



EPISODE 38: Who Killed Stephen Smith Part Nine + The Murdaugh Murders Bloody Towel No One Knew About

Mandy Matney 00:02

I don't know who killed Stephen Smith but we are going to keep tugging at strings in this case and related Murdaugh cases until we get answers. 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 Luna Shark Production written with journalist Liz Farrell. Hello, we have been busy in our "Alex Is Over" era and I'm excited to tell you about it. After taking a few weeks off from in person events to heal my inner introvert I am pumped to get back on the road again. We're heading to Columbia, South Carolina for an amazing members only event at the Capital City Club with special guests Sarah Ford and Sandy Smith. Shout out to Rachel Oliver, our new Luna Shark event coordinator for planning this event and future events across the country. We're going to be in LA, San Francisco, Napa Valley and Maui this spring and we would love to do a few fan events and book signings while I'm on the West Coast. If you live in those areas, we would love to hear from you for event location suggestions, submit your ideas to lunasharkmedia.com/new-events. Also exciting we have an entire new line of merch with a mission with proceeds being donated to Stephen Smith Scholarship Fund. The new line of merch includes Justice Toal mugs, FOIA Around and Find Out t-shirts, Lied Tried and Denied stickers and Toal Ya So t-shirts. Head to the link in the description to order yours today. In the past week, we have gotten a few FOIA requests returned. And they have been interesting to say the least, and really on brand for our overall podcast theme of how the justice system simply works differently for powerful people. We're trying to get our hands on everything possible to find answers specifically to the two biggest mysteries we've talked about on this podcast, the Stephen Smith case and what happened to the Murdaugh money. This is how investigations work, pulling at strings until the yarn is untangled. It is frustrating, time consuming and expensive because a lot of the leads

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just don't pan out, which is why we are particularly grateful for the Luna Shark premium community supporting our work. We wouldn't be here without y'all. And I want to again say, thank you. First let's talk about the FOIA. We got back from Colleton County in which we asked for Becky Hill's emails from various members of county staff including her son who was the IT director at the time as well as production companies. Tucked away in one of Becky's emails to a production company, reporter Beth Braden found unredacted memoranda of investigation outlining interviews that SLED had conducted with Alex Murdaugh's two brothers and his sister in the summer of 2022, shortly after Alex was charged with murdering Maggie and Paul and more than a year after their murders. So the first question that we ask is why did SLED wait until after Alex was charged to have these interviews with the family? The most logical explanation is because new information that had become available to them, but also that maybe SLED couldn't trust the family to tell the truth so they couldn't rely on their answers anyway. For instance, most of the memoranda of interviews, which they call him allies recounted what happened when SLED agents visited each family member to play the video they had discovered on Paul's phone that proved Alex was down at the kennels that night and after Alex had spent more than a year telling everyone that he wasn't SLED had this video since at least April 2022. But they chose to wait to get the family to confirm what investigators already knew to be true that the man talking to Maggie and Paul on the video was Alex and as you'll see, that wasn't exactly an easy task. So the first one is from Lynn Goettee's interview with SLED agent Ryan Kelly on July 26th 2022 at her place of work, which is the First Circuit Solicitor's Office in St. George, South Carolina. So this is Alex's sister and it was disturbing. Actually a lot about Alex's sister is disturbing if we're being honest. She works as a victim's advocate for solicitor David Pasco's office. Her literal job is to help victims so that prosecutors can hold their aggressors accountable as

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Someone who is being paid by taxpayers to be a compassionate and friendly face for people who have been traumatized so they won't be further traumatized by the system. She made no effort to mask her own contempt for this same system when it tried to hold her brother accountable for what he did. Whether it was her helping sneak books to Alex during the trial continuing to disregard the court's rules about interacting with the defendants on trial or her rolling her eyes at Judge Newman. Lynn showed exactly who she was during those six weeks that she got to take off from her government job. Another thing that disturbs us is what she did the day after the murders: the day after Maggie and Paul were killed Alex's sister Lynn Goettee was at Moselle at the house and her niece, Randy's younger daughter, handed Lynn a bloody towel and Lynn didn't give it to investigators. Instead she had it washed. Here is David with what the agent wrote.

DAVID MOSES 06:03

Ms. Murdaugh presented Ms. Goettee with a hand towel with what appeared to be a small smear of dried blood. Ms. Murdaugh told Ms. Goettee she located the hand towel in the half bathroom located on the first floor of Alex and Maggie Murdaugh's residence. Ms. Goettee did not associate the blood with the murders of Maggie and Paul Murdaugh because they occurred down at the dog kennels. Miss Goettee had quote, "no inkling" end quote that anything found in the house would be related to the murders. Ms. Goettee did not believe at the time that the person responsible for the murders would have had access to the main residence. Ms. Goettee believed the hand towel was either white or yellow in color due to the way the hand towel was folded the red in color substance would not have been immediately obvious. After taking possession of the hand towel from Ms. Murdaugh, Ms. Goettee was not able to recall if she put the item in the washing machine or if she asked Murdaugh family housekeeper Ms. Blanca Simpson to do so. Ms.



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Goettee never told anyone about the hand towel and quote did not think twice about it. Ms. Goettee advised in hindsight, she quote “probably should have told someone.”

