



## EPISODE 29: What Happened to The Money - Part Seven + The Most Important Part of the Becky Hill Scandal

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### **Mandy Matney** 00:02

I don't know where exactly the millions of dollars stolen by Alex Murdaugh went. But finally, we have reason to feel hopeful that the recent suspension of a certain attorney connected to offshore accounts will help lead investigators on the right path. My name is Mandy Matney. This is True Sunlight, a podcast exposing crime and corruption previously known as the Murdaugh Murders Podcast. True Sunlight is a LunaShark Production written with journalist Liz Farrell.

### **Mandy Matney** 00:55

Let's start with the best news. I got some much needed rest in the last week as I'm sure you all can hear in my less vocal fry voice and now we are back to planning in person events. Current dates and details are at [lunasharkmedia.com/events](http://lunasharkmedia.com/events). We will be celebrating a wildly busy and crazy year with our Premium Members at the Westin Hilton Head Island on Friday, December 29. Join EB, David and I as we toast, "Cups Up," to the holidays inside the resort's Ocean Lounge with a little low key holiday party and book signing. Soak Up the Sun Premium Members will get a special invitation and their first round is on us for the first 50 to RSVP. So we hope that we see you there at the end of the month. Westin Hilton Head Island has great hotel rates too if you want to make it into a weekend adventure. And don't forget, we want you to suggest similar events around the world at [lunasharkmedia.com/newevents](http://lunasharkmedia.com/newevents). We've gotten some great suggestions for activities in Denver, Chattanooga, the UK, Sydney and beyond. Keep them coming and we'll make some exciting announcements after the holidays. So I'm feeling better, I'm energized and I'm ready to get back to fighting the good fight now that a majority of my book work is done. While the whole book process was traumatic and exhausting, I won't lie, it has forced me to get out of my shell again. The book signings have been a huge wake up call for me personally. Basically the universe saying, "Hey, people aren't that bad! You should get out more and see them!" I think the combination of working



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from home, the pandemic and having a job where I see the worst sides of humanity, on top of my fear of someone coming after me - all of that caused me to shut down a lot of my social side. Thankfully, the book events have forced me to put myself out there again. And with that I am finally able to listen to y'all. Y'all have been listening to us for more than two years. And I honestly feel that connection in person, which is such a special feeling. But my favorite thing about the book signings is that I get to know a little bit more about the wonderful people who have been supporting us and making journalism dreams come true and making victims feel validated for all of these years. The LunaShark community is such a spectacular group of people because y'all truly care about victims and you truly care about making the system better. While y'all love to laugh and be entertained just like we do, we are all connected to so much more than that. So, after meeting hundreds of you awesome listeners and hearing your stories, both in person and on social media, I have noticed something. So many of our listeners have endured a devastating loss in their lives. And you tell me that you feel a connection to me because of that. If you follow me on social media, you'll know that this week is a tough one. This week marks the 25th anniversary of my brother, Michael's death. My single most life changing moment in my 33-years on this planet. A moment I am still learning to understand the gravity of. Everything happened so fast. What started with the flu in my 9-year old brother evolved into brain swelling that the doctors couldn't control and suddenly I was in a hospital boardroom at the age of seven looking my teary eyed parents in the eye as they told me the unimaginable had occurred and my big brother was dead. I would trade everything and anything in my life to change that terrible day. But life doesn't work like that. So I have learned to look for the positive in absolutely everything. I have learned to find purpose in the pain. I have learned how precious this one life we have is so we best make the most of it. I wouldn't have the drive for justice and for victims if my brother's death never happened. I realize that. And this is all to say that I know so many of you are grieving or hurting in some way this holiday season. But please know, there



