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Clerk of Court

with  
NEIL R. GORDON

BEHIND THE  
DOORS OF JUSTICE: THE MURDAUGH

HILL & GORDON



A look at the Murdaugh Murders trial through the eyes of Rebecca "Becky" Hill, the trial's Clerk of Court.

Rebecca "Becky" Hill had known the Murdaugh family for decades. Her own family's connection to them went back to the 1950s. She had known about their good deeds, and she was there when Randolph Murdaugh received the Order of the Palmetto, the highest honor bestowed on a civilian by the Governor of South Carolina.

Becky had also known about the rumors of corruption and crime surrounding the Murdaugh family. What she didn't know was that Richard Alexander "Alex" Murdaugh was capable of murdering his own wife and son.

Serving as the Clerk of Court at the time of the trial, Becky Hill was present in the courtroom in the case of the State of South Carolina v. Richard Alexander Murdaugh.

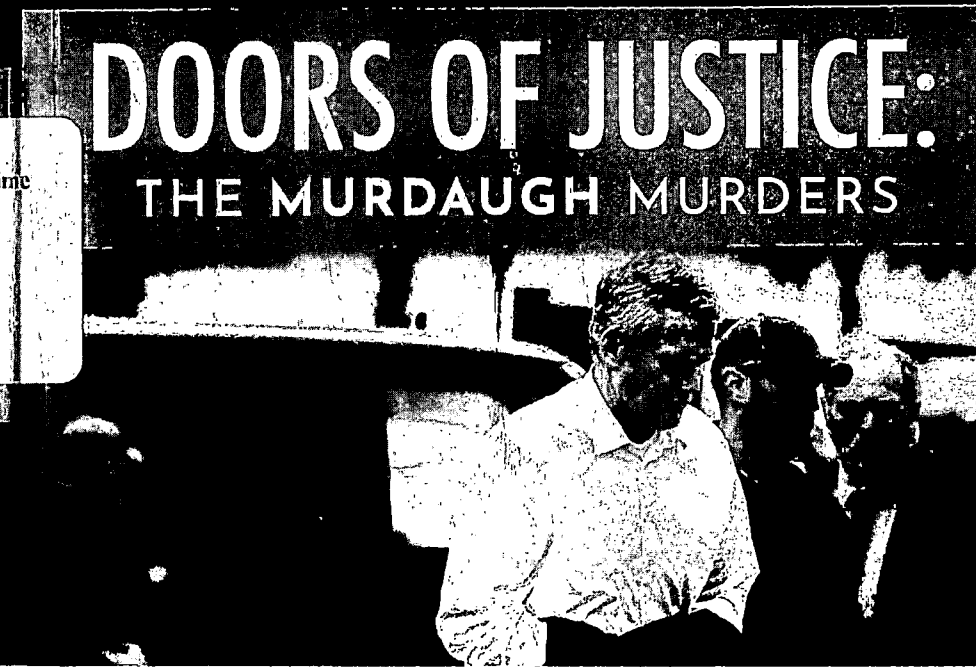
Join her on her journey as she visits the crime scene, shares heartfelt details about the Judge and people involved, navigates the massive media frenzy, delves into her own family's history with the Murdaughs, and ultimately, reads the guilty verdicts on live television. The verdicts that would put Alex Murdaugh away for two life sentences with no possibility of parole.



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True Crime  
Hill  
10/23



theft, and an investigation would find he had been confronted about missing money at the firm by Jeanne Seckinger on June 7—the same day Maggie and Paul were killed. He admitted to organizing a botched hit on himself so that his surviving son could collect on his life insurance.

“This may be the most outrageous thing I’ve seen in thirty years in South Carolina,” journalist Randy Covington said.

But inside the Colleton County Courthouse, where the trial was stretched for weeks, the atmosphere was mostly staid, looking at times like a wedding reception. Spectators in suits, sundresses, and heels milled around in the moments between witnesses, passing around mints and sharing sweaters for the courtroom’s cool air. Several said they had come to see the powerful finally held to account, even as Alex was still apparently receiving deferential treatment.

“He’s chewing gum, he’s talking to family...he even touched them,” Eric Bland said. “For normal defendants, that doesn’t happen.”

But for decades, juries in the Lowcountry have sided with the Murdaugh family, issuing the settlements that made them wealthy. Alex’s future will be decided the same way, perhaps a final test of his influence.

“Have you noticed? He only cries when the jury is looking,” said Ruth, who declined to give her last name. She lived in Walterboro and came almost every day to

watch the trial. Word is from someone on the defense team that Alex had been practicing and perfecting his snot-and-crying display for weeks.

I guess we will wait to see if any other twists reveal themselves and take the Murdaugh saga in another surprising direction.

—Rebecca “Becky” H. Hill,  
Clerk of Court, Colleton County,  
South Carolina, 2023

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County Circuit  
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conflicted, by professional  
oped with the defendant Alex

to the pressure, no one expected a six-week trial in the Murdaugh murders trial.

Jurors' names are randomly selected from a master list of names derived from a combination of the list of registered voters and the list of licensed drivers in the county. Random selection means that each name has an equal chance of being chosen. This procedure, and all other procedures related to jury selection, is conducted without reference to the race, creed, gender, color, national origin, or economic status of the individual. All except citizenship.

