide so his son Buster could receive approximately \$10 million in life insurance benefits. Obviously, life insurance companies do not pay out benefits unless the insured is dead.

[00:14:32] **Mandy Matney:** So, this is a problem that we have been pointing out for over a year now. Alex Murdaugh and Eddie Smith were both charged with insurance fraud in the Labor Day incident, but there was no evidence of insurance fraud, nor was there evidence that Alex actually intended to die that day. And Eddie is still facing a suicide-for-hire charge. When you read the arrest warrants from that incident, it appears like law enforcement took Alex Murdaugh for his word and wrote up charges according to what he said. I always thought those charges seemed rushed and problematic for a number of reasons. One of them being it felt like Dick, Jim, and Alex were in control. Now, Dick and Jim are trying to omit the roadside shooting narrative, specifically that it was another example of a sympathy ploy to distract from Alex's other crime in the double homicide trial. The defense has a point here. The prosecution cannot in one case say that Alex was setting up his own murder with intentions of his son collecting insurance money while simultaneously saying in another case that he really didn't want to die; that the whole thing was just for sympathy and distraction. I wonder if this will force the state to drop some of the Labor Day shooting charges and if they ever will admit to being wrong there. I also wonder what if Newman rules that the defense has a point and that the roadside shooting evidence can't be a part of the double homicide? The roadside shooting and evidence surrounding it are absolutely a key component of the state's narrative. It shows a clear pattern for Alex; with the threat of being exposed looming, then a confrontation, followed by an alleged act of violence involving Alex — an act



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of violence big enough to distract from his crimes. But the fact is we still don't know the full scheme. We still don't know how many people were involved. We still don't know if the crimes that we know about were a part of something much larger. And we still don't know what happened to all of that money. We will be right back.

[00:17:10] **Liz Farrell:** So, what happened to the money? One explanation for where the money went is that it was lost in a rob Peter to pay Paul scenario that occurred after some bad land deals Alex Murdaugh made prior to 2011; meaning that he was constantly in arrears and borrowing from one source to pay off another to pay off another to pay off another until his final downward spiral. This is true. But while this seems to account for part of the missing money and why Alex might have felt the need to steal the amount of money he's alleged to have stolen, it doesn't tell the full story of where this money was going and what he was up to. We're also not inclined to believe that Alex was allegedly stealing this money because he had gotten into some sort of pickle when the real estate bubble burst in the late 2000s.

[00:17:56] As to where the money went, we believe there were at least two other situations occurring. One is the obvious one and that is a situation called Paul Murdaugh. The boat crash case wasn't the first time Paul had created financial catastrophe for Alex and Maggie. In fact, over the years, dozens of sources have told us that Paul had been a problem for Alex and Maggie since he was a little boy. Whether it was destroying people's property, trashing beach rentals with friends, getting into vehicle wrecks, wrecking friends' cars, getting into serious trouble at school or serious trouble with the law or something even more nefarious than all of this. We have heard so many examples of where Alex and Maggie had to come in and clean up Paul's messes using large sums of money. Suffice to say, Paul was an incredibly expensive child. And as a plaintiff's attorney, Alex would've been fully aware of the liability that comes with behavior like that, particularly as Paul grew older and particularly as the Lowcountry grew in size.



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[00:18:59] This is a side note but it's important to mention. We have always said that social media was the Murdaughs' undoing and we still believe that. They just weren't prepared for it after the boat crash. But social media isn't the only societal change that threatened the Murdaugh kingdom. The wildly expanding demographics of Beaufort County and, to a much lesser extent, Colleton County, or at least the coast of Colleton County, meant the world that Randolph Murdaugh and his family were used to for generations look nothing like it once did. It's one thing to have a Paul-related mishap within the confines of a world inhabited by people who grew up with the Murdaughs, who knew them well and who understood and who could be leveraged by the consequences of noncompliance. But it's another thing altogether to have Paul Murdaugh roaming free in a world inhabited by vacationers from Ohio and Massachusetts, whose expectations of legal accountability likely don't include cash in paper bags and friendly squeezes of the shoulder; meaning Paul was always one incident away from causing total destruction for Alex financially, legally, and criminally.

