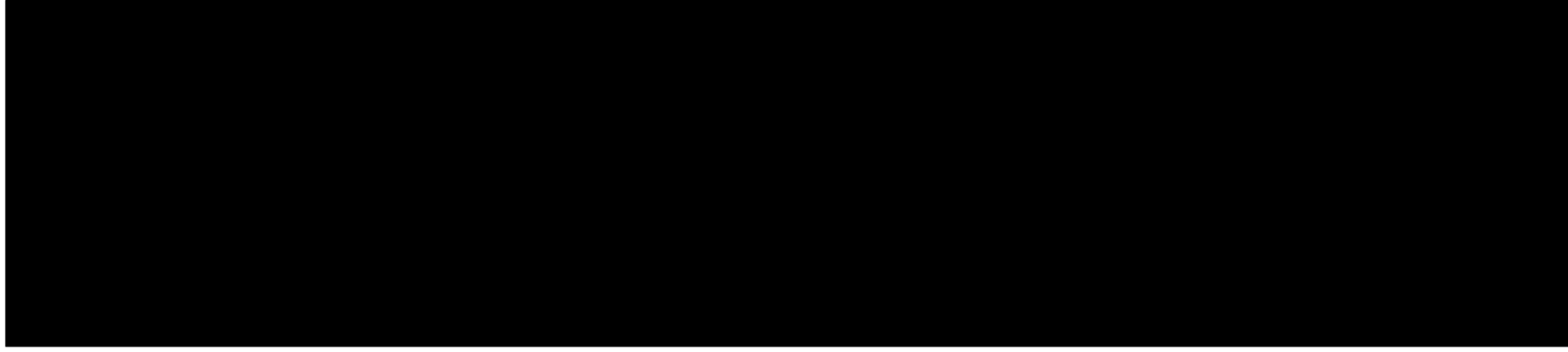


Sandra Smith



September 28, 2016



Re: Stephen Smith Murder Investigation

Dear Sir or Madam:

My family is in desperate need of your help. My 19-year-old son, Stephen Nicholas Smith, was murdered on July 8, 2015, in Hampton County, South Carolina. It has been apparent from the first week of this investigation that authorities are covering up critical evidence, and we no longer know who to trust.

Stephen's father (my ex-husband, who is now deceased) and I were first told that our son was shot to death after running out of gas in the early hours of the morning and exiting his vehicle. Later that day, we were told it was a hit and run. Finally, investigators determined he was beaten to death. He was attacked so violently that the entire side of his face was rebuilt with putty for his funeral. Hampton investigators asked us at that time to continue to publicly say it was a hit-and-run. They claimed they didn't want the killer to know they were looking for him. There have been no named suspects.

The first call my family received after the murder was from authorities notifying us of Stephen's death. The second came very quickly the same morning from Solicitor Randolph Murdaugh. In fact, he called my ex-husband's cell phone as we waited in the police station for a positive identification. He said he heard of the case and was interested in working pro bono as a liaison between the family and investigators. Stephen's father accepted the offer, although we were unsure why Mr. Murdaugh wanted to help us. We also weren't sure how he found out so quickly – even before it was confirmed to be our son. Surprisingly, after just a few interactions, Mr. Murdaugh stopped returning our calls.

Within days of our son's death, Stephen's twin sister, Stephanie, was approached multiple times by peers telling her that Solicitor Murdaugh's nephews were responsible. As a family, it was suspicious to us since he had taken such an immediate interest in the case and then became unreachable so quickly. These suspicions reached new heights weeks later when Stephen's older

brother, Chris, was approached at work by a young man he did not know. This person told Chris he was present when Stephen was murdered and witnessed everything first hand. He said that Solicitor Murdaugh's nephew, Buster Murdaugh (who graduated with Stephen), beat Stephen to death with a baseball bat. He claimed it was because Stephen was gay. (Stephen was in fact gay.) The witness said they were out smashing mailboxes when they came upon Stephen, and Buster seized the opportunity. The young man told Chris that Buster threatened to kill him if he ever spoke up. This information was given to investigators but nothing has come of it.

In reviewing a copy of the 911 dispatch log which I have enclosed (Tab A, Page 2), I found that the first responding officer, Michael Bridges, arrived on the scene within a minute of 911's dispatch, even though in the Hampton County Sheriff's Office Incident Report (Tab B) he claimed to have driven around for a while trying to find my son's body. The second officer, Jason Eubanks, arrived within two minutes. This is suspicious to me because the area where my son was placed is extremely rural. Cops do not patrol that area frequently, and it's not likely an officer, much less two, would coincidentally be patrolling there prior to 5 a.m. They had to be in that area at that time for a reason. I suspect they were there because they already knew Stephen was there, and I suspect the Murdaughs were the ones who told them.

The Murdaughs are probably the most prominent family in Hampton County. Stephen had on more than one occasion mentioned to friends and his twin sister that he was involved romantically with someone from a prominent family in the county who was hiding his sexuality. He said that it would shock people to know this person was gay. We suspect this could be the young man Stephen was referring to, though he never named him.