Liz Farrell 07:22

So how did SLED find out about the towel right? And why were they asking about this in July 2022. The most logical assumption would be that Randy's teenage daughter mentioned it to SLED or to someone else who mentioned it to SLED. A teenager clearly thought a towel with blood on it could be a significant clue in a double murder. The adult woman whose family has been in law enforcement for nearly 100 years, the adult woman who works in law enforcement herself, somehow had no inkling, no inkling, the fact that this family was allowed back in that house directly after the murders is something that Colleton County Sheriff's Office and SLED should not only look back on with shame, but should be looking back on with a critical eye so that it never happens again, no matter whose house it is, which officers and agents allowed that to happen. And why. I mean, we know why. Because the house was swarming with PMPED lawyers, and this was after all the Murdaugh's. But systematically why? What does this say about their system? To us? It says that no one could afford to be bold. No one could afford to stand up for what was right, because they couldn't trust their own chains of command to have their backs over the backs of the Murdaugh's. That is what it says to us. And that is what needs to change. So yeah, good old girl Lynn Goettee, saw a towel with blood on it and then deleted that from her mind because it didn't fit the narrative she had already decided on the day after the murders. During that same interview, Lynn told the agent that she never suspected that Alex had been embezzling money from his clients, or that he was addicted to drugs, or that he had previously gone to rehab or that he had any marital issues with Maggie. She also told the agent that she knew Paul drank in quote “social

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settings” but had never seen him grossly intoxicated. A few weeks after this interview on August 17, 2022, Agent Kelly returned with Agent David Owen to conduct another interview with Lynn. This interview was done in Walterboro at SLED’s Low Country offices. Agents Kelly and Owen also interviewed Randy and John Marvin there on the same day. All three were interviewed separately. During these interviews the agents played the audio from Paul's kennel video and asked each sibling to identify By the voices they heard, then they played the video for them. The agents noted that all three had been told about the existence of this video during a meeting prior to Alex's arraignment on the murder charges. It's not clear if they learned about this video through SLED or through Dick and Jim. During these interviews, each sibling was shown the blue raincoat and asked if they had ever seen it before. Here's David with what the agents wrote about Lynn's second interview.

DAVID MOSES 10:30

Ms. Goettee stated she heard rumors of the video and that she was told of the video but not the content of the video. Senior Special Agent Owen when played the video only allowing Lynn to hear the audio and asked if she recognized any voices. Lynn stated she heard Paul talking to the dogs she heard Maggie in the background talking about the Guinea or the chicken and quote,” I can hear Alex”. She believes she heard another person but did not know if it was another person or just something said by Paul, Maggie or Alex that she was not able to identify. Agents note Lynn became visibly emotional during the playing of the video.

Liz Farrell 11:12

The video is played a second time for Lynn and she told the agent where she couldn't identify a person at the 15 second mark. So they



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played it for her again. In the MOI the agents noted that they had another audio file which had been enhanced by the FBI and split into three files. So they played each of those for Lynn. She identified the female background voice as Maggie. She said the male background voice sounded like Alex and the third voice which had been labeled subject she identified as Paul you heard the equivocation right. She ID'd Maggie and Paul but said the male background voice quote sounded like Alex she didn't commit to it. After they played the clips for her. The agent showed her the blue Kokatat raincoat. She said she did not recognize it. Kokatat, by the way, is an upscale brand of outdoor sports apparel. Randy's interview with SLED was even more equivocating than Lynn's, at least at first. Now, he was the only one of the siblings who appeared to have brought an attorney with him for the meeting. He had John Moylan from the Wyche Law Firm with him. The Wyche Law Firm is who has been representing PMPED throughout all of this. It's unclear why Randy thought, or why PMPED might think that he needed an attorney for this meeting. Senior Special Agent Owen played the audio from the video several times for Randy. Randy wouldn't commit to what he was hearing and requested to hear the enhanced audio files. Here's David with what the agents wrote about that interview.

DAVID MOSES 12:46

Randy stated he believed he heard Paul in the third clip, but there were a couple of phrases where he was not sure it was the way quote, "he enunciated" and some were quote, "just not clear". After hearing the enhanced clips Randy requested to hear the full clip again. The full clip was played for Randy several times. In the first of the series of clips, Randy stated that he believed he heard Alex Maggie and Paul. Agents note Randy wore hearing aids and indicated the way his hearing aids worked that he needed to be quote, "squared up on the computer".



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Accommodations were offered and made to assist Randy the full clip was again played for Randy which he identified as Paul, Maggie and Alex.

Mandy Matney 13:37

Agents showed Randy the blue raincoat and he too said that he didn't recognize the jacket nor the name brand. After that the full video was shown to Randy he showed agents the parts of the video where he was not sure of the voices. He told the agents the part where Paul was speaking at the 17 second mark did not sound like Paul. Then he stated he was confident that the three voices were Maggie, Paul and Alex. In the video, John Marvin was interviewed last. When Agent Owen played the audio John Marvin identified all three voices as Paul, Maggie and Alex. He told the agents he also thought he heard someone else talking at the 15 minute mark and at the 32 second mark. When they played the enhanced audio files for him. He again identified Maggie, Paul and Alex. The agents noted that John Marvin became visibly emotional at the time. When they played the video for him he asked the agents if the fourth voice had been identified. The agents told him that SLED had not identified a fourth voice meaning the investigators did not believe there was a fourth voice. The idea of a fourth voice is one that's been talked about a lot on social media and it's part of what is behind the opinion that Alex had helped that night. What we hear when we replay the video is Alex's voice moving away from Paul as he goes to retrieve the chicken from Bubba's mouth. Lastly, John Marvin also told agents that he didn't recognize the coat nor the name brand Kokatat. We are continuing to go through Becky's emails and we will share what we've learned in future episodes. Another Freedom of Information Act request was returned to us from the South Carolina Department of Corrections. Reporter Beth Braden submitted her routine FOIA for Alex's phone calls, iPad messages and a list of visitors plus any disciplinary actions against