[00:20:07] **Mandy Matney:** So, one explanation for where did the money go could simply be it's hidden somewhere really good or in multiple really good places. Lawyers know how to protect their personal assets from personal liability. They have access to all sorts of tricks of the trade when it comes to that and, obviously, when it comes to limiting their tax burdens. Sticking to the personal liability angle, yes. Alex, according to the state, seems to have gone into full asset hiding overdrive when the boat crash occurred and again after the murders occurred and again after he was arrested. But it's also likely that he had been doing this long before the crash. We can see how he put the Moselle property and the Edisto beach house in Maggie's name. We know he was sinking this wave, at least as far as the land goes. We have both heard stories about certain South Carolina attorneys traveling out of the countries with suitcases full of cash intended for illicit international investment or deposit. We still don't have a full understanding as to what, if any, overseas assets might exist with Alex Murdaugh. But we know that Alex left the country on a private plane to The Bahamas sometime after the murders and before the Labor Day shooting incident. We have no idea why he took that



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trip, where he went, or what he did when he was there. We also don't know to what extent the federal government is investigating Alex on that or any front. As of late, we have frankly lost a lot of faith that the US Attorney's Office has any interest in pursuing charges beyond the Laffittes. At any rate, if Alex was trying to hide incoming money from the boat crash victims, it is logical to think that he might have been protecting his assets to some extent all along and that this might explain where some of the money went.

[00:22:14] **Liz Farrell:** The second situation that we think deserves attention when it comes to where the money went is whatever situation was happening with Alex Murdaugh and drug trafficking. So, you guys know that on June 23rd, 2022, the state grand jury indicted Alex Murdaugh on a single count of drug possession and distribution. That covers the period between October 7th, 2013 and September 7th, 2021. The state is accusing Alex, along with Eddie Smith, of knowingly possessing, selling, manufacturing, delivering, purchasing, or bringing oxycodone into South Carolina or providing financial assistance or otherwise aiding, abetting, attempting or conspiring to do all of the above. And that brings us to the little issue of the Cowboys.

[00:22:59] Now, sometime around September 2021, the Murdaugh camp apparently started floating a theory behind the scenes that involved this gang from Walterboro, which is a small town in the Lowcountry. Now, I'm in no way downplaying the violence or destruction that some members of the Cowboys have brought to Colleton County, but we need to give you guys some perspective here. Saying "gang from Walterboro" is a little like saying "assassin from my grandmother's knitting club." These are not juxtapositions one typically expects to see, but it's true. The Cowboys are a gang in Walterboro. Now, let's do a brief rundown on the Cowboys. The first time we heard of them was in 2017 when the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office announced their role in a multi-jurisdictional investigation that resulted in seven members of the gang and one associate of the gang pleading guilty to federal RICO and racketeering charges. This was a big deal but it was memorable mostly because of what I mentioned earlier about the strange pairing of "gang" and



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"Walterboro." But this is when we got a bit of an education about what goes on in Colleton.

[00:24:03] So, the Cowboys' name came up again after the Labor Day shooting incident. It seemed like behind-the-scenes insinuations were starting to get made that the Cowboys might — and that's a very loose might — have been involved in Maggie's and Paul's murders. Now that Alex's alleged drug habit was out in the open, I guess it seemed logical to mention this gang and why they might want to kill the wife and son of Alex Murdaugh, the newly minted \$10 million druggie. But there were a few problems with that one. Everyone in the world of Murdaugh believes that killing a Murdaugh would mean the end for them in all of the ways, so the incentive is low there. Two, low-level gang members typically don't kill family members from what we understand. If Alex were a problem for the gang, then, well, the gang would eliminate that problem, not create a bigger one. Three, Maggie's and Paul's schedules were unpredictable. Maggie was at Moselle allegedly because Alex had lured her there that night and Paul was there to check on a dog. Is it possible that gang members showed up looking for Alex and he was napping so they did the next best thing using a shotgun and a rifle belonging to the Murdaughs? Sure. But the state clearly thinks not.