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are people out there who know exactly how you feel and can help you get through it. You are not alone. Please know, that one day down the road you will be able to take that horrible grief and use it for some kind of good in this world. Please know that the grief doesn't ever really go away. But it does get better and it does get easier. Y'all are fantastic listeners full of empathy and love and I am honored to be able to bring such a wonderful community of people together to make the world a better place. So thank you for listening. And speaking of making the world a better place, we are making strides here at LunaShark. Yesterday, we watched several hours of a judicial reform meeting at the South Carolina State House where several lawmakers and law enforcement leaders talked about ways to improve the system. While one lawyer lawmaker in particular was emotionally defensive of the current system - and by the way, we are watching you Rep. Micah Caskey, I felt a sense of relief after hearing a majority of the leaders speaking on judicial reform. Finally, state leaders are recognizing the fact that many people in this state are tired of the way we elect our judges. Particularly, they are tired of the backroom deals, they are tired of the lack of transparency and they are tired of the lack of accountability. Especially among our judges. As they always say, systemic change is difficult. And it does not happen overnight. The fact that lawmakers are finally seeing that the public is fed up with the system and the fact that we have forced these decision makers to finally recognize that the public's trust in the system is eroding - that is a big deal. I heard multiple lawmakers yesterday say things like, "This could be a major opportunity for us to be on the right side of history as our justice system seems to be at a breaking point. From the hours that I watched, it felt like the good ole boys like Micah Caskey, who faithfully defend our system no matter who it hurts particularly the JMSC and the influence of lawyer legislators in the selection of our judges - they are becoming the minority in South Carolina, even in the leadership positions. And let's be clear here. If the JMSC did not exist, I believe thrice accused rapist Bowen Turner would still be in prison. The Bowen Turner case gave us the clearest example of how the JMSC works against the public's



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interest and in favor of privilege and power. A thrice accused rapist with a history of violating his bond conditions was suddenly given probation. Hmm. Because his attorney was an influential lawyer lawmaker and the solicitor who gave him the deal, David Miller was working on increasing his chances of becoming a judge. That very clear example of corruption happened more than a year ago. And yet even with the eyes of the world on the JMSC, even after they heard victims pleading to them to not approve this man with a track record of making bad deals at the expense of public safety, even after so many of you sent messages to the JMSC with your concerns as to why Miller should not qualify to become a judge in South Carolina, the JMSC - the one that Rep. Micah Caskey is a part of and steadfastly defends, they gave him the green light. And Micah Caskey and other good ole boys will still scratch their heads and blame the media for twisting the truth about our justice system. They are making these dirty deals right in front of our faces. But the meeting went on all day. And I never heard a single one of them pulling out the elephant in the room, that the JMSC had the opportunity to prove to the public that they could be trusted with screening judges with David Miller. They failed that test by giving him the green light. It is that simple. And they deserve every bit of sunlight and scrutiny that will be shined upon them in the next few months. We are still waiting for the transcript of that meeting where Dallas Stoller's father told the JMSC exactly why they shouldn't vote for him. And don't worry, we will have a full episode on that when we get the transcript and before Miller gets voted on by lawmakers. What is important is that they are hearing us! Finally! And many of the decision makers seem to be ready to change the system specifically to improve transparency and accountability and that is a big deal!

**Liz Farrell** 10:18

We have a few quick updates for you, as usual. Both are, unfortunately, about Russell Can't Admit Defeat Laffitte, a man we should have been calling "Daddy's Boy" from the very beginning. Or maybe I mean, Daddy's fall boy.