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Alex. There were surprise, surprise, no records of any phone calls made by Alex that are responsive to FOIA, meaning he made calls that were either to his lawyer or SCDC decided they were too personal to release. When agencies return your FOIAs they're supposed to tell you specifically what statute they're using as justification for holding back each piece of information. This FOIA return didn't tell us anything specific, only that there were no calls to release during the period of time that we asked for. The only visitor that Alex had through December of last year was someone named John Cope. We don't know who John Cope is, but we do know that a Reverend John Cope spoke at Maggie, Paul and Randolph's funerals. As for the messages, they are dirty, racy and unsettling. They're all from women, mostly from one woman. And from what we received back from our FOIA, it does not appear that Alex is responding to the messages, at least not in a way that was responsive to our FOIA. Premium Members of Luna Shark can view these messages and a whole lot more from our FOIA request on their premium feeds.

Liz Farrell 16:49

Okay, now the fun part, the part where Alex was caught having excessive pens and sticky notes in his cell during a search on October 5, 2023. I say fun because it's a reminder that Alex is where he belongs. He's in a very restrictive place where he can just do what he wants anymore. Also, who knew there was a limit on Post-it notes in prison? What are they using them for? From the evidence photo included with his discipline reports and yes, I said evidence photo. It looks like Alex had about eight pens in his cell along with three opened and one unopened package of sticky notes. The photo is in black and white so you will not get to find out if like with his Capri Sun's Alex has a preference for his Post-it notes color. After a sergeant with SCDC searched Alex's cell Alex was charged with having contraband. He

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received a verbal warning which he surprisingly accepted without fighting. Now, as you know, this wasn't the only time Alex has been disciplined while in prison. On August 15, 2023, the warden received a report from the Office of the Inspector General about an interview conducted on August 9 at around 1:30pm in which inmate Richard Murdaugh participated. That interview is with Fox Nation for their documentary The Fall of the House of Murdaugh, which aired in late August right before Dick and Jim's circus had a press conference accusing Becky Hill of jury tampering. Here's David with what's in that report.

DAVID MOSES 18:29

During the interview, inmate Murdaugh's Attorney Jim Griffin stated he conducted an interview for the news media, which he recorded and provided to the production company in which Murdaugh willingly and knowingly abused his telephone privileges to communicate with news media for his own gain.

Liz Farrell 18:49

It's not clear how the Office of Inspector General found out about this interview. As you all know, prisoners' calls with their attorneys are not monitored. But there's another incident report. This one is from a day earlier when the warden says he was reviewing phone calls and came across one made on August 9, the same day as the interview but about an hour after it. That call was placed by an inmate named Joshua Kelly to a number that we now know to be Jim Griffin cell phone. Here's David with what the warden wrote.



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DAVID MOSES 19:24

On the call, I recognized the voice of Richard Murdaugh 39039. Inmate Murdaugh stated he is using someone else's pin number because his is not working.

Liz Farrell 19:36

Joshua Kelly, the prisoner whose pin Alex used, is a 37-year old man. Coincidentally also a redhead, whose prison location like Alex is also listed as undisclosed. He's expected to be in prison until 2027. But he's eligible for parole in May. He has two infractions on his public profile online that Note two incidents in which he was caught with drugs. According to news reports, Joshua was arrested in 2019 for an incident in Florence, where he allegedly shot at a crew from Duke Energy, who were in the area to mark trees near power lines. Joshua pointed a shotgun at them and allegedly threatened to kill them. He was arrested after a standoff at his home and charged with three counts of attempted murder, two counts of pointing and presenting a firearm and one count of malicious injury. According to his prison profile, he is only serving time for pointing and presenting and discharging a weapon into a dwelling. According to the Public Index, two of his three attempted murder charges were dismissed, and he was found not guilty of the third. Now, on August 15, after two infractions have now been documented about Alex breaking the phone rolls SCDC disciplined Alex by restricting his phone privileges for 20 days, which if you've ever looked at a prisoner's disciplinary actions online, you'll know he got off pretty easy there. But Alex being Alex when he signed the form acknowledging the disciplinary action, he selected the option on the form that says no I do not want to accept the sanctions listed above and request that this case be referred to a disciplinary hearing. You know that saying how publicity hungry people would attend the opening of an envelope if it meant they could get camera time. Alex is



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that way about with hearings. The man loves to argue his way out of consequences, it's unbelievable. Not only did Alex not accept the sanctions he asked that his accuser the warden be present at the hearing and that he wanted a substitute counsel. Next to this on the hearing report is a handwritten note. The only thing we can make out is the inmate's lawyer is requesting to pee. So it looks like Alex's attorney had some asks for the prison at Alex's hearing which was held August 28th. He pleaded not guilty. Then he was found guilty. Quite the pattern for him there. Instead of losing 20 days of phone privileges. He now lost 30 days for the interview and 30 for using another inmate's pen. Also, they barred him from using the canteen for 30 days, which we all know must have been a real kick in the gut for him. Anyway, that is a find out situation right there. After this the prison discovered that while Alex was awaiting his disciplinary hearing date, when he had already lost his phone privileges. Alex found a workaround. Here's David with what the warden wrote on August 24th about a call he found that an inmate made to a number that matches the main number for the Griffin Law Firm.

