



EPISODE 40: Who Killed Stephen Smith Part Ten

Mandy Matney 00:02

I don't know who killed Stephen Smith. But we recently obtained thousands of files that tell us more about who Stephen was and what his life looked like around the time he died. The more we find out about Stephen's life, the closer we get to answering the big questions about his death. 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. This past weekend marked five years since the boat crash that killed Mallory Beach, five years since the beginning of the end of the Murdaugh dynasty, five years of investigating five years of people awakening to the fact that if they don't speak up now and nothing will ever change, five years of a fight to change South Carolina's justice system, that fight that was joined by millions around the world, five years of peeling back layers that just kept getting worse five years. And we're still not done with this nightmare. In the last week, I've been stuck in the past, flipping through On This Day photos on my phone because of the amount of significant events that took place on this week. Eight years ago this week, I moved to Hilton Head to start my life in South Carolina. Five years ago this week, Mallory Beach was killed in a boating accident that changed life as we know it in the Low Country. And one year ago this week, Alex Murdaugh was convicted of murder. A moment few Low Country locals ever imagined seeing in their lifetime, a Murdaugh held to account in his own home court. It was a big deal. And sidenote Soak Up the Sun premium members are invited to join the Luna Shark team this week as we look back through some of the most memorable moments from Alex Murdaugh's double homicide trial. The broadcast and chat will start at 11am Eastern on Thursday, February 29th. And even after all of this time has passed, as much as things change, they still stay the same. A screenshot from five years ago today just reminded me of that. It was from a source who received a text in the days after Mallory Beach was killed and no one had been

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arrested. The text said quote, “DNR in the sheriff's office is going to protect this family at all cost. Going viral is the only way Mallory gets justice.” These were the types of messages that were flooding our phones that week sounding the alarm that we heard so clearly. And five years later, has the system really changed? On Saturday, which was the five year anniversary of Mallory Beach’s death, Beach family attorney Mark Tinsley tweeted, “Five years ago today, Mallory Beach lost her life. Five years ago today her family waited for her body to be found. While some people in law enforcement tried to help Alex five years later, those people still have badges and SC is still second and DUI related deaths. Do better, demand more.” Mark is right, we must do better, and we must demand more if we really want to change the system. Some of the members of law enforcement who appeared to have helped Alex in Randolph in their apparent mission to steer the investigation away from Paul not only still carry badges, but some have even switched agencies. Some have been promoted and awarded. These are men who chose to look the other way, chose to not write down what they were hearing, chose to intentionally bungle elements of their investigations. Men who allowed the Murdaugh family behind the crime scene tape, who thought about the needs of the Murdaugh family above the needs of the beach family who forgot to turn on their body cameras or who allowed body camera footage to disappear. They all collect salaries paid to them by taxpayers, and they all will collect retirement paid to them by taxpayers. And they get to continue to use their authority to make life and death decisions about the taxpayers who pay them. Even though they have proven to us that some people don't matter as much when people like the Murdaugh’s are involved. Nothing changes. Nothing gets better. The world saw what Alex and Randolph tried to do in the bo crash case, they saw how Alex abused his badge by waving it around the hospital by letting it hang obscenely out of his pocket. So it was visible to law enforcement and to anyone who dared to question him when he tried to enter the other kids' rooms. The civil cases that



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emerge from the boat crash and the investigation into Maggie and Paul's murders showed us all what an investigation looks like when it involves a member of the Murdaugh family. And five years later, we're still seeing so many similarities between the boat crash and the Stephen Smith case. In both cases, law enforcement failed to do their jobs to preserve key evidence in the initial investigation. And yet, in both cases, law enforcement has not been held to account for that. Before we get into our recent reporting on the Stephen Smith case, let's talk about a few updates from SLED that I don't think we've reported on before. I say I don't think we've reported on it before because honestly, I don't remember. And we need to make this clear. When we were going through old notes this past week, we were reminded of this information. And it was one of those things that we were both like I vaguely remember this. This happens a lot when you've been covering a case for this long, not to mention a case that includes two and a half solid years of breaking news and outrageous twists and turns. So according to our sources SLED has accounted for every piece of evidence meaning nothing is missing, including the rape kit that seemed to disappear into thin air according to the case file. Also SLED has cracked Stephen's phone and his iPad. All of this is encouraging. As we said in our last episode about Stephen, we're going to keep telling the story of who Stephen was while focusing on individual pieces of evidence. This week, we're going to start sharing everything we're learning from an initial download of Stephen's, iPad and phone. But first we want to give an update on the investigation that was started last year by Sandy and her attorneys.