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First, we want to clarify some confusion that we've seen out there since a report was published in the media two weeks ago about a judgment that Palmetto State Bank appeared to receive against Russell Laffitte for more than \$2.3 million. It might have seemed like yet another win for the institutions that allowed these thefts to happen. But this wasn't anything new and that's why we didn't cover it at the time, meaning the bank is not getting an additional amount of money. Palmetto State Bank was granted this \$2.3 million judgment against Russell back in August at Russell's sentencing hearing. Remember when we were outraged by the more than \$3.5 million the federal court ordered Russell to pay in restitution to the bank and to PMPED? That \$2.3 million is the part that Russell was ordered to pay to the bank to cover the \$680,000 payment Russell made to PMPED when their little scheme was discovered. The \$750,000 unauthorized loan Russell gave to Alex, a \$285,000 line of credit that was extended to Alex to pay off the money he had taken from Hannah Plyler's account. One-hundred fifty-five thousand dollars that represents half of the checks stolen from Hakeem Pinckney. One-hundred seventy-five thousand dollars that represents half of the money taken from Natasha Thomas and more than \$700,000 to cover investigative costs. The week after Thanksgiving, the bank filed that judgment in Hampton County because judgments must be filed in the county where the property in question is. Meaning Russell's money is in Hampton County and this is a lien against the more than \$10 million in assets that we learned he had during his trial. We expect to see a similar filing by PMPED which will get \$1.2 million from Russell. One interesting thing to again note about this restitution, the bank is waiving all post judgment interest on what the federal government says Russell owes them, meaning even after being convicted of six felonies, all of which involve his criminal mismanagement of money at his family's bank, he is still getting cut a break. That is where the outrage should lie. No other customer of Palmetto State Bank would get that kind of treatment, especially not one who, for all practical purposes, was stealing from the bank. I've gotten into some heated discussions with people involved in this case about what I



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see as PMPED and Palmetto State Bank continuing to protect Alex and Russell. It's a matter of semantics really because as I'm often told the firm and the bank aren't protecting Alex and Russell, but rather themselves. So think about that for a second. How are they protecting themselves by cutting breaks to the people who did them so dirty? The second update is that the Bureau of Prisons has finally published Russell's release date. He is expected to leave federal prison on September 2, 2029, which is six years after he turned himself in. Obviously, that's less than the seven years he received from Judge Gergel and it doesn't take into account any credits he might get while incarcerated or whatever state sentence he might receive if his attorneys Mark Moore and Todd Rutherford ever stopped delaying proceedings. Mark with his, "I didn't do my homework," coupons and Todd with his, "I'm a lawyer legislator so I can't come to court until I say so," privilege.

**Mandy Matney** 13:58

Now, for the subject we really want to talk about with y'all today. What happened to the money that Alex Murdaugh stole. Today we want to introduce to you an attorney named Peter J. Strauss, who was suspended by the South Carolina Supreme Court on Tuesday. The court's order notes that he is being suspended pursuant to Rule 17(a) of the Rules of Lawyer Disciplinary Enforcement. Here is David with what rule 17(a) says:

**DAVID MOSES** 14:33

Criminal prosecution or conviction for a serious crime without the necessity of commission action. The Supreme Court may place a lawyer on interim suspension upon notice of the filing of an indictment, information or complaint charging the lawyer with a serious crime and shall immediately place a lawyer on interim suspension on receipt of a certified copy of a judgment or conviction or other competent evidence showing that the lawyer has been convicted of a serious crime. The fact that sentencing may be



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delayed or an appeal may be taken shall not prevent the Supreme Court from imposing an interim suspension.

### **Mandy Matney** 15:19

This is different from the rule that was cited in suspending Alex and Cory in 2021. The South Carolina Supreme Court suspended them because of accusations of misconduct and sufficient evidence that made them potential threats to the public and administration of justice. But according to this, Peter has been accused of some sort of criminal activity. It looks like there are two complaints against him, but as far as we can tell, through public record searches, he has not been charged with anything. LunaShark reporter Beth Braden also reached out to the Attorney General's Office, the US Attorney's Office and SLED and she checked out the Charleston County and Beaufort County Jail. There is no record of him being charged or arrested. But from what we are told this could mean that if there are indictments, they could be sealed. So who is Peter J. Strauss and why are we talking about him in this context? Peter is someone we haven't discussed on the show before, but his name has been floating around behind the scenes since the Fall of 2021, when it first became clear that Alex had stolen millions of dollars that disappeared into thin air. Of course, Alex and his team want us to believe that the millions of dollars just disappeared into his medicine cabinet and the sweaty pockets of his cargo shorts. But, no one out there actually believes that. The most plausible theory and the theory we are hearing from some of our best sources in this case is that the money is in protected entities housed in offshore accounts. As we said in the Murdaugh Murders Podcast, Episode 73, which was somehow less than a year ago, but it feels like ages ago, lawyers know how to protect their personal assets from liability. They have access to all sorts of tricks of the trade when it comes to that and obviously when it comes to 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



