

#11: French affairs

Jack Blum: After I left, uh, the Senate in '77, '76, '77, and, uh, did the consulting gig for the U. N. Uh, and then started in private law practice and one of the things I did in private law practice was deal almost immediately with cases of international criminal activity, fraud particularly, and learned in the process an enormous amount about the dysfunctionality of the international system.

Naomi Fowler: This is Jack Blum: The Corruption Diaries from the Tax Justice Network. I'm Naomi Fowler.

Jack Blum: There was a case that was particularly striking, which in retrospect, completely remarkable, but extremely educational. The case involved a woman who came to me and said, I met this guy and he proposed to me and I accepted, but there's something really weird going on in this relationship and I need help. And I start listening more closely to the story, and the story is that she was a person who had gone through a bad relationship. She was trying to shrug it off. She decided to take a week vacation in Puerto Rico. She flew down, stayed at the San Juan Hilton and was about to leave when she crashes into this guy who sweeps her off her feet, says she's absolutely beautiful, wonderful, the best thing he's ever seen, blah, blah, blah. And on top of that, he said, well, you're leaving, but I want you to stay on my dime. And, you know, he really does what we would call the bum's rush, um er, this young woman. He then says that he is going through a divorce and that he has this big place in New York but he is temporarily out of it because he's been forced out by this woman he's divorcing and the story goes on and on and on. She took the bait. Stayed on at the hotel and then he said I'll come back to where you live in the Washington area and maybe I can stay there for a little while while this is all going on. Well, one thing leads to another, and he stays with her for a while, and he says, I'm going to get you a big engagement ring, and turns up with this large diamond from a well known jeweller in New York, and things seem to be going along fine until his story doesn't really begin to add up, 'cause he talks about things and then changes the version of it, and she's getting nervous about, who is this guy, really? So I start digging in, I have a private investigator, we do a little bit of digging and find out that this guy is a complete liar. He's lied about just about everything, and that what he has in fact done is dive into her credit and get credit cards in her name using her credit and her information and that he's used her friends and turned them into victims of his con man schemes. So, I drop the bad news on her and of course she's like, oh my God, how could this have happened? We get the FBI involved. The FBI gets on a telephone call. We set him up. He's arrested. He was flying into Washington National and the FBI picks him up at the airport. Goes to jail, and the more, the more they dig into his background, the more they find out this guy is a professional con man.

Well, that would have been simple enough, except for the fact that the woman who was, uh, my client, was very energetic, and found two previous women who had been through the same thing with the same guy. The unbelievable part of it was the three women looked like sisters. The story that each of them told was slightly different, but it was the same M.O, you know, close in on them after they'd been in a bad relationship, convince them that they would the credit of the people who they had just moved in on, and abuse their friends and steal

money from their friends, leaning on the credibility of the relationship they had with these people who are now becoming victims. So, one of the three women that he'd hit was a woman who was French, and she had convinced some friends of hers that he was a really good guy, and like many French people at the time, wanted to own gold. And they were not in a position to go buy physical gold as they would have liked in Switzerland. So he said, no problem, I'll buy it for you, you give me the money and I'll go get the gold for you. And, and of course he didn't. And these French people living in New York decided that what they were going to do was go to a French examining magistrate and get him to prosecute this guy whose name was Manny Pollock, get a prosecution of Manny Pollock in France. Because it turns out that if you commit a crime against a French person, even though it occurs outside of France, a French prosecutor can then go after the person who commits that crime. And in this case, the French prosecutor decides, okay, I'll pick it up. But who do they go after? They go after the French woman who Manny had targeted, who had led Manny to the friends who were victimized. So the French prosecutor goes after her, she's a French national, so he has jurisdiction there. And she's facing a criminal trial in northern France. So she now asks me to go to northern France to explain the mess to her French lawyers so she doesn't go to jail. And now I find myself on a plane to Paris and then we go up to Soissons was the name of the town where all of this was going on and I spend time with the French lawyers, get involved with an affidavit for the French court. And this whole case wound up in the Court d'Appel d'Amiens, and suddenly I'm beginning to understand the differences between French and American law and the difference between Continental law and Common law, the Common law system, and how those differences really are significant. That case also brought home how hard it is to go after a con man unless somebody is really able to move in and put various pieces together and get the multiple victims to come forward. Because most of the time victims don't want to be embarrassed by how stupid they were in letting these people into their lives or allowing them to steal their money. So that was part of the educational process in terms of figuring out that this is a global problem, even though this was very small scale. And, uh, there would be many more like that that I came to deal with.

It wasn't a very long process, but it was a very interesting, um, way of looking into an international criminal operation. A guy who knew how to use the international system and how bizarre pieces of it fit together. I mean, one of the aspects was the French were viewing the wife of a con man as a legitimate criminal target even though she had been the victim as much as the other victims. And this is all an offshoot of the French Code Napoleon and their attitude toward women, or it was the attitude at the time.

Naomi Fowler: The Corruption Diaries is a production of The Tax Justice Network, made by Naomi Fowler and Jo Barratt. Interviews with Jack Blum were recorded over several days at Jack's home in Maryland by Zoe Sullivan.