Liz Farrell 07:15

This week on Cup of Justice we talked to Dr. Kenny Kinsey, the beloved crime scene expert who helped put Alex Murdaugh behind bars for murdering Maggie and Paul. If you haven't already listened to it, I highly recommend you do because it was a really great conversation.

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Obviously, we discussed the trial and how it was the messy crime scene that Alex left behind at Moselle that night in June 2021. That ended up giving him away, along with Alex's long list of relentless lies. But more importantly, we talked to Dr. Kinsey about the Stephen Smith case and his role in trying to get it solved once and for all. And we talked to him about what he found when he launched his investigation last March, after he was hired by Sandy Smith and her attorneys at Bland Richter to investigate the circumstances surrounding Stephen's death. One of the elements Dr. Kinsey looked at was why Stephen was found where he was on Sandy Run Road. This was a crucial question to get answered, or at least to get the potential answers narrowed down to just a few and Dr. Kinsey was able to do that. To that end, there were four basic questions that he sought to answer. The first was, was Stephen killed at a location other than where his remains were found? The next was, was his body manipulated or moved in any way after the fatal injury, but before his death? There was also what caused the fatal injury to Stephen and did Stephen have defensive wounds on his arms? So there was a thought out there that Stephen might not have been injured where his body was found. The way his body was positioned it almost looked like two people could have picked him up by his arms and legs and simply placed him in the road to make it look like he had been hit by a vehicle. For instance, there are people who have said that Stephen was at a party that night and that he was hit in the head there and then transported to Sandy Run Road to fabricate an accident scene. According to Dr. Kinsey's report, Stephen's body showed no signs of defensive wounds. As you know from the initial autopsy report, Stephen's right shoulder was dislocated and it's still not clear what caused that. But as far as the scratches found on Stephen's arms, Dr. Kinsey believes that the lack of consistency in the pattern on his arms would indicate that Stephen got those marks from when his arms hit the road. The slight momentum from falling to the ground would be the cause of that. early on. When we first started looking into this case



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in 2019, we could see that there was no trail of blood, nothing that would obviously indicate that Stephen's body had been moved but we were told by an investor gave her a friend of ours that the large pool of blood had the potential to cover up a short trail if, say Stephen were removed from the bed of a pickup truck and placed on the road directly behind it, but Dr. Kinsey was able to roll this out. He said he believed that Stephen died in the place he was found because of a blood pattern or not on Stephen's face that showed he was still breathing for an unknown length of time after he was injured, time and distance would have altered that pattern. For instance, if Stephen had been moved, there likely would have been a visible disruption in how those droplets presented. In Cup of Justice Dr. Kinsey also indicated that a human only has so much blood so adults, for instance, have an average of 10 and a half pints. After Stephen's heart stopped beating, he would have continued to lose blood through gravity if he had been transported. As it was explained to us by another source if Stephen had been moved, he likely would have bled out before getting to Sandy Run Road, and the pooling of blood would not have been as significant. Now in looking at the likelihood of Stephen walking the route that he appears to have taken from his car, Dr. Kinsey went on quite a hike. He started at the location where Stephen's car was found nearly three miles away on Bamburgh highway, and looked at all the ways Stephen could have gotten to the point where his body was found. In his report, he notes that there were initial reports that Stephen may have traveled through the wooded area on the night of his death. I hate to split hairs here, but that isn't quite the case. Or rather, I want to make sure that we're clear on what investigators were specifically told in 2015. There weren't reports that Stephen would have walked through the woods in the sense that he would have skipped the roadway altogether in favor of picking his way through dense pine trees to get home from where his car was. It was more that he would have ducked into the woods and hidden or walked into the woods at that point on Sandy Run Road until