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again after he was arrested. But it is also likely that he'd 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 thinking this way at least as far as land goes. We have both heard stories about certain South Carolina attorneys traveling out of the country with suitcases filled with 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 to Alex Murdaugh. However, we know that Alex left the country on a private plane to the Bahamas after the murders and before the Labor Day shooting incident. And we know that he went to Guatemala with his family in what seemed to be like a hasty trip in 2018. We have no idea why he took these trips, where he went specifically when he got there or what he did while he was there. But we have been told for a long time that the FBI has been looking into the money trail, which is why this next part is really interesting.

**Liz Farrell** 18:50

That brings us back to Peter. Remember the Calvert's case we mentioned in True Sunlight Podcast Episode 2.1? Let's start there. To recap, the Calvert's were a wealthy couple in their 40's living on a yacht in Sea Pines on Hilton Head Island. In March 2008, they went missing. Liz Calvert was an attorney who worked in Savannah, Georgia. John Calvert managed the couple's portfolio of timeshares in Sea Pines, a well known resort on Hilton Head's south end. Their accountant was a man named Dennis Gerwing. The case took Hilton Head by storm and continues to be one of the island's biggest mysteries. The question is still on everyone's minds and there are plenty of theories swirling around, what happened to Liz and John Calvert? The couple were last seen on March 3, 2008, when they had an evening meeting scheduled with Dennis in Sea Pines. Liz Calvert had discovered serious discrepancies in their books and had basically given Dennis an ultimatum, "Explain where this money is or we're going to the FBI." John considered Dennis a close friend so this ultimatum was potentially a friendly gesture, as





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in, "Let's give Dennis a chance to explain himself." Unfortunately, this ultimatum was what did them in. So the couple went missing and all eyes turned to Dennis Gerwing since he was the last person to see them alive. Dennis naturally was like, "Oh no, they're missing. I have no idea where they went." Then he hired a criminal defense attorney with mad connections in the Solicitor's Office, and more specifically to a powerful man who carried two Solicitor's Office badges with him at all times apparently. That is Corey Fleming, Alex Murdaugh's best co-conspirator. Then, eight days after the couple went missing, Dennis was found in a timeshare in Sea Pines in what was one of the most prolonged and bizarre suicides in the history of embezzlement. We'll get into the Calvert case more in a future episode, but suffice to say that Dennis took his own life using a cheap steak knife after taking a large amount of Benadryl. Part of his suicide note was written on a bedsheet. His handwritten note read, "I've acted completely alone in all actions committed. I knew the risk of this happening and believe taking myself out of the game is the best way to move everyone as quickly as possible past all events. All anger should be directed towards me." It also said, "It all happened at SPC." SPC is Sea Pines Center where his office was and where he had met with Liz and John on March 3rd. The other note written on the tan bed sheet said "Slow way," something illegible, "warning to ready to wake up see," something illegible, "brain keeps flashing with a flash memory of old event, bright like a computer going off." He did not directly admit to killing Liz and John, but it turned out he had stolen millions of dollars from clients, including the Calvert's. That money was never found. His business partner spent the next several years paying back the missing money to their clients. Questions remain about where that money went, and what the people in his life knew about it. And suspicions remain about why Dennis was mostly concerned with exonerating those in his circle and moving quote unquote, 'quickly past this'. Like I said, we'll talk more about this in a future episode. Okay, so Dennis' body was discovered by his business partners and two of his lawyers, sort of. They went to the timeshare where they knew he



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had been staying because sheriff deputies had messed up his house during the execution of a search warrant. His business partners and the lawyers broke into the apartment, went upstairs and saw the note on the bed sheet. They tried to get into the bathroom, found it locked and called the police. One of those four men who went to check on Dennis Gerwing was Peter J. Strauss.