At the beginning of the investigation, officers told us they would not have access to Stephen's text messages for approximately a year. They claimed they would have to send the phone to Apple to override the security features. We found out months later the phone had never been sent to Apple. Often investigators claimed it was uncertain which department had the phone. They have since produced the phone, which they still have not sent to Apple, but still claim they cannot access it. We feared then, and still fear now, that they have and will continue to delete critical information from the phone. It has already been over a year and we have no knowledge of who Stephen interacted with by phone call or text prior to his murder.

Since the murder, Buster has gotten rid of his old vehicle, which is critical because according to the witness who approached Chris, they were traveling in Buster's old vehicle that night. It's also critical because Stephen was found 3 miles from his vehicle on the morning of his murder. There was no blood splatter on the crime scene despite his brutal beating, which makes it clear he was transported to that site. We believe there is DNA in Buster's old vehicle. I think it's important to note that Stephen's wallet was found in his own vehicle and his gas cap was open, further suggesting he did not leave willingly (Tab C). Stephen was very skittish and would never have walked down the road in the dark, and it's not likely he would have opened his car door to accept assistance from someone he did not know – especially alone on a dark country road. He was

even known to walk through the woods during the day to stay out of sight. His autopsy shows his toxicology reports were negative for drugs and alcohol, so I have no reason to believe he would have done something so completely out of character.

Since Stephen was placed on the highway, it became a Highway Patrol investigation. We thought this was beneficial to Stephen, since local authorities obviously have their own agenda. However, this did not help our case at all. This case was mysteriously bounced from investigator to investigator without reasons or notification. It would repeatedly get to a certain point, then the assigned investigators would bow out, perhaps not wanting to take on Solicitor Murdaugh.

I was approached in September 2015 by a gentleman claiming to know about a criminal case decades ago that was swept under a rug to protect a different member of the Murdaugh family. This came as no surprise to me. I see history repeating itself with my son – no one here is trying to solve our case. Therefore, I contacted Governor Nikki Haley that same month with a plea for help.

I wrote her a letter telling her basically word for word the story I have just explained to you. She responded promptly and assigned the case to new investigators. While it appeared to be the answer to our prayers, very little progress has been made and they say they have exhausted their leads. I cannot fathom how that is possible. Our concerns regarding Solicitor Murdaugh and his family have not been investigated despite witness accounts which include an alleged conversation between a schoolmate of Buster's little brother, Paul, and school officials. I was told he claimed to have knowledge of the murder and implicated Buster as the murderer. Those school officials were said to have discussed the statement with the student's family, not police. We have heard no further follow-up to this situation. Interestingly, according to my source, Paul was transferred from that school to a private school after the alleged statement.

We believe Solicitor Murdaugh's influence extends to the pathologist, Dr. Erin Presnell of MUSC, who performed Stephen's autopsy (Tab D). Though Deputy Coroner Kelly Greene and SLED Agent Brittany Burke, who were both present for the autopsy, have gone on the record to state that neither made any mention of a car striking Stephen, Dr. Presnell ruled his death a hit-and-run. She was combative with the highway department investigator, Todd Proctor, regarding her findings when he pointed out that the only trauma was to Stephen's head. He asked how she came to that conclusion, and she said it was because he was found in the road. That alone was her reason. She insisted hit-and-run despite the fact that neither his injuries nor the crime scene support that finding.

The coroner disagrees with her determination, and it is documented multiple times in the case file that there were no skid marks or vehicle debris consistent with a hit-and-run at the crime scene (Tabs E, F, G). Dr. Presnell herself confirmed to Investigator Proctor that she found no glass or other fragments on the body to suggest a hit-and-run. It is simply not possible that a vehicle struck solely his head. Coroner Ernie Washington informed Investigator Proctor that Dr. Presnell told him she would "change her report to read however he wanted it". Copies of

Investigator Proctor's summary notes which document his discussions with Dr. Presnell and Coroner Washington are enclosed (Tabs F and G).

We desperately need your help. This investigation is being deliberately derailed. We need someone to hold the investigators accountable and access Stephen's phone. Solicitor Murdaugh is widely known, and it appears this is playing to his advantage. We need someone who doesn't care about his family name to take this case seriously. In July 2016, I wrote to Attorney General Loretta Lynch in the hopes that she could and would help us, but there has been no response.

I have enclosed the key documents I mentioned above, but I can provide copies of all the case documents I have at your request. We also have new information which we discovered in the past few weeks that we feel is critical to this case; however, I no longer trust the investigators here. I am holding it as I await your response. I can be reached at [REDACTED] I thank you immensely for your time and help.

Sincerely,

Sandra Smith
Sandra Smith

Enclosures

- A: 911 Dispatch Call Log
- B: Hampton County Sheriff's Office Incident Report
- C: SLED Crime Scene Notes
- D: MUSC Autopsy Final Report
- E: SCDPS Incident Report
- F: Case File Notes – Investigator Proctor
- G: S.C. Hwy Dept. MAIT Case Notes – Investigator Proctor