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it was safe to come back out. The main point is this. His family has been clear that Stephen would not have been in the middle of the road if a car was coming in either direction. They say he would have moved immediately when he saw the car coming in the distance. As Dr. Kinsey notes in his report, despite a slight curve in the road, at the point where Stephen died, he would have been able to see a car coming for two tenths of a mile in either direction. In his report, Dr. Kinsey notes that when he was there in April 2023, the crops just west of Stephen's body were not in season and the woods that had been to the east of Stephen's body had now been clear cut. We looked at Highway Patrol photos from the night Stephen was killed and from the next day, and you can see that to the west of his body, the field was filled with tall corn stalks, and to the east, there were rows of neatly planted pine trees with some undergrowth. According to those photos, visibility looks about the same then as it did in the spring of 2023. Meaning Stephen would have been able to see a car coming for quite some time in either direction. If he were simply walking on the road to get home, he would have had plenty of time to get out of harm's way. It's also super quiet on that road, which means he likely would have heard a vehicle coming in either direction. A look at the road shows that there's enough flat grassy Earth on either side to walk on instead of the middle of the road. Look at the Highway Patrol photos from 2015 shows us that the grass had not been recently mowed on either side, but it wasn't prohibitively tall either. The grass was also uneven, meaning it was shorter the closer you got to the road, there appeared to be enough room to walk and not fear an encounter with a hidden snake. Also, we have to know Stephen had his iPhone with him that night. Flashlights were standard on iPhone starting in 2013. We don't know what version of the iPhone Stephen had with him that night, but we do know that the phone he got was from Mark Bickhart, who at the time indicated to investigators that the phone was new. We will unpack the Mark Bickhart cell phone situation in a later episode because there is a lot going on there. I should also



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remind you here that Stephen's toxicology report showed that he had no drugs or alcohol in his system that night. This is important, especially because recently they've seen a lot of rumors out there that Stephen intentionally walked in front of a moving vehicle. It is so clear that the people repeating those rumors do not know this case, nor do they know much about Stephen at all.

Mandy Matney 14:44

Okay, back to the woods. There were two mentions in the case file about Stephen and the woods. The first was on July 17 2015. When his twin sister Stephanie spoke with South Carolina Highway Patrol Corporal Michael Duncan, please excuse homophobia.

Corporal Michael Duncan 15:01

He's not the typical, and I hate to put it this way, but people see people that are gay as weak. He wasn't that type.

Stephanie Smith 15:10

He was really strong. And, you know, he looked like the type of person that couldn't fight. But when you actually, he's very scrappy. And they were saying how it had to, if it was an incident that he got beat or anything, that it had to have been at least three people. And he had to have known people. Because, you know, he wouldn't, you know, randomly hop in the car with somebody, you know, he wouldn't, he would run in the woods for a couple of miles until he found my house before.

Corporal Michael Duncan 15:45

If he's walking that roadway, say, let me make sure I understand what you're saying. If he's walking down because he ran out of gas or whatever, or the car broke down or whatever, they're walking down the road, if he saw a car come up.



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Stephanie Smith 15:57

In this road, you can see the distance, he wouldn't just stand there in the road. Now he would hurry up and hop in the woods and if it passed, he would jump back out. And if he felt that they were, you know, slowing down or something he would get farther in the woods and keep walking until he got it was safe enough to come out.

Mandy Matney 16:15

The second mention was from a young man from Stephen's High School, who Stephen apparently used to hook up with, he told Corporal Duncan that he hadn't seen Stephen and more than a year but that he'd heard some things. This interview is from August 27 2015.

Corporal Michael Duncan 16:34

And now let me ask you this. Have you heard anything strange about how Stephen died or any rumors or anything like that? Have you heard anything off the street, whether it be about Mark or anybody else?

High School Friend 16:49

What I heard was that he was running from somebody.

Corporal Michael Duncan 16:52

Said he was running from...?

High School Friend 16:54

Running in the woods from a guy like he was running to escape somebody.

Corporal Michael Duncan 17:00

Now who do you hear that from? Did you hear that from Stephen's mama?



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High School Friend 17:03

Though...I heard this from my classmates.

Corporal Michael Duncan 17:07

Okay. And did they even describe who it may have been?

High School Friend 17:11

The guy he's running from...we figured maybe nobody knew him and I guess that Stephen was messing with kind of trying to bring him out or something like that. That's what we thought.