### **Mandy Matney** 22:50

In 2008, Peter was a new tax attorney on the scene on Hilton Head Island. No one knew who he was at the time. He had just passed the bar in 2006 and had graduated from the New England School of Law in 2005. In 2007, he got married and moved in with his wife on Hilton Head. Together, they had four children before separating in 2017. Soon after Gerwing's death, Peter became known on the island as a high roller. According to divorce filings, Peter opened his law firm in 2009, and became involved in the captive insurance business which became, "extremely lucrative," quote unquote. One year later, he drafted a Cook Island offshore trust account and made the trustee an entity called, Southpac Trust International according to court filings. This is where he allegedly put a lot of his assets. Side note, according to *Forbes*, which has published several pieces written by Peter Strauss quote, "A Cook Islands trust is an asset protection trust set up under the laws of the Cook Islands, widely considered to be the most secure trust jurisdiction on the planet." The article states that quote, "There are many conceptions surrounding the offshore trust, the main one being that it is a means to hide assets. Unlike other offshore trusts, the Financial Supervisory Commission is the body responsible for regulating financial services in the Cook Islands. In addition, the Cook Islands Financial Intelligence Unit is responsible for anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism finance operations for the Cook Islands. What strengthens the Cook Islands Financial Intelligence Unit is the extensive anti-money laundering legislation passed by the Cook Islands government which ensures that any Cook Islands trust open is legal, ethical and regulated." So that's what the article says. The trust is currently at the



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heart of a malpractice case against Peter Strauss filed by his ex-wife and a family court case that was remanded to probate court and is under appeal. His ex-wife is seeking half of the trust, which is valued at \$48 million. According to an affidavit in which she cites a loan application filed by Peter, in which he listed his personal net worth at that amount. Peter's position, according to court records, is that the trust is not an asset of his and instead belongs to the trustee, and therefore his ex-wife has no claim against it. But her claim is that the trust was a sham because the foreign trustee, Southpac, had no involvement or control over the trust assets as required by law. Peter claims he doesn't owe the mother of his four children a dime of his millions of dollars. And she is saying essentially, "Your trusts are a sham and I will expose you." This case is messy. And the lawsuit, in several parts, reads like a good novel. But because she wants to prove that her husband's offshore assets are a sham, and therefore she is owed some of the money, it gives all sorts of insights into Peter's very complicated global empire. While Peter claims to not really have any assets, the divorce papers accuse him of living a very lavish lifestyle that includes owning three private jets, and an airplane hangar, and flying around the world on them spinning between, get this, \$400,000 - \$800,000 on his travels. And spending an extra \$100,000 a month on credit cards, owning multimillion dollar properties including a 17,000 square foot office complex that he built by himself and living in a multimillion dollar home and owning part of a winery in South America. And something of note I have to point out, I noticed over a dozen mentions of the Bahamas in court documents. You know, the place where Alex mysteriously jet setted off to in August 2021 when he realized that SLED was onto him and his walls were closing in. Peter has several accounts and companies based in the Bahamas and he was well known to travel there via one of his several private planes, according to court documents. Again, y'all this divorce case is messy. And we could talk about it for years if this was an entertainment podcast about random people's business. But we are here to answer an important question, where is Alex Murdaugh's money? Or rather the money he stole?



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**Liz Farrell** 27:41

Okay, so let's go back to this concept of captive insurance and what it is. The easiest way to explain it is to call it self-insurance. You're insuring yourself. There are tax sheltering advantages to setting up a captive insurance company. They can also generate revenue. Think of it this way. Right now you pay premiums to an insurance company. That insurance company assesses the risk of covering you and determines what payouts to give you based on the terms of the policy and how they're interpreting them when compared to your claim. But for the most part, they keep most of your money. It doesn't come back to you at least not easily and sometimes only with a lawyer's help. With captive insurance companies, a business entity is set up, be it a natural company or a shell company to pay premiums to the captive insurance company which is a subsidiary of the entity paying the premiums. It's circular. The profits basically stay with the originating entity and the arrangement gives you more control over the risk management aspect of the insurance policies. In a deposition related to his divorce case, Peter said that captive insurance companies are used by more than 90% of Fortune 1000 companies and they can be designed to cover a broad range of risks like employee benefits or property casualty. Captive insurance companies are not illegal or inherently bad. But because of their tax sheltering advantages and the ability to create these entities overseas in countries that don't necessarily cooperate with our federal government, there are many examples of where they become problematic. Which brings us back to Peter Strauss. And by the way, this stuff is super complicated and it's easy to lose track of the facts because of all the twists and turns and because of the seemingly endless business entities involved, so we're gonna keep it simple for now. According to his divorce filings, Peter came into the captive insurance business through an association with his good friend and mentor John Ivsan. Ivsan was a Swiss based tax attorney who was disbarred by the North Carolina and Ohio Bar Association's as well as the U.S. Tax Court after he pleaded guilty in 2013 to what the U.S. Attorney's Office called, "a complex multi-million dollar tax fraud