DAVID MOSES 22:58

I, Warden Palmer was reviewing phone calls and found a call to 803-744-0800 on August 21, 2023 made by inmate Jacob Hazlet 381849. In the call inmate, Hazlet states quote, "This is a friend of A's he asked me to give you a call. He says his phone privileges have been taken away and he wants you to let J, identified as Jim Griffin, know his hearing is Wednesday. He further states that he, Murdaugh, wants J to send a letter so it can be entered into the record for the hearing." The call concludes with inmate Hazlet saying quote, "He also asks for \$150 on his account." The female states to let him know she will take care of it. This is a second call on August 22, 2023 to the same number in made



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Hazlet again is delivering a message for inmate Murdaugh regarding a letter from his attorney for an upcoming DHO hearing.

Liz Farrell 24:03

For that, both Alex and Jacob were disciplined. Alex's hearing was held on September 13th. He requested that his accuser be present and that he have a substitute attorney. He pleaded not guilty and he was found guilty. Like I said, quite the pattern. He was placed on disciplinary detention for 15 days and lost his phone privileges for another 30. This disciplinary action for some reason isn't mentioned in his public profile on the SCDC website. Now being placed on disciplinary detention means he was housed in a more restrictive unit for 15 days which might explain the sticky notes. He got out of that disciplinary detention and felt free as a bird and was like, You know what I'm gonna do? I'm going to open a fresh pack of Post-its tonight baby. Now, an interesting thing about Alex from Jacob. Like Alex and Joshua, his prison assignment is also listed as undisclosed This Jacob, by the way, is 33 years old and has been in prison since 2019. His projected release isn't until 2074. And he's not eligible for parole until 2066. He's serving time for about a dozen counts of sexually abusing a minor. In 2018. Jacob was arrested after it was discovered that he had abused 14 boys within 90 days at a church daycare in North Charleston where he was volunteering. He was caught on camera molesting boys as young as three years old. He admitted to sexually assaulting them and to taking photos and videos of them. At the time he was arrested he was in the process of trying to adopt a child of his own. According to news reports at Jacobs sentencing one child's grandfather told him you're a living example of what evil is. Over the past week there were three Murdaugh related stories in the news that we want to mention. One was a report about SLED confirming their nearly year long investigation into breach of trust allegations against former Hampton County Administrator Rose Dobson Elliott, who now



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works for Jasper County, another county and the 14th Circuit. Rose left her position in December 2022 amid citizen outrage over the county mispending more than \$5 million that was earmarked for specific expenses, like capital improvement projects and the fire department. I say this is a Murdaugh related story because sources have told us that some people in Hampton County believe that Rose is being targeted for other reasons, ones related to decisions she made during her tenure that perhaps adversely affected people in Alex's inner circle. That said, we do know there are legitimate problems here and that a group of citizens has been trying to get a forensic investigation into the county spending for more than two and a half years. We'll keep you posted if anything interesting arises from that case. Also this week, Alex alleged co-conspirators, Jerry Rivers and Spencer Roberts were sentenced to prison Judge Clifton Newman sentenced Jerry to seven years for seven charges that Jerry pleaded guilty to in August, including obstruction of justice, making false statements to insurers distributing drugs and laundering money. Jerry denies ever meeting Alex but prosecutors say he was an important contact for Curtis Eddie Smith, who was allegedly a go-between for Alex procurement of pills. Judge Newman sentenced Spencer to eight years for a COVID-19 loan related fraud that is not connected to Alex Murdaugh. According to the Post and Courier newspaper, Spencer is still facing charges related to drugs and money laundering for his alleged dealings with Alex. We're still working on getting the bigger picture on what Jerry and Spencer's alleged roles were in Alex's scheme and we'll keep you posted.

Mandy Matney 27:51

Okay, our last update is about Peter Strauss on season two episode 29. We introduced you to Peter, a Hilton Head attorney who was suspended by the South Carolina Supreme Court in December. In this suspension the supreme court dropped hence in its order that Peter



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had been charged with a crime. But funny enough, our reporter Beth Braden couldn't find any charges for Peter Strauss, The Millionaire attorney who specializes in asset protection. We had heard from two independent sources that Peter Straus could be the missing link to the Murdaugh money mystery. But if this is true, there have been no indications from law enforcement. However, the facts of Peter's case sure do point to some sort of significant cooperation from him. Y'all know how we scream over and over on this podcast about how there are two systems of justice, one for the powerful like Peter and the Murdaughs, and one for everyone else. Well, the federal government just proved to us again how the system simply works differently for people like Peter Strauss. Turns out, Peter pleaded guilty to one felony count of removal of property to prevent seizures in November after the US government and his attorney came to an agreement in October. And because nothing is ever simple with these guys, even after coming to the agreement with prosecutors, the original plea he entered on November 6, was not guilty. Shortly after that he changed it to guilty. We're not sure why or what happened there as a part of the deal. According to records, the government agreed to seal the indictment for three months while Peter J. Strauss was out on bond. Now, imagine you were a client of Peter Strauss all this time with your money in Peter's hands while he's out on bond facing five years for a federal felony or imagine you were working for Peter's company. Think about how frustrating it would be to know that this man had pleaded guilty to a federal felony because the government in the Supreme Court quite frankly decided to keep it quiet. We have screened about this before with Alex Murdaugh and Cory Fleming and how long the Supreme Court took to disbar them despite the mountains of evidence against them. I hate to say this, but it looks like the South Carolina Supreme Court and the bar haven't changed a thing when it comes to how they police their own attorneys. Even after Alex Murdaugh and company