Mandy Matney 17:28

The last part might have been hard to hear. The young man told Corporal Duncan that he and his friends had heard Stephen was being chased by an older man in the woods and that they were trying to figure out who the older man was because they thought it could have been someone who Stephen had been messing around with who was worried he would be outed. Dr. Kinsey described the area between where Stephen's car was found that night and where his body was found nearly three miles away as very unforgiving. According to his report, if Stephen were to have entered the woods near his car and tried to get home that way, he would have soon encountered an eight foot high steel hog fence that would have all been prohibited his passage to a cut through road, he would have had to climb the fence and because of the overgrowth and the fact that he was wearing shorts that night, he would have been all cut up.

Liz Farrell 18:21

Speaking of that cut through road, it's called Corbin Road. This road would have been a little longer of a walk, but it would have kept Stephen off the main road. However, it's a long dirt road that according to Dr Kinsey it is very desolate. He said he saw no evidence of lighting



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that would have been on that road in 2015. Meaning the best route for Stephen to have taken that night from where his car was found seems to be to walk down Bamburgh highway and then to take that ride on Sandy Run Road where he was found as to what caused Stephen's fatal injury. Consistent with the findings of the second autopsy Dr. Kinsey believes that Stephen was killed by something protruding off a high speed vehicle. He also believes that the person who hit Stephen would have been aware of hitting him and that they chose to leave the scene without making an attempt to help Stephen. Remember where Stephen's wound was. It was on the right side of his forehead. So if you place your hand on the right side of your forehead and right now, and then visualize yourself walking along the yellow line, in the middle of a road, it's very difficult to understand how this happened. The injury of Stephen's forehead was the point of initial impact. When he was hit, he fell to the ground and he hit the back of his head on the concrete. What do you notice when you visualize standing on the yellow line with your hand on the right side of your forehead, the car to your right would be coming up behind you, meaning it would have hit you from behind at first. And what about the car passing you on your left? The car you're facing would hit you on the left side of your forehead. And this is the complicating factor here. How did a vehicle hit Stephen on the right side of his forehead? We now know that Stephen was hit by something that either was or wasn't a part of a moving vehicle or maybe it was something protruding off of the moving vehicle. And we know he was killed where his body was found. He was not moved from that location. So explain that. The way Dr. Kinsey explains it is that the driver of the vehicle would have had to cross over into the opposing lane prior to hitting Stephen. If that's the case, Stephen would have been hit by something on the passenger side of that vehicle, right. Okay. Now, Stephen's walk home looks a lot different, right? Was he running from someone? Were there people in a vehicle messing with him? Did he run into the road and attempt to turn away from the vehicle? Or was he



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walking in the middle of the road refusing to move out of the way of an oncoming vehicle and got clipped when the vehicle attempted to swerve out of the way? If that were the case? Why wouldn't the person have stopped? It wouldn't have been their fault, right? Okay, maybe the driver had been drinking. Why not tell the police later, after they can no longer prove you were drinking? Why not tell the police now after knowing that the Smith family has been suffering for this long without answers? Why not unburden your soul now. But here's the thing, everything we know about Stephen, everything we're continuing to learn about Stephen tells us No. This is not a person who would intentionally get in the way of a moving vehicle. This is not a person who would not have sought safety when he saw a car headed toward him. This was a man who was used to walking these long highways and Hampton county in the dark, who knew how to navigate these roads, and who from all indications would have called his sister or a friend to help him when he ran out of gas. He was also a man with a bright future ahead of them and a large group of friends who adored him.

EXPOSING CRIME & CORRUPTION

Mandy Matney 22:03

Liz and I have spent the past two weeks going through a CD that Sandy gave us. That CD contains some content that the highway patrol says is from Stephen's phone and iPad. years ago, the Highway Patrol mailed Sandy this CD, frustrated after the investigation had gone nowhere for years. She put it to the side and was unprepared to go through all of it. Some things are just too painful. Sandy shared the CD with us because she knows Unlike others, we won't post the entirety of the file online with zero regard to the privacy of her son and to her family. She trusts that we will be thoughtful with the evidence and not do anything to compromise the case. When the investigation was reopened by SLED and 2021, attorney Andy Savage offered to represent Sandy Smith. She handed over everything she had in the investigation to Savage's investigator Steve Peterson, including the CD because at the time