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scheme". This scheme involved hundreds of millions of dollars. According to his divorce records, these two were very close. Not only does Peter credit Ivсан's influence and his friendship in his 2011 book, *The Definitive Guide to Captive Insurance Companies: What Every Small Business Owner Needs to Know About Creating and Implementing a Captive*, he apparently flew to Switzerland right after Ivсан was arrested to help him. When Ivсан was on house arrest - in a deposition, Peter says he didn't realize that Ivсан had broken house arrest to meet, Peter flew to Switzerland in what his ex wife told the court was a quote, "secret meeting at a Swiss bank to get set up so he could take over Mr. Ivсан's lucrative captive insurance management book of clients". So a year before Ivсан was arrested and his scheme was made public, Peter was sued by a financial adviser on Hilton Head who, in 2010, had entered into an agreement with Peter to set up a captive insurance entity in St. Lucia. She accused Peter of fraud, negligence and breach of fiduciary duty, among other things. In her claim, she mentions that instead of Peter handling the creation and management of her company as arranged, which was to have 12 captive insurance companies come under it, Peter had another company called Intercontinental handle the whole thing. Here's David with what the woman said about that in her claim:

### **DAVID MOSES** 31:09

"In 2004, two of Intercontinental's principles, G. Thomas Roberts and Nigel Bailey were named as defendants in a lawsuit filed by the United States Department of Justice seeking more than \$500 million in damages arising from an alleged scheme to defraud the United States of taxes by among other things, establishing, selling and maintaining non-tax deductible retirement savings plans in the guise of tax deductible insurance and charity programs. Plaintiff is informed and believes that the federal government recovered more than \$200 million as a result of the lawsuit."



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**Liz Farrell** 31:53

So basically, this woman thought she was entering into a legitimate tax planning arrangement, but came to discover that her company was now associated with these guys because of Peter Strauss. This case, by the way, settled in 2014. In 2019, Peter was also named as a defendant in a few cases related to a billion dollar Ponzi scheme perpetrated by Paulette and Jeff Carpoff. The US Attorney's office called the Carpoff case, the biggest criminal fraud scheme in the history of the Eastern District of California. Between 2011 and 2018, a company called DC Solar manufactured mobile solar generator units that would serve as emergency power units for cell phone towers and for lighting at sporting events. Essentially, the Carpoff's lied to investors about the market demand for these units then covered up their lies by creating fake leasing contracts and financial statements. They ended up paying old investors with new investor money and stopped making the units altogether, but that didn't stop them from selling leasing agreements for them. According to the U.S. Attorney's Office quote, "At least half of the approximately 17,000 mobile solar generators claimed to have been manufactured by DC Solar did not exist". This game was epic, and it apparently fooled the likes of Warren Buffett and the US Treasury Department. Now, one of the related cases that named Peter Strauss as a defendant was a civil RICO case in which Peter was accused of conspiring with a Carpoff's to set up one of the business entities called DC Solar International, which was based in the Caribbean nation of Nevis. The lawsuit says this company was, quote "designed to move profits out of the United States and tax free". The lawsuit accuses Strauss of having extensive conversations with the Carpoffs about obtaining citizenship in Nevis island which the lawsuit says is a quote, "well known asset shelter in the Caribbean". Peter and his firm were also accused of helping the Carpoff's set up offshore accounts, trusts in captive insurance companies to hide assets outside of the United States. The claim also accused Peter and his firm of helping the Carpoff's set up a trust in the Cook Islands in 2016. In December 2018, the