[00:25:12] Anyway, the nature of Alex's connection to the Cowboys isn't clear, and it's not clear either what the Murdaugh camp wanted us to believe about his connection to the Cowboys. Were they saying the Cowboys were his drug dealers? Were they implying that he owed them money? Or were they simply, as Alex apparently did with the boat crash victims, looking for any plausible other guy who might have killed Maggie and Paul? We'll be right back.

[00:25:43] **Mandy Matney:** Here's what is interesting. We have mentioned the name "Emmanuel Buckner" to you before. In episode 38, we told you about how, in August 2021, we FOIA-ed the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office for a full list of cases that Alex had handled for them as a badge-caring volunteer solicitor. The Solicitor's Office answered that FOIA on September 10th, 2021, about a week after Alex's shooting incident and three days after the Solicitor's Office



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announced it had cut ties with Alex. Again, they didn't cut ties with Alex until they were forced to. Anyway, we FOIA-ed for this because after the boat crash, Liz and I both heard of accusations behind the scenes about how Alex had routinely misused his solicitor's office credentials. We wanted to know what exactly he was doing for them and what value, if any, he was bringing to that office. So, we found out that in the 15 years since his father was the solicitor, the Solicitor's Office could only name one case that Alex had handled as a lead prosecutor. And that was State versus Buckner in October 2019, which he prosecuted with his daddy. And we will talk about that in a second.

[00:27:07] But who is Emmanuel Buckner? First of all, he's alleged to be a Colleton County drug dealer and an alleged member of the Cowboys, although we have not confirmed that. But that's interesting, right? What a strange coincidence that this man, Buckner, the only defendant Alex Murdaugh ever prosecuted as a lead, is also connected to this gang, the Cowboys, that is alleged to be tied to Alex Murdaugh and his drug pipeline. So, that's a mouthful there and led to so many questions we wanted answers to. So, we FOIA-ed for the transcript from that trial.

[00:27:51] **Liz Farrell:** It's 304 pages, and it's downright surreal, meaning it's crazy reading a transcript in which just three years ago, Alex Murdaugh, now a self-reported drug addict who says he relied heavily on the Colleton County drug market, was trying to prosecute a case involving an alleged Colleton County drug dealer. It's also crazy reading the official record of how Alex tried and failed to prosecute a case. Yes, failed. We'll discuss that in a second. There's a couple of fun side notes here. One of the drug charges Buckner faced is a charge that Alex himself now faces. And according to the transcript, Alex kept referring to the evidence as "plaintiff's evidence" instead of "state's evidence," because again, he doesn't even go to this school.

[00:28:34] Anyway, in addition to this being the only case on which Alex had served as lead prosecutor and the irony of it being a Colleton County drug case knowing what we know now, there's a long list of weird things here. First, let's talk about the fact that Alex was even on this case. Now, we've told you



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before about how we've heard from sources with direct knowledge of this that Alex Murdaugh's role at the Solicitor's Office seemed shady, even to those on the inside. The way it's been explained to us as it related to cases being handled by the Solicitor's Office, whatever Alex wanted is what Alex was supposed to get; meaning it wasn't unheard of for an assistant solicitor to find out midway through a case that Alex had already spoken to the defense attorney about the terms of a plea agreement. So, knowing this, the logical question with this case is did he insert himself in it?

[00:29:26] That multi-jurisdictional federal case we mentioned involving the Cowboys and the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office? A longtime assistant solicitor, Tameaka Legette, who worked for Randolph Murdaugh at the Solicitor's Office before he retired at the end of 2005, helped prosecute the case as a Special Assistant US Attorney. Lizette went straight from law school in 2002 to the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office. Her main areas of focus seemed to have been Allendale, Hampton, and Colleton counties. She is most known for her work prosecuting career criminals — the most violent and repeat offenders in those counties. So, it's no surprise that Legette would be assigned to the Emmanuel Buckner case.