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seemed he trusted him and she knew the attorney-client relationship meant the CD would remain confidential. Now, there are a lot of red flags from the gecko with Steve Peterson and Andy Savage's short involvement in this case. In the few months that Savage worked as Sandy's attorney, he essentially did three things for Sandy. One, he hired a PI who allegedly conducted a quick investigation and investigation, which sources who were interviewed during that investigation told us had an extremely narrow focus to he silenced Sandy, during a time when her son's case needed momentum in the public's attention. He told Sandy she wasn't allowed to speak to the media without his permission. Not only that, he told her he would stop representing her for free if she were to speak with the media. And third, he made a statement to the media that appeared to attempt to clear the name of the Murdaughs in the case. And he made this statement before telling Sandy that he was going to say that to the media. And before informing her of how he came to that conclusion. Specifically, Ed savage told ABC 13 that quote, There are suspects we have in sight that are unconnected to Murdaugh. The focus any in the media have on Murdaugh may be unfounded. He said that he was basing this statement on the work done by his private investigators. Then he went on to clarify that he was referring specifically to Paul Murdaugh, meaning that the suspects were unconnected to Paul Murdaugh, which is a strange delineation given that Paul had just been killed a few months earlier. Also suspicious with these to Peterson the pie has continued to appear On every TV and YouTube show that we'll have him to speak about the case as if he were an insider with insider knowledge, when in reality, he hasn't been a part of this case since 2021. Sandy has repeatedly told him to stop speaking about this case, as his confusing statements and shoddy conclusions are constantly causing chaos in the investigation. Oh, and remember this jailhouse phone call where Alex specifically mentioned Andy savage. When you're listening try to pay attention to Alex's wording when there's some over speak from Buster.

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Alex Murdaugh 25:40

Did SLED ever come out and say there's no connection even though they told Andy Savage that?

Buster Murdaugh 26:21

SLED has not released anything. They wouldn't even release a statement about...what was the most recent thing? There was something...something came out not long ago talking about how there's been like a breakthrough and evidence. Something to do like the homicides and SLED wanting to come out and issue a statement saying that there has been no further evidence like, gathered. So personally, I would not count on SLED to help in any way.

Liz Farrell 26:52

Did you catch that? Alex says did SLED ever come out and say there's no connection? And Buster says no. And then Alex says even though they told Andy savage that weird, huh? How would Elek know what SLED told Andy savage. It's not something you read. Andy said that the PII hadn't found a connection, not the SLED hat and maybe it got related to alcohol or maybe Alex misunderstood what he is being told, still hearing the name Andy Savage, come out of Alex Murdaugh's mouth, around the same time that Sandy was wondering why the heck this man was brought into her life in the first place, out of nowhere to help her is strange to us. I say all of this to say that the CD is another piece of broken evidence. In this case, it appears that years ago, Highway Patrol downloaded photos and screenshots from Stephen's phone and iPad, which is news to us. The download unfortunately does not contain the parts of the phone and the iPad that we need the most. And that would be the phone calls, the messages, the location data, etc. It is not a forensic download by any means. We also don't know if anyone deleted certain images at any point from the CD. However, the CD contains thousands of images. And these thousands of images all



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have a file number attached to them. It's not clear at what point they were assigned these numbers. But the numbers do appear to be sequential with lots of gaps in the sequence, meaning photos do appear to be missing. But we don't know why or at what point that occurred. Were they deleted back when Stephen was using his phone tablet or after that, given how irregular this investigation has been? We have to ask those questions.

Mandy Matney 28:46

Liz and I have been investigating Stephen Smith's murder for almost five years now. And it just occurred to both of us how little we really know about Stephen, until we pored through the images on the CD we were given. We've talked to dozens of people who knew Stephen over the years, but the images on his phone told me about a person I really related to a person who in another world 19 year old Mandy would have been great friends with Stephen Smith had a fantastic sense of humor, school and reading were at the center of his world. He was often frustrated with the cost of college, which is evident in the many memes he saved on his phone like this one that said:

DAVID MOSES 29:36

How to pay for college in 1983 work part time and summers maybe take out minimal loans. How to pay for college in 2013. Which one of your organs is the most valuable? What to do with your degree in 1983 work in your field? What to do with your degree in 2013 cry?