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Feds executed search warrants against the Carpoﬀ's and their company DC Solar. Four months later, a complaint was filed in federal court accusing Peter of helping the Carpoﬀ's hide \$5 million for personal use. A day after federal investigators raided the Carpoﬀ's this \$5 million was transferred by Paulette Carpoﬀ into Peters IOLTA account. According to court records, Peter then allegedly wired amounts of money to various law firms across the country. In May 2019, Peter was brought before Judge Richard Gergel in Charleston in an effort to determine whether the money wired to these law firms was money stolen from DC Solar by Paulette Carpoﬀ. Peter answered Judge Gergel and other lawyer's questions by pleading the Fifth. According to the transcript from this hearing, Judge Gergel seems surprised and irritated by this. He asked Peter for clarification as to why he was doing this. In other words, Judge Gergel was like, "Are you doing this because your responses might incriminate you? Is that what you're telling me?" Peter answered that question by again asserting his Fifth Amendment right on the advice of counsel. Here's how judge Gergel responded to that:

### **DAVID MOSES** 35:27

"Yeah, but that's...advice of counsel is not a Fifth Amendment right. Fifth Amendment right, is that you have a right to remain silent because your response may tend to incriminate you. And you don't. There's no requirement that you be a witness against yourself. That is the basis of the Fifth Amendment. Are you insisting, asserting the Fifth Amendment right, because your response might tend to incriminate you?"

### **Liz Farrell** 35:54

Peter responded to that by saying, "Yes, Your Honor. Then Judge Gergel launched into a series of questions designed to get at the heart of how and why Peter had gotten this money. Peter answered them all by invoking the Fifth. Before Peter left the witness stand after he'd invoked his Fifth



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Amendment right dozens of times, which further complicated the matter, Judge Gergel told him this:

**DAVID MOSES** 36:17

“Mr. Strauss, I'm going to put you on notice that I intend to advise the South Carolina Supreme Court that you took the Fifth Amendment today in a matter involving the potential criminal activity and I would suggest you self-report your appearance today and your actions.”

**Liz Farrell** 36:38

Now, I want to stress that both this case and the civil RICO case and the case involving a financial advisor all settled and that the accusations made in them were just that, accusations. But the question of what Peter's fate is going to be has still not fully been answered. For one, our reporter Beth Braden contacted the Supreme Court and the Office of Disciplinary Counsel to not only get more information about Peter's suspension, and what prompted it, but also to ask about whether Judge Gergel had reported Peter in 2019 and whether Peter reported himself at that same time as Judge Gergel had ordered him to do. Unsurprisingly, they refuse to answer those questions, citing the anonymity of the disciplinary process. One thing we can say is this, May 2019 was almost five years ago. Since then, we've seen no disciplinary actions concerning Peter Straus. Until now. So the thing that's no doubt on your mind, how is Peter Strauss connected to the question of where is the missing money that Alex Murdaugh stole? Sources have told us that while this disciplinary action isn't likely to be directly tied to the Murdaugh case, if at all, it's providing the first brick in a path that investigators believe might lead to the money. Meaning, investigators are considering the possibility that Peter Strauss might be able to help them get some answers about where the money is and how Alex could have done this. Peter obviously has extensive knowledge about the complex captive insurance trade, and he's a Low Country attorney who set up shop in the 14th Circuit, home of Alex Murdaugh.





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The timing of this is pretty notable. So the question is, could this be the break in the case that we've all been waiting for?