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showed the entire world how much privileged lawyers in South Carolina could get away with because South Carolina is the land of no consequences for them. Even after that the South Carolina Supreme Court is still moving at a snail's pace to keep its own lawyers in check and to protect its citizens from being victimized by attorneys.

Liz Farrell 30:48

So Peter pleaded guilty to removal of property to prevent seizure in a case that has nothing to do with Alex Murdaugh, just like our sources had told us and we reported to you in episode 29. In that episode we told you about the DC Solar Carpoff case and the associated civil lawsuit. It was 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 they covered up their lives by creating fake leasing contracts and financial statements. They ended up paying old investors with new investor money and they stopped making the units altogether but they did not stop selling leasing agreements for them. According to the US Attorney's Office, 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 apparently even fooled the likes of Warren Buffett and the US Treasury Department. In December 2018 the feds executed search warrants against the Carpoff's and their company DC Solar. And this is where Peter got into trouble. I'll have David read the section of the press release from the US Attorney's Office.



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DAVID MOSES 32:26

Following the execution of search and seizure warrants related to an investigation on the Carpoff's company Strauss received \$11 million from the Carpoff's on December 19, 2018, the first \$5 million dollars was transferred into Strauss's IOLTA account and thereafter distributed to various criminal defense attorneys and bankruptcy counsel and to Carpoff's captive insurance funds managed by Strauss' captive insurance management company thereafter, on December 28 2018, Strauss received an additional \$3 million used to pay for the Carpoff's Captive Insurance Fund premiums. Finally on January 15 2019, the Carpoff's wired Strauss \$3 million into Strauss's IOLTA account thereafter, the funds were commingled in Strauss's IOLTA account and completely spent over the next few months by pleading guilty. Straus admitted that by the time of the \$3 million transfer on January 15 2019, he knowingly transferred and aided and abetted the transfer of funds from Carpoff to prevent and impair the government's lawful authority to take such property into its custody and control. The defendant has agreed to pay \$2,700,000 in restitution to the federal clerk of court at or before the sentencing.

Mandy Matney 33:53

The Carpoff's have already been sentenced for their role in the scheme. 30 years for the husband and 11 years for the wife, which is yet another example of white collar criminals who have gotten steeper sentences than Cory and Russell. By the way, Peter faces up to five years in federal prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. According to the press release, however, the press release does not mention Peter Strauss' extremely lenient bond conditions, which we have to talk about for a minute. In November, Peter Strauss appeared before Judge Molly Cherry in federal court for a bond hearing where he was granted a \$100,000 unsecured bond with very few restrictions. Essentially, an unsecured bond is a



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pinky promise to the government that you will follow the rules of your bond conditions appear before the court when you're told and if not, you will have to pay the government that money in full, you know, because the people who have been charged with federal crimes like fraud and money laundering have such a great track record of following the rules. But not everybody can make a pinky promise to the government like Peter can with bond. I have seen this a lot over the years, the government often decides to give privileged defendants who could afford unsecured bonds or PR bonds. While the less privileged defendants often get stuck with surety bonds that they have to pay. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, an estimated 500,000 People are sitting in jail across the United States right now, just because they can't afford to pay bail. This has been something I have paid attention to my entire career simply because it doesn't seem right. I've seen people sitting in jail for months, sometimes years after being charged with petty crimes like walking on a highway or simple drug possession simply because they don't have anyone in their life to pay their bail, which I've seen sometimes is as low as a few \$100. I urge y'all to look up your local County's jail log and poke through the charges of those who have been confined for several months. For instance, I quickly found in Charleston, a 63 year old South Carolina man who was arrested and charged with credit card theft in October who has been sitting stuck in jail ever since because he can't pay his \$2,500 surety bond. I get it guys like Peter Straus could pay \$100,000 If they needed to, and most people charged with petty crimes cannot be in a system where we are innocent until proven guilty. Why is it that we are taking people's freedom away simply because they don't have the funds to afford bail because Peter and people like Peter who can afford it wasn't required to pay it. He also wasn't required to wear a GPS monitor.