[00:30:06] In Colleton County, Buckner has a history of prior drug-related arrests and at least one conviction. According to the *Walterboro Press and Standard*, Buckner was one of 12 people arrested in August 2004 for running a, quote, drug drive-thru in a residential neighborhood. It was like a McDonald's, one of the investigators told the newspaper. Buckner's charges related to that case, which was the culmination of a three-month investigation by the way, were dismissed just two months later. According to public records, in January 2009, Buckner was once again arrested in Colleton County. This time, he faced nine charges, most of them traffic stop-related. Two of the charges, though, were for first offense drug trafficking. In 2011, he pleaded guilty to one of those charges and was sentenced to seven years in prison and given a \$25,000 fine. It's not clear how much of that time he served, though, because the South Carolina Department of Corrections website only has release records going back to 2016, and Emmanuel Buckner



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appears to have been released sometime before that. Not only does he not appear in those records, we know that by August 2016, he was getting arrested again. And once again, facing first offense drug trafficking charges after a brand new Colleton County Sheriff's Office deputy encountered Buckner around 9:30 at night, driving around with tail lights that didn't work. The deputy tried to pull Buckner over but Buckner booked it. The deputy chased Buckner reaching speeds of more than a hundred miles per hour through residential neighborhoods, which by the way Colleton County needs to change their pursuit policy if that's still allowed. The deputy chased Buckner reaching speeds of more than a hundred miles per hour through residential neighborhoods until Buckner finally pulled over in a random person's driveway. Buckner got out of the car and ran. The deputy ran after him, caught him, and arrested him. According to the transcript, Buckner had thrown two suspected baggies of drugs out of the window of the car as he was trying to escape the deputy. Investigators only found one of the alleged baggies, which later was identified by SLED as crack. In his car, they found more alleged cracks scattered about and five pills that they thought were molly but turned out to be methamphetamine. The deputy also found \$7,500 in cash stashed in four different pockets of Buckner's pants. There's actually a funny line in the transcripts during Alex's closing arguments in which he says, you know, I'd argue to you that the little bit of money I got, I keep in one pocket. That hits differently these days, doesn't it?

[00:32:39] Okay. Back to Tameaka Legette. It makes sense that this case would be her case. She was more than capable of handling it. One month before this went to trial in October 2019, Legette was awarded the John R. Justice Community Leadership Award by the US Attorney's Office for her work and commitment to making her community a safer place. 14th Circuit Solicitor Duffie Stone said in a press release at the time, Tameaka's calling is her work as a prosecutor. At the time of Buckner's trial, Legette had a 95% conviction rate. Her 64 victories were tied with the all-time record for the Career Criminal Unit and she had put away 17 gang members, according to a news release from the 14th Circuit. So, why would someone like Tameaka Legette need Randolph Murdaugh, a retired solicitor in private practice, and Alex



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Murdaugh, a plaintiff's attorney, to help her with this case? She wouldn't. Yet they did. And by helping, I mean they took her 95% conviction rate and tainted it with a hung jury.

[00:33:42] **Mandy Matney:** So, that's a weird fact. And here's another. The judge who presided over the case is named Tommy Hughston. Hughston is a former South Carolina legislator, part of the Democratic Party from the era in which Buster Murdaugh and Randolph Murdaugh were quite influential. He became a circuit judge in the late 1980s and retired in 1998. 1998. Yes. A judge who retired in 1998 was presiding over the one case Alex Murdaugh prosecuted. Now, in South Carolina, judges retire so they can stay on and double dip, receiving their full retirement and a salary for still serving. That is another story for another day that'll make taxpayers angry because there are a lot of downsides to this. Specifically, it makes these judges even more untouchable. So, you might be thinking, oh, maybe Judge Hughston was just the Colleton County judge at the time of Buckner's trial. And that would be a big no. We looked at Judge Hughston's record for the 10 years prior to Buckner's case, and guess how many times he presided over the Colleton County's general sessions? Zero. According to the online roster, during that time, he presided over the 14th Circuit's general sessions cases zero times. And yet on this special day in October 2019, he came to Colleton County to take on Alex's one and only prosecution. Why? We don't know. But a look at the news coverage in the 1990s shows that Judge Hughston happened to preside over a number of Randolph Murdaugh's cases in Beaufort County, meaning they knew each other and had a history.