### **Mandy Matney** 38:16

So real quick, before we end today's episode, we want to give you an update into Becky Hill's case and some of the things we have been finding out as we continue to dig into the effort to take her down so that Alex can get a new trial. The most important thing for everyone to understand is that two things can be true at once and there is only one central question here that matters when it comes to Alex Murdaugh's conviction: did Becky Hill tamper with the jury? We not only believe that answer to be, no, Becky did not tamper with the jury we have a bevy of well placed and well informed sources who say this same thing. Now as far as her ethics complaints, remember two things can be true at once. The accusations against Becky when it comes to jury tampering have nothing to do with the ethics complaints. They have nothing to do with what Becky's son is accused of doing in listening in on a county employee's phone calls. They have nothing to do with anything investigators might be finding as they look into the complaints. And let's be honest here, 90% of the media outlets writing about Becky's son's debacle like it's the White House scandal wouldn't care to touch that story with a 10-foot pole had Dick Harpootlian and team Murdaugh not accused Becky of jury tampering in September. Nor would 90% of the people reading and tweeting and TikToking about Becky right now care about her son's case at all. Nor would they care about her ethics complaints if the headlines didn't have Murdaugh attached to them. Liz and I have reported on officials in the state of South Carolina for years. We have caught so many public officials doing far worse than what Becky is accused of and rarely ever do they lose their jobs and it's even more rare to see them get criminally charged. We will be happy to provide those examples in a later podcast. Corruption is so common in South Carolina, I actually find it refreshing and rare when we look into a powerful public figure who isn't using their position for something horrible or extreme personal



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gain. This is not to excuse anything Becky could have done but context does matter here. We have found that most of the time public officials are only held accountable here in South Carolina for wrongdoing when and only when a powerful public official has something to gain from taking that person down. Our concern has been and continues to be that the war on Becky, whether it's ultimately justified or not, is being used by team Murdaugh to confuse and manipulate people into believing they are one in the same as the jury tampering charges. The timing of this and the connections we keep finding to people associated with the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office make us believe that the complaints against Becky were harnessed to help lend credence to Alex Murdaugh's accusations against her. The most concerning accusations against Becky involve federal funds that she is accused of misappropriating, as well as what she knew about her son's alleged wiretapping of county employee Megan Utsey. The alleged misappropriation occurred in 2021, according to one of the complaints made against Becky. The person making the complaint in July of this year, the same month that Becky's book came out, knew about this alleged misappropriation in 2021 but she waited until Becky's book came out so she could say something. The wiretapping is alleged to have started in July right when Becky was being accused of ethics violations and when Becky's controversial book was published making her an easy target. Again, July is not March. March is when the jury came back with their verdict. Their verdict that they are standing by. We need people to keep their eyes on the ball here. We are not excusing anything Becky is being accused of. We simply do not know all the facts yet. But the facts we do know raise suspicions as to the motivations of the people making the accusations as well as the timing of everything. Even if she ultimately finds herself facing charges, it does not mean that the timing of the accusations and the investigation were not fueled by this hardcore push to get Alex his new trial. We are also not saying that the charge made against Becky's son was unwarranted. But that doesn't mean that it is not being used and exploited by those in Team Murdaugh's circle to help further Alex's cause.



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Let's be clear, we are not on Team Becky here. And I personally apologize if we have ever given that impression. We are on team, let's not allow Alex Murdaugh to dismantle the justice system, once again. We are also on team, everyone in public office who is doing wrong should be held accountable - not just those who make for easy targets. And most importantly, we are on team, one system of justice. And Alex Murdaugh being granted a new trial based upon the facts that we have seen so far is not an example of one system. We hope that South Carolina's judges are paying attention and that whoever is appointed to hear Alex's motion for a new trial that they are able to hold two opposing thoughts in their head at once. And we hope they constantly ask themselves this, "What does this have to do with jury tampering?" And we hope the media starts asking themselves that question too. We will keep digging into the Becky Hill accusations, the missing millions, Stephen Smith and the many mysteries tied to this never ending story. Stay tuned. Stay pesky. Stay in the sunlight. True Sunlight is a LunaShark production created by me, Mandy Matney and co-hosted by journalist Liz Farrell. Learn more about our mission and membership at [lunasharkmedia.com](http://lunasharkmedia.com). Interruptions provided by Luna and Joe Pesky.