Mandy Matney 29:58

Stephen was independent hinker. Here are a few important quotes I found saved on his phone.



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DAVID MOSES 30:05

It is better to be hated for what you are than loved for what you are not. Andre Dede, I used to think the worst thing in life was to end up all alone. It's not the worst thing in life is to end up with people that make you feel all alone. Robert Williams, you have to be odd to be number one, Dr. Seuss.

Mandy Matney 30:29

Then there are quotes like this one. That related to Stephen's situation so much. It shocked me when I saw it.

DAVID MOSES 30:38

Years of love have been forgotten in the hatred of a minute. Edgar Allan Poe.

Mandy Matney 30:45

Stephen read a lot, way more than I did when I was 19. We saw hundreds of screenshots from books, he was reading on his iPad, often with his favorite sentences highlighted, and new words bookmarked, so he would remember them and his vocabulary. Sandy has always said Stephen was studious, determined to study his way out of his small town of Hampton, South Carolina. He had a clear plan for his future, even in high school, to become a nurse long enough to afford medical school, then eventually becoming Dr. Stephen Smith. I never realized how serious Stephen was and how smart he was, until I spoke with Miss Michelle, a former teacher at Wade Hampton, who I met at a brewery years ago. Miss Michelle taught health science in Stephen's junior year, from 2012 to 2013. Among her many students over the years, Stephen always stuck out in the best of ways. Here is Miss Michelle.



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Miss Michelle 31:52

Oh my gosh, okay, he, he was very mature, he was focused, he was very much in line with telling you this is my plan, because some students will even adults sometimes really don't have an idea of what they want to do. But he was very focused on going to nursing school and becoming an RN, and then later exploring different paths of going from there. So it's very focused, serious, humble, but also goofy and funny. But he knew when to turn it off and turn it on. So you can't be serious all the time. He was always prepared. He was, you know, you never had to worry about him not having what he needed, or a textbook or being prepared for a quiz or a test. He was one of those who picked up on very quickly as a teacher that he was wise beyond his years, and also that he very smart, very smart that, you know, he might play it off sometimes. But I just contributed that to his focus on wanting to go to the next level and also that he enjoyed reading. Unfortunately, you just don't see students reading for leisure time, like you used to. And thinking back and reflecting on this. This was the transition time of iPads and cell phones had a place but they were not as dependent on them and like they are now so you would see an actual paperback book, you know, that he was carrying around or, you know that and that'll something I was going to share too, that this class, I always also shared with the students that you may not want to go in the health field and that's okay. This class is just to explore it. So you had some students that just needed they needed a class to fill in their schedule. And then you have some students like Stephen that this was a means to an end you needed this class to go to the next level.

Liz Farrell 33:49

Michelle was also in charge of Health Occupation Students of America. HOSA, essentially a science club for students who are interested in future health careers from EMTs to doctors. Every year, South Carolina,



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HOSA students competed in a state conference. Michelle remembers the year that Stephen competed vividly.

Miss Michelle 34:11

Every March, there was a state conference and you could send students from your chapter and we had a chapter and we would meet either before school or after school and some of the competitions were academic. And that's what Stephen was interested in, which was medical terminology. And so, of course you to go on this trip, it was a big deal because you had to make a deposit. You had to make sure the students were vested in wanting to participate, they had to have no disciplinary actions and their teachers had to be okay with letting him out of school for two and a half days because they were going to miss their other classes. So so it was a combination of different things. But the year he went there were about I'm trying to think about 10 to 12 but just really, really good kids. And they're different grades nine through 12. He participated in the medical terminology competition, which was a test, and you're stuck. You're balancing your regular high school load of academics, but you're also having to study on your own. And that's what we would do at meetings is do prep for the competition's. I just this always stuck out in my mind, Stephen would always come to me for extra study aids. And that's what I was referring to earlier nails, so much of its Alextronic. But back then we would have these little tubs of big index cards, and put them on a little silver ring and just flip the cards over and over and over. Because it was it was a lot of memorization. And then you would have to take the terms and match them to the body parts and the body systems. And that sounds easy. But when it's in Latin and Greek, you could just be like I said, speaking a different language. But some kids were going, Hey, I'm going on a trip. But for Stephen, you could tell he was very serious, but he was going to have a good time too.