[00:35:43] And speaking of Randolph, another weird thing is how little he said and did during this trial. I'd say it was weird reading the parts where Alex told the jury about trying the case with his, quote, dad, but this is South Carolina and, unfortunately, my ears are dead end to such nepotism. Randolph chimed in occasionally, such as the time Alex was done questioning the former Colleton County deputy who arrested Buckner and Randolph asked if the witness could remain in the courtroom. That's right — former Colleton County deputy. Sometime after Buckner's arrest, he left the sheriff's office and



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became a firefighter. He then got a job at the Ridgeland Police Department before taking another position with the Jasper County Sheriff's Office. Randolph wanted him to stay and watch. Randolph also handled the questioning of one witness — the chemist from SLED who tested the narcotics confiscated during Buckner's arrest.

[00:36:46] And one more thing that was really weird: Alex Murdaugh was sure to mention Buckner's alleged gang connection and his prior record to the judge. Here is David reading the transcript as Alex's part.

[00:37:02] **David Moses:** Your Honor, the defendant is affiliated with a local gang and known by law enforcement to be affiliated with a local gang known as the Cowboys.

[00:37:14] **Liz Farrell:** Back to Judge Hughston real quick. We're not trying to shame a senior citizen for remaining in the workplace past retirement, but it's worth noting. At the time of this trial, Judge Hughston was 76 years old and, according to the transcript, he was hard of hearing, completely unfamiliar with Colleton County courtrooms, hazy on the rules of criminal procedure — he left his criminal procedure book in the car and had to have a bailiff fetch it for him at one point — and he wasn't up to date on recent Supreme Court rulings that had a bearing on courtroom procedures, which the defense routinely pointed out to him.

[00:37:49] This brings us to another weird element of this case and that's the jury. So, the jury was chosen and the trial was set to start immediately afterward. Randolph informed the judge that the defense had some pretrial motions and that the state was not prepared for them because their witnesses would not be at the courtroom until the following day. The judge agreed to send the jury home and, the following morning, he heard the motions. After the defense's motions were denied, a juror was brought into the courtroom. She had sent the judge a note saying that, come to think of it, she does recognize Emmanuel Buckner now. Turns out, she worked at a bank where Buckner was a customer of hers. No, not Palmetto State Bank. The



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judge asked her if she could be fair and impartial in weighing the evidence. She said she wasn't sure. The judge was like, what? Are you friends with him? She said no, and he sent her into another room to await his decision. When she was gone, Alex Murdaugh asked to have her excused, so she was. The alternate juror was selected in her place. Now, this jury anomaly is worth noting because the Murdaugh's reputation includes their control over local juries. And it is especially worth noting as we're just weeks away from another Colleton County jury determining the outcome of a case involving Alex Murdaugh.

[00:39:06] So, Emmanuel Buckner's attorney admitted that Buckner was guilty of failing to stop for blue lights. That, as it turned out, was the only charge the jury could agree on. But the other two charges, the trafficking charges? After less than an hour of deliberating, the jury sent a note to the judge saying they could not reach a verdict. The judge brought them in and was like, try again. They did and came back 30 minutes later and said, we did and we can't agree. The drug trafficking portion of the case ended with a hung jury. Buckner was sentenced to three years in prison suspended after two years, meaning he had to serve two of those years and then he'd go on probation. According to the Department of Corrections' online records, though, Buckner served less than a year. He was released on October 1st, 2020. We're told this is an unusual structure for a sentence — to have a defendant serve part of the time and then have the rest of it suspended. Apparently, it's usually just outright suspended. But less than one year isn't bad considering Buckner was facing up to 15 years on a single drug trafficking charge. That said, what the heck was going on here? Why was it so important for Alex to prosecute this case? If he was trying to throw the book at Emmanuel Buckner, it did not work.