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Liz Farrell 36:49

Peter Strauss's bond conditions were very lax. He was barred from committing crimes possessing a gun or traveling outside of South Carolina without the express permission of his probation officer. Oh, and there was a special note written on the bond order that said he couldn't make any financial transactions over \$50,000 without permission. Which brings us to our favorite part of the show which we are now calling The Audacity. Peter Strauss, like a true good old boy, couldn't just accept his easy bond. In December his attorney Joseph P. Griffith Jr. filed a six page motion to get permission for Peter to travel to Mexico, you know the stereotypical place for us criminals to escape for his second anniversary trip that was already planned. The motion even included a screenshot of his hotel reservation. He was staying at a tasteful but price conscious Hotel, which was a short walk from the beach. Just kidding. Our boy took his multimillion dollar private plane to Playa Del Carmen where he and his wife stayed in a beach friend's studio at a luxury resort where their room is currently priced at just under \$4,000. A night. The audacity. And again, you heard the part I said about private plane right? To further separate Peter from the rest of us, his attorney mentioned in the motion that Peter has a private plane that the government can easily track while he's on his Mexican vacay as he waits to be sentenced for his federal crime. Again, the audacity. I know in a world where rules apply to everyone in the criminal justice system, you would think the court wouldn't just say no, but hell no. Peter has deep connections all over the world and a private plane to get there. He's got the means and motive to flee. And of course the government gave him the opportunity to go and they didn't require any GPS tracking. Somewhere out there Russell Laffitte's ankles just started twitching. Judge Gergle, the same judge who sentenced Cory Fleming, Russell and soon Alex Murdaugh is also the judge in Peter's case. By the way, right before asking Judge Gergle if Peter could go to Mexico, Peter

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and his attorney filed a hefty motion asking Judge Gergel to recuse himself. The claims are interesting and Peter was able to get attorney Barbara Seymour to file an affidavit as an expert on ethics and the law. She's a well respected attorney and a go to for lawyers fighting complaints with ODC. Peter claimed that because Judge Gurgel got salty at two hearings in May 2019. When judge gurgle was tasked with finding out how the car pops money he got deposited into Peters law firms trust account and who that money ultimately belonged to. After Peter pleaded the fifth dozens and dozens of times to questions that Judge Gergel no doubt regarded as one's most simple answers. Judge Gergel informed Peter that he was reporting him to the office of disciplinary Council and he recommended that Peter self report. Additionally, Judge Gergel referred to the US Attorney's Office and a prosecutor who was present at the first hearing as quote, my US Attorney's Office and my US attorney, and he referred to the money trail as criminal or appearing to be unlawful. Gergle gave Peter Strauss the permission to travel Mexico in January, because, of course he did. But when it came to the recusal, he was like, Yeah, I'm good. Now, the annoying thing about Peter being granted permission to go to Mexico is that he used cases to show that a precedent had already been set, US v Golestan and US v Renacci. In both cases, the defendants were allowed to travel internationally for work while out on bond, but get this. The second case I mentioned used the first case as an argument as to why the second case is motion should be granted. And it worked. It's like an echo chamber of judicial privilege. It all hinges on one lenient judge's decision to allow one rich guy to do something, then all the other rich guys jump on board and say to me too, and the judges let them through because well, precedent was already set.



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Mandy Matney 41:19

Of course, in response to finding out that Peter Strauss was allowed to travel to Mexico, we bought a subscription to Flight Radar 24.com so we could get access to flight records for Peter's plane. Now when Peter asked permission to go on the flight, he said it was to and from Cozumel, Mexico from December 30 to January 4, and here is an example of the good ol boys pushing the limits even when they are already granted something absurd. According to flight radar, Peter's plane took off at 2:11 am on December 11th, the day he was given permission to go outside of South Carolina and what's weird, the entire flight log is listed as unknown. It doesn't say where the plane went or how long the plane was gone, which is odd. Also on December 30th, his plane presumably with him on it flew to Florida likely to get gas then stopped in Cancun for seven hours before taking a 30-minute flight to Cozumel. He didn't have a connecting flight because he was in a private plane and he just got gas in Florida. So what exactly was Peter doing for seven hours at an international hub like Cancun while he was out on bond. We also noticed he stopped at both Cancun and Florida on his way back to Hilton Head and his plane has made several out of state stops since then. So it's a little odd. The prosecutor, Emily Limehouse, the same prosecutor who put an extra ankle monitor on old Russell a feat didn't think of asking for at least one ankle monitor for Peter Strauss when he went to Mexico or as he awaits his sentencing. Why would Russell be considered more of a flight risk than Peter? Russell is a dopey nipple baby who absolutely could not survive in another country. In no way could he survive in a world outside of the kangaroo pouch of his father's belly and he didn't even have a plane; he had kids and a wife and a farm and oh yeah, an ankle monitor on his other leg. But nope, ole Emily was like you need another one. But to Peter, he takes out his wallet to pay bond and it's like oh, your money's no good here, sir. Please sit down for a massage and Viva Mexico. It's actually funny when

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you think about it within the two systems of justice, one for us and one for them. There are still upgrades to be had in the one for them. Sources with knowledge of federal investigations and plea deals have told us that the federal government granting this much leniency to Peter Strauss is a sign that he had a lot of info that they want and that he is cooperating the kind of info that maybe Cory and Russell either didn't have or refuse to give up. While Peter's charge isn't directly connected to Alex Murdaugh. We're told investigators are considering the possibility that Peter Strauss might be able to help them get some answers about where and how Alex could have hidden his money. Peter obviously has extensive knowledge about the complex captive insurance trade as well as tax sheltering, and he's a low country attorney who set up shop in the 14th Circuit home of Alex Murdaugh. Also, the timing of this is notable, especially when you look at the timeframe when Alex's finances faced the most pressure in winning turned up the notch on his stealing and 2018 and 2019 which was around the time when Peter got into hot water for the DC Solar case. The feds have sat on the Carpoff case for almost five years. Both of the Carpoffs have been in prison for years now. So why deal with Peter now? Why not back then? By all outward appearances, the DC Solar case is done. So we're wondering what information Peter Straus might have that the government clearly wants.