With the charges that were at stake, the high-profile defendant who was also a well-known lawyer, and the international media coverage, a well-executed jury selection process was critical for the Murdaugh trial. Within a week of the verdict, Murdaugh's defense team decided to appeal the guilty verdicts based on his alleged financial misdeed evidence being allowed into the murder trial.

I first learned how a financial hardship situation on the jury was averted while I was 30,000 feet in the air, flying from the Charleston Airport in South Carolina to LaGuardia Airport in New York on March 5, 2023. I was accompanying three jurors so that they could be interviewed live on *The Today Show* just a few days after I read the guilty verdict.

One of the twelve original jurors who voted to

convict Murdaugh almost didn't serve because of the financial burdens he would be under. It involved the mother of his child, who lives hundreds of miles away in another state. Can you imagine the choice this young man had to make?

*Option 1:* Serve on the jury. Help decide the "Trial of the Century." Risk jail time for lack of child support payment.

*Option 2:* Stay at regular job and pay child support. Maintain his freedom.

Judge Newman, again, in all his wisdom, asked the juror to take a day and think about whether he could serve. He had a difficult relationship with his babies' mom and had struggled in the past to meet the expectations that were on him. He did not want to risk that happening again, but he was also compelled by his civic duty.

I was present in Judge Newman's chambers when the juror came back the next day and said, "I received an unexpected blessing." God is a God of unexpected blessings and miracles, and the entire courtroom staff was happy to hear that our original juror would now remain with us.

What I learned on our flight to New York City after

the trial was that three close friends of his all chipped in and paid the financially strapped juror his regular salary. For all six weeks of the trial! Several thousand dollars.

The jury selection process began with a summons being mailed to Colleton County residents on December 5, 2022. The clerk's office has a mailing process when mailing the documents and summons to jurors. People in Colleton County with certain qualifications randomly get correspondence.

Our team would have made any Amazon distribution center or call center proud as we stuffed the following into envelopes:

- A summons
- Four-page questionnaire
- Return envelope
- Postage affixed to nearly 1,000 addresses

We started getting a flurry of phone calls a few days later leading up to Christmas 2022. Mostly it was people wanting no part of being on the jury, and some could be eliminated on the phone. A few were aware it was for the Murdaugh murder trial, but many were not.

Normally, we mail out 250 for a trial and get about 25% or so to come to the courthouse for the jury pool. The judge, attorneys, and I decided on 900 to increase

the jury pool and about 40% showed up after mailing or bringing in their answers.

We communicated to the prospective jurors to come to court at four different time slots on Monday, January 23. Jury selection ended Tuesday, January 24. What some thought could take two weeks was done in two days. Thankfully, we had a strategic plan:

Phase one was the prosecution and defense teams getting to know the jurors. That was the initial questionnaire in which they provided information about if the jurors or their relatives had a history of working with legal entities or law enforcement agencies or jail/prison systems. It also involved questions about being on a jury before or witnessing or being a victim of a crime. Questions also included how a prospective juror consumed their media on the "true crime genre," police procedure programming, and the wave of podcasts and social media platforms out there. There was also a place on the questionnaire to explain why someone felt they couldn't serve or be objective. Some who filled out the paperwork declared Murdaugh "guilty" or "not guilty" with their minds made up. In our world, sometimes this is an easy way to get out of jury duty. Instantly, those people were disqualified for bias, which in many cases was what they wanted.

Phase two is not unusual in high-profile cases. Both the prosecution and the defense prepared a second and

Internet "detectives," regular, everyday people who were fascinated by the Murdaugh case, hopped onto Facebook Groups, Instagram, TikTok, and more to try and piece together what really happened. "True crime stories often inspire internet detectives who believe they can help solve the mystery and relish the online attention discussing clues and theories, which can hinder investigations and generate false accusations with tragic results. True crimes are stories. They have suspense, horror, and intrigue, stimulating the same emotions and neurological rewards inherent in the conflict and resolution of a story arc. Emotional activation enhances interest and engagement," added Dr. Rutledge.

Those "fans" were also some of the millions of podcast listeners who couldn't get enough about the case before, during, and after the trial. Murdaugh podcasts became the number one most listened to podcasts in the country, including Mandy Matney's *Murdaugh Murders* podcast, which launched in June 2021. Within two years, Mandy's podcast had 26 million downloads in the first forty-one episodes. Mandy is from the Lowcountry, and she signed on to be one of the executive producers of a *Murdaugh Murders* drama series that's in development with a division of Universal Studio Group. Mandy's credited with being the first journalist to break the Murdaugh story wide open, and she is now followed by a lot of "guerrilla journalists."

During the trial, in the spirit of full transparency, I

provided my cell-phone number and email address to anyone who was involved in any part of the case. As a result, I unexpectedly received several emails with questions, insights, and requests from various internet sleuths:

"Please tell Creighton Waters to mention that Alex Murdaugh is a family annihilator."

"Why is Alex calling Maggie 'Mags,' Paul 'Pau Pau,' and Buster 'Bus Bus'? He has never done this."

"Alex said he would never hurt Paul and Maggie. Ask him who did? If he didn't do it, he had to have help. Who helped him clean up the scene?"

"I think the motive is the life insurance policy on Maggie and Paul. Please pass this on to the lawyers."

"At the end of trial, Court TV panned the jury. Did you see the jury was panned? They have been seen. What are you going to do about it? This is a violation."

Perhaps the pettiest comments from these internet sleuths were about Alex's mannerisms while he sat at the defense table. More than fifty people wanted me to tell Judge Newman that it was bothersome that Alex ----