[00:40:23] Frankly, it's not clear to us why this case even went to trial. The 14th Circuit is notoriously backlogged and notorious for dropping charges at the first sign of a wobbly case. In Buckner's case, Alex and Randolph and Tameaka had to prove that Emmanuel Buckner knew he possessed the crack cocaine and the methamphetamine pills. That's kind of hard to do when investigators



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— and I'm including Duffie Stone's own investigators here who were the same ones that were traipsing around the Moselle crime scene — didn't get DNA or fingerprint testing done on the packages of drugs or the scale they found. They also didn't ask whether the car Buckner was driving that night belonged to him. Turns out, it didn't. It belonged to an LLC called A & D Auto Sales. According to the South Carolina Secretary of State's Office, that LLC is registered to a man named Ernest Rivers Jr.

[00:41:19] **Mandy Matney:** And this is where we remind you of another man whose last name is Rivers who is also connected to the Murdaugh case in the same way. In August, the state grand jury indicted two men, a Jerry Rivers and a Spencer Roberts, on charges that are purported to be related to Alex's alleged drug trafficking and alleged money laundering. We talked about Rivers and Roberts in episode 60. And in that episode, we told you how Roberts and Buckner had a construction company that started in April 2022 called Buckner Roberts Construction. Roberts, who is alleged to have helped Murdaugh and Eddie Smith acquire drugs, created four new LLCs since May 2020. And Emmanuel Buckner appears to have been quite the entrepreneur during this time, too. On October 26th, 2020, about 25 days after he was released from prison, someone by his name and his same address incorporated a business called Never Enough Enterprises, LLC. On November 22nd, 2021, this same person incorporated an LLC called Motion Control Transportation.

[00:42:42] Now, back to our original point, could Alex's connection to the Cowboys, whatever that connection was, explain where the money was going? How is Alex Murdaugh really connected to Emmanuel Buckner, and what kind of information did he get access to while prosecuting this case? Will the Solicitor's Office ever investigate Alex's time at their own office? Will they ever take responsibility for any of the power that they gave Alex, and how much more will we find out? Will this Alex Murdaugh rabbit hole ever end?

[00:43:29] In September 2022, the *New York Post* published a story about Roberts and Rivers and the now notorious Cowboys of Walterboro. In it, an



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unnamed gang member told the reporter, quote, Alex Murdaugh runs half of the drugs in the county. Rivers told the reporter that he was, quote, being railroaded and Roberts' attorney Mark Peper said prosecutors were grasping at straws. Another unnamed gang member, perhaps the same one who said Alex ran half the drugs in Colleton County, said the cops wanted to get, quote, the Cowboys' name in there to muddy the water and get everyone to think we done killed those people. Maybe look at some of the corrupt white sheriffs here instead, end quote.

[00:44:20] So, let's take a step back and pretend this isn't Alex we're talking about. What are some of the reasons the circumstances surrounding the prosecution of Emmanuel Buckner in 2019 might exist? Perhaps this pretend man, this one-time prosecutor, wanted to impress his father. Perhaps this pretend man we're talking about wanted to throw the case to help lessen Emmanuel's sentencing. Perhaps the pretend man wanted to show Emmanuel who was boss in Colleton County. In the case of Alex Murdaugh, it is not clear why he stepped in on the Emmanuel Buckner case, which six years later is still listed as active. The 14th Circuit still hasn't dropped the charges or retired the case. One thing is clear, though. Alex Murdaugh was always up to something. And as we draw closer to the murder trial, we hope investigators are getting closer to telling the world what exactly was going on here. Without that answer, it might be hard for the state to get a jury of 12 people, especially from Colleton County, to understand why a man like Alex Murdaugh could be capable of murdering his wife and son to get out of whatever it was he might have been in.

[00:46:08] So, if you wanna learn more about every facet of this case, please consider supporting our mission to expose the truth wherever it leads by joining our MMPPremium community. As a soak up the sun member, you'll get exclusive access to review documents that we used on this episode, like the Buckner trial transcript, and you'll get invited to our Discord channel where you can ask us questions, chat with us as news breaks, and share case information with other MMP fans. Your support helps us FOIA for documents



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and keeps the pressure on. Plus, there's much more on the horizon because we are just getting started. Stay tuned and stay in the sunlight.

[00:47:03] **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.

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