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Liz Farrell 36:03

While Stephen was a jokester, he was also very nice about it. Michelle remembered a great example from that weekend of the HLS a competition that perfectly describes Stephen's kind sense of humor.

Miss Michelle 36:16

I remember we went to a Mexican restaurant. It's in North Charleston at the convention center so we could walk everywhere. And there were some restaurants across the street so and me being nervous of course, I'm like, you know, y'all are not used to crossing busy highways. Let's make sure we you know, hit the button so we can go across we're not going to jaywalk, but we went on to a Mexican restaurant and the other sponsors and I sat at a booth and of course, let this student sit at a nice big table. And I have a couple of pictures from that night. But they've they of course, and Stephen was the root of this Stephen or another young man, I cannot remember. But they thought it'd be funny to tell the waitstaff that it was my birthday and of course, it was not my birthday. So out came the Sombrero and the music. And they they just really thought that was hilarious. And you know, of course it was, you know, I went along with it that and ate the ice cream and everything, but they were just real tickled that they pulled that off.

Liz Farrell 37:18

Even as a high schooler Stephen lived by the work hard play hard mentality. As much as he joked around that night at dinner, Michelle remembers after dinner, he went straight to his hotel room to study for the competition. The competition was really important for kids like Stephen who grew up in a small town and learned in a small school district that didn't have a lot of funding, it was their chance to shine and show themselves and their community that they could compete with the kids from the bigger fancier schools. And they could go on to do bigger things than what their hometown had to offer them.



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Miss Michelle 37:53

What I always told the students and I hope they took it to heart was health science, just like any other academic class was, there's a series of standards that come out from the State Department of Education. And I always told them, it doesn't matter what our classroom look like, you are just as smart because you are mastering these skills like everybody else in the state. But me telling them that was one thing. The students actually participating in these competitions and competing against the big schools from the bigger cities in South Carolina and seeing that they were on the same level. And it's just like a parent trying to tell a child you know, you can do this, but they could see for themselves that they could do it. So it was a real competence booster. And also they had to dress up they had to be professionally dressed. And so Stephen was in his suit and he looked very sharp. And so it was just neat to see the pride but of that group that year, Stephen was the only one that mastered the test. So you go to the next level. And so the ones that exceeded the second level go on to the to the national which he did not, but that was okay because it showed showed him what what he could do.

Liz Farrell 39:06

His schedule at Orangeburg Tech was tough. And from the photos and screenshots, it was clear to us that school was his priority. There were hundreds of photos of things like notes on a whiteboard in his classroom, screenshots of his assignments, photos of pages and his textbooks, photos upon photos of anatomy, sketches and anatomy models and screenshots of his schedule, which was packed in the fall semester of 2014, which was his first semester in college. He had General Psychology at 8am on Mondays and Wednesdays, after that he had developmental math. Later in the day, he had medical vocab and anatomy on Tuesdays and Thursdays. His day started at 930 with



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anatomy and physiology with clinical labs Later that afternoon, along with a college skills requisite

Miss Michelle 40:01

I was super proud of him going to Arnsberg tech. And just to give a little background on the technical college system, being an arienne, in the state of South Carolina, some people know this, some people don't. But a two year technical college degree, you can get an associate's degree of nursing, or you can go to a four year college and get a bachelors of science of nursing. Regardless of the academic path you choose, both sets have to take the national exam, which is called the NCLEX National Council licensure exam. So it's not like you just wake up and say, you know, I think I want to be a nurse, I'm gonna go down to the technical college and take some classes, you have to be accepted to the school first, but then you have to be accepted into the program. And since you're doing so much hands on with patients in the healthcare system, they only take X amount of students, so I'm not sure what his class was His mission class was, it may have been 50. It may have been 100. But that's it. So waiting lists are a very real reality in that. So the fact that he went right out of high school, because in nursing programs, you find a lot of second career people that have worked in the healthcare field and decided to go back. So the fact that he went straight in was really a testament to his academics and his maturity. The two year degree is comprehensive. I mean, you're doing four years worth of work in two years, and a lot of hands on and lot early mornings and late nights. And so to know that he was committed to that is extraordinary.