Liz Farrell 45:20

As we continue to cover Stephen Smith's case, we're going to take deeper dives into various parts of the investigation into his death. This week, we want to talk with you all about the car he was driving the night who was killed, the one that was left on the side of the road with its gas cap open and hanging from the side. The car is a significant piece of evidence or it could have been there's no indication that investigators attempted to retrieve fingerprints from the gas cap, the



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steering wheel or any other part of the vehicle, there's no indication that the items found in the car were cataloged or booked into evidence other than his wallet, even failed to notice a gate passed to an upscale gated neighborhood on Hilton Head Island. It took Sandy noticing it and bringing it to law enforcement attention. The whole thing is weird because at the time that law enforcement brought Stephen's body to the corner, they were treating this case like a homicide. They even sent a crime scene unit to the scene of where his car was found. It wasn't until later in the day that the case became Highway Patrol's so before the car was towed and taken into impound law enforcement believed they were investigating a potential murderer. In other words, the SLED was in charge of the investigation at that point. According to SLEDs crime scene notes from the time they arrived at the secondary scene where Stephens' car was found three miles away at about 920 that morning. They had a search warrant for Stephen's car before unlocking it with a key they found in his pocket. And they noticed footwear impressions in the dirt near the driver store. Quote "the responding officers' shoes were compared to these impressions by Special Agent Burke and found to be consistent therefore footwear impressions were not collected". SLED searched the vehicle and cleared the scene within 20 minutes releasing the car to Hampton County Sheriff's Office. A SLED agent then attended Stephen's autopsy. Which reminds me there's a point we left out of our episode last week when we were talking about our issues with how Dr. Aaron Pressnell handled Stephen's autopsy. Remember how we told you that our primary issue and investigators' primary issue with her at the time was how she put in her report that Stephen died as the result of being hit by a vehicle. It's a statement that another medical examiner would later call unfortunate. Highway Patrol did not understand how she was making that determination when his body showed no signs of being hit by a car. When troopers asked Dr. Pressnell for clarification on that she became

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angry and told them that she was told that Stephen had been hit by a vehicle and that's why she put it in her report. But the troopers asked both the deputy coroner and the SLED agent who attended Stephen's autopsy and both denied ever saying that they use the word vehicle with Dr. Pressnell. They both told the trooper they said that Stephens' body had been found in the road. And that was it. This is important because Dr. personnels classification of Stephen's death is what doomed his investigation from the start. It was a question of who was going to investigate his death. Would it be the South Carolina Highway Patrol which has a team that specializes in accident reconstructions and death by vehicles? Or would it be SLED which has agents highly trained in homicide investigations? It's again, a question of whether this is incompetence or whether it's signs of a larger cover up because certainly if this is a case in which there is obstruction of justice happening, having this case investigated by the agency, less capable of handling a case like this would be ideal, right? So the narrative that emerged from Stephen's death in 2015 was that he was driving home late at night and had run out of gas. And instead of calling his twin sister for help on the cell phone he had with them, he attempted to walk nearly four miles to his home, leaving his wallet in the car. It's a story that never made a whole lot of sense to his family, nor to many other people who knew Stephen personally. His family says he would never have chosen that option. He would have called Stephanie, he would have hidden until someone could have come to get him because he was afraid of people, particularly people who might harm him because he was gay. Before moving to Varnville, Stephen and Stephanie lived on Old Salkehatchie Road. Yes, the road where Alex Murdaugh lied and said he was shot by a nice man in a truck. When they lived on that road they didn't have any close neighbors so Stephen and Stephanie would go for walks just to have something to do. Here's Stephanie who spoke with us this week.

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Stephanie Smith 49:55

We would walk up and down the road but if we were to walk down the road, if we heard a car or saw a car, we would jump in the woods and just walk in the woods until the car was gone. And then we would jump back out and walk on the road. So for him just to be walking in the middle of the road, you know, not seeing or hearing the vehicle. It's kinda odd.

Mandy Matney 50:20

They grew up in the country, and they were used to walking in the dark, regardless of how dark it was. So the idea that Stephen would be walking dead center in the middle of the road and not move when a vehicle was barreling in his direction is hard to accept as plausible, and especially when toxicology showed that he was sober before Stephen allegedly ran out of gas and July 2015, Stephen had only run out of gas one time before that Stephanie could remember.

EXPOSING CRIME & CORRUPTION

Stephanie Smith 50:51

We had a 1998 Ford Explorer that was on it was like a maybe three and a half inch lift kit with big old mud tires. And the gas gauge didn't work. So you had to basically put gas in it like every day just to make sure you didn't run out. It wasn't really trustworthy. And he ran out of gas coming from school one day, which it was maybe a little farther up from where his car was found.

Mandy Matney 51:22

So this is important when this happened to Stephen before in the other car. It was around where his car was found. 2015 Here's what he did when he was waiting for Stephanie and their father to come help them.



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Stephanie Smith 51:36

He took the into like a little pathway into the woods, you know, for deer hunters back in there. He didn't park it on the side of the road. And then, of course he called me and my dad and was like, hey, I ran out of gas. I need you to come get me and me and my dad basically drove back and forth for a good 20 minutes while Stephen sat in the woods watching us to make sure it was us.

Mandy Matney 51:59

Now, in July 2015 Stephens car was a 2008 Chevy Aveo. It was a bright yellow four door coupe with a sunroof and a missing door handle on the driver's side. It had a United States Marine Corps sticker on the back window, torn upholstery on the driver's side seat and a Jelly Belly air freshener hanging from the window. He got the car only mere months before his death. We asked Stephanie why he chose this little yellow car, which he referred to as a banana.

EXPOSING CRIME & CORRUPTION

Stephanie Smith 52:28

It was just a car we seen for sale uptown. Um, it was reasonably priced. And it was small and convenient. You know, because he wanted something that was decent on gas mileage with, you know, traveling back and forth from school. And that's it. I mean, he didn't really pick it because he liked the car or anything. He just thought it was cute and would be good on gas.

Mandy Matney 52:56

Stephen attended school about an hour northeast of where he lived in Farmville. It was about a 55 mile drive. Stephen was known to be a fast driver. Usually whenever Stephanie went somewhere with him, she took the wheel.



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Stephanie Smith 53:10

I think I let him drive like one time. And I learned my lesson. Because he was like a NASCAR driver. I couldn't let him drive because I probably would have broke the door handle with how bad he drove.

Liz Farrell 53:25

So like we said, when Stephens car was found in July 2015, the gas cap was off and hanging loose. He was almost home from wherever he was earlier in the night. It's plausible that he could have done some mental math and decided he had enough gas to coast home those last few miles and simply miscalculated. But why was the gas cap off and hanging loose? Was it assigned to passing vehicles or law enforcement that the car wasn't abandoned, that it had simply run out of gas, the gas tank was on the passenger side of the vehicle. So the fact that his cap was off and loose wouldn't have necessarily been visible to those driving by. Or had Stephen done that for another reason.

EXPOSING CRIME & CORRUPTION

Stephanie Smith 54:07

He wouldn't have done that unless somebody was bringing him gas. Honestly, if he did run out of gas, I don't understand why he didn't call me because I always came to the rescue when it comes to vehicle issues. So I don't know. To me, it just seemed a little weird.

Liz Farrell 54:29

Speaking of Stephanie, coming to Stephen's rescue, the only issue Stephen seemed to have with his new car was that it didn't hold oil. But the day before his death, he needed Stephanie's help solving another problem.



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Stephanie Smith 54:41

The day before he passed. He got stuck at the gas station in Bronson and he said his car wouldn't start. I went up there to see what was wrong and just so happened the battery cables were loose, and I tightened it up. Powered, cranked right up you know. We drove home Um, the terminals were loosened on both sides, there's no way that it would just loosen by itself.

Liz Farrell 55:07

As we said before, Stephen was skittish around people, and for good reason.

Stephanie Smith 55:13

The same day as me having to, you know, fix his car in the parking lot at the gas station, he sat in the car the whole time while I was working on it. And we were on the phones, even though I was right in front of the car, and he was in the car. And I asked him to get out of the car because there was this well known homeless guy like walking in our direction. And I asked him to get out because I felt uncomfortable, and of course he wouldn't.

Liz Farrell 55:41

This level of skittishness, though, struck Stephanie as unusual, but he didn't seem too concerned about the loosened wires at the time, Stephanie believes that someone had been messing with Stephen and undid his battery cables that day, we'll talk more in a future episode about what Stephen's life was like leading up to his death and where he might have been the night he was killed. But the battery raises questions, especially for Stephanie. Was Stephen being targeted? Was he being harassed? If so, by whom? And on the night he was killed? Was someone coming to help him or did someone else undo Stephen's



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gas cap? Again, we might never know the answer to that last question because law enforcement didn't think to take fingerprints. Not even after accusations of foul play started to rise up behind the scenes.

Mandy Matney 56:29

Stephen's car was a highly noticeable one. We're asking that anyone in Hampton County and beyond who might have been in the area on the night of Stephen's death to please jog your memories. Do you remember seeing a little yellow car at a party driving on the road speeding down the road? Do you remember passing by his car on the side of the road? Any little detail helps no matter how small or how unrelated you think it might be? In order to put together a puzzle there need to be pieces, please contact us at answers for Stephen.com if you remember seeing Stephen in his car in or around July 2015. One last thing we want to mention is obstruction of justice. In the 2019 boat crash case, Alex and his family have been accused of interfering with the investigation but they aren't the only ones. Today we are asking SLED, DNR and any other agency or anomaly is occurred and then reporting of the boat crash in the collection of evidence and following the chain of custody with that evidence. We want officials to hold the people who didn't follow procedure accountable. In order to get Stephen's case solved. People need to trust that law enforcement will have their backs when they speak up. So law enforcement needs to step up and show those with information on what happened to Stephen that they will not tolerate any shady and illegal behavior from their rank and file and that they will protect witnesses. They need to stop giving the benefit of the doubt to the people on their payroll who have been known in the past to show more loyalty to their friends than to the laws they've sworn to uphold. If you want people to cooperate with your investigations, start showing that they can trust your agencies. Stay tuned, stay pesky, and stay in the sunlight. True Sunlight

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