Mandy Matney 41:40

One thing Michelle told me that really stuck out about Stephen, he had a lot of close friends, who was very confident in himself, and often had a pack leader mentality. He was by no means a loner in school. This is



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again, important as people continue to spread baseless rumors that Stephen would have intentionally walked into a moving vehicle.

Miss Michelle 42:05

Well, I'm observing from the teacher standpoint, but in the classroom, you always have those students that stick out in the leadership role. And the neat thing about that medical terminology class was that I had freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors, but he easily established himself as someone that other kids, hey, what you know, what's the answer to this? How do we do this? And I was always putting them in small groups, or are pairing them off and mixing them up. And yes, he was a beloved member of our class. It's almost like a little community that you create every with every class and every class has a personality. And he had one of his near dear good friends in there. When he passed, I went to the funeral. And I remember I sat with another teacher, there were some teachers there, and I walked out and I ran smack dab into his good friend in there, and I was fine. Blah, say, No, you're never fun. But I was holding myself together. But the minute I saw her, I said, You were his friend. And I just lost it. I just lost it. And another young man that had been on the trip, I've said, y'all were his friends. Y'all were his friends, but I never. Yes, they loved him. And you know, you see students in the cafeteria out in the courtyard at all, but he always had a group of kids with him.

Mandy Matney 43:46

Stephen was loved by so many. This has been evident in every bit of information we have reported on Stephen so far. But even though he was loved, no one has had the courage to come forward with information about how he died. Even after all of these years later, even after so much has changed in Hampton County. We are asking that more of Stephen's friends come forward. Even if you don't have information about Stephen's death, telling us about his life is equally as



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important and can open doors that we wouldn't think about in this investigation. If you knew Stephen personally, especially around the time he died, and would be willing to talk with us, please visit answers for Stephen.com or email Mandy at lunasharkmedia.com. We know that those who knew Stephen miss him all of the time and think about him and the future he could have had all of the time, like his teacher, Miss Michelle said.

Miss Michelle 44:51

And that picture I was telling you about with the Mexican restaurant there. I mean, it's just a snapshot of time from That evening where they're all in this restaurant, it was almost like a dining room table and they're all sitting around that table. And you look at him and I'm like, okay, that one's a firefighter in Charleston, that one is gone on to do such and such. This one is working and just seeing they're doing their grown up things. And then the part that's missing is, you know, Stephen didn't get to live his dream.

Mandy Matney 45:27

This is perhaps the most stunning and saddening conclusion that has haunted us as we've learned about Stephen and the past few weeks what potential this man could have had, if something different happened on July 8 2015, what places he could have gone, the lives he could have saved, the people he could have helped the difference he would have made, his life mattered. It was worth a whole lot more than the local press in the community gave him at the time of his death. Stephen had a full and complicated life as most 19 year olds do. He had just reached the end of his first full year out of high school when the newness of Independence was still fresh and fun. And when you're starting to get a glimpse of what being an adult is going to entail, the files we have from Stephen's, iPhone and iPad, tell that story. And we are going to share more of what is on there as we continue to look at



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what is known and not known about his life and his death. Obviously, Stephen's sexuality was no secret and could end up playing a role in the why of his death. But even so, it is clear that Stephen was living his truth proudly. And even though the CD doesn't tell the full story of Stephen's life, it gives us a lot of insight. The thousands of files on Stephen's phone and iPad include screenshots of conversations and photos of men he was interested in and of men who were interested in him. There are a lot of means and photos that knowing how he ended up dying could now be considered uncanny. And there are even photos of his little yellow car when he was considering buying it. And in the background, we could see the big PMPED building looming because of course, we'll talk more about all of this in an upcoming episode. We do want to mention that there were no overt connections to the Murdaugh family in any of the photos that we have gone through so far. We want to remind those who know what happened to Stephen Smith that now is the time to talk to SLED. Remember, there is a \$30,000 reward. Remember, most importantly, that coming forward would mean the world to his family who deserved the peace of knowing what happened to Stephen. Remember, small details solve big investigations. Stay tuned, stay pesky and stay in the sunlight. True Sunlight is a Luna Shark production created by me Mandy Matney and co-hosted by journalist Liz Farrell. Learn more about our mission and membership at lunasharkmedia.com. Interruptions provided by Luna and Joe Pesky.