**Hard Times & Hope, episode 13**

**Stacy: Booties Never Worn**

**Jule:** Today's guest is Stacy. Stacy and I first met when we worked for the same company, and we've been friends for almost 10 years. I wanted to talk with Stacy because I admire how she handles herself at work. She has important clients, C-level executives, but she isn't intimidated by their positional power. She always tells it straight up.

I wondered what Stacy would have to say about hard times and hope—let's find out.

Stacy, thank you so much for taking the time to be here today.

**Stacy:** Thanks for having me.

**Jule:** What is the hard time you're going to be using for reference?

**Stacy:** I am going to talk about a mom going through a loss, and I'm going to share with you the loss that I had of twin girls.

**Jule:** I'm sorry. I didn't know.

**Stacy:** So I'm going to talk about the rollercoaster of emotions that I went through of finding out being pregnant, and then finding out you have twins. So you get excited and all of this. And then what happens when your world falls out from under you?

**Jule:** Let's go back to the beginning and just take me through what it was like for you.

You find out you're pregnant…

**Stacy:** Yeah. So find out I'm pregnant. I'm young, right? I'm 21 years old and I found out I'm pregnant and I'm really excited. And the one thing I wanted more than anything was girl. I wanted a girl, and I was super excited about this. I go, I have a normal pregnancy up until about four months, four and a half months.

And then all of a sudden, I go into the doctor's office and my belly had grown just… suddenly very large. And they're like, “Oh yikes. You may have gestational diabetes. We're worried. We're going to send you in for an ultrasound and some tests.” So I go in for the ultrasound, and they're like,” Oh my gosh, did you know you have twins?”

And I'm like, wait, no, no idea. I was hoping for one girl. Yeah. I mean, I was excited. I was going in and I was hoping that possibly I was going to find out the sex of the baby, but you go in and you find out you're going to have twins and they acted a little funny whenever they shared that it was twins and said, we need you to stay here for a few minutes.

We need to have somebody come in. And they, they come in and they said, um, it's girls. So I was like,” Whoa, I got, I got the girls.” So it was kind of exciting. I got to hear heartbeats. I got to hear all the exciting things, but then you realize they're going to get somebody else and something's wrong, but you don't know what.

So at that point, you're just kind of trying to figure out what's going on.

**Jule:** So you're 21. Are you like lying down on the table or…?

**Stacy:** Oh yeah. You're lying down on the table. You're trying to figure it out. But the whole time, you know, I get to see this picture of two adorable things up on the screen.

And again, this is in the nineties, so it's not exactly the picture you get to see today.

**Jule:** Not all that clear.

**Stacy:** Yeah. So, um, a little later a doctor comes in and they take a look, and they walk you through kind of what they're looking at on the screen. And you see pictures of two babies and you can tell like, there's difference in size.

And they want to do some tests and then they start looking at things and they're able to see some of the organs of the babies on the screen. And what they share is that from the picture, you could see that these guys are identical twins, which is an exciting thing, but it's also a high risk thing because in identical twins, there's a lot of things that happen because a lot of times they can share things.

And my girls did, they shared something called twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome where they shared blood vessels and the umbilical cord and essentially they're sharing nutrients. So what I was feeding, they were kind of taking from each other.

**Jule:** Oh, wow.

**Stacy:** And then one other thing that happened is one of them had a duodenal adhesion, which is where they had a blockage in the intestinal area.

So if we were able to get through this, there was going to have to be surgeries and things like that right after. So, you know, your balloon is immediately busted. So just to get through that, like they share all this information. I'm again, 21 years old and they say, “You know, if you want to get through this, you're going to have to listen to everything we tell you to do.”

First thing is you got to go home, and you've got to go on bed rest. We're going to have to do a lot of different things to get you through this. So you get kind of a one-two punch, right? You walk in, you're excited. You try to figure out, are you having a boy or a girl? And then you find out twins.

So you have that roller coaster of high and then something's wrong and you come out--crash. So I found out, I go home, I go on bed rest. I was going to do everything right to try and save the girls. And I started getting more information. I had weekly doctor's appointments to do. We had to measure how big I was, because whenever you have this, there's so much fluid around the babies from how much nutrients they were getting.

I grew very large. So, what, what essentially was happening is… the survival rate in a pregnancy like this for both twins is very low, particularly at the time. I think for both twins, it was like less than 20% that both would survive and then like 40% that one would survive. So it's still very, very low.

**Jule:** Yeah. And you're on bed rest. And are you just thinking about this all the time?

**Stacy:** All the time. All the time. Yeah. So you're trying not to get out of bed. You're trying to figure out what to do. I luckily at the time worked for a company that working from home at the time was just not a thing. Like I don't even know that we had really many places that had dial-up internet.

It wasn't, it wasn't terribly, uh, exciting working from home at the time. I remember going through paper applications and doing as much paperwork as I possibly could. So we get to the point, we go through weekly visits. We do as much as we can from the doctor's point, but three months of bed rest.

And I'm at the point of being eight months, I just wake up and you realize something's wrong. Something's not right. Yeah. So I called the doctor, and I can't articulate it. Right. I just know something's wrong. I don't know what it is. And I was kind of a regular, everybody knew me because since I went in so often, so they said, come in, let's go ahead and see you.

Plus I think I drove them crazy a little. So I came in and whenever I went in, it was definite they couldn't find one of the twin’s heartbeats for sure. And, you know, we're trying to get to like over eight months period, and then we were going to go and, and be induced. So I was getting so close to that date.

So we decided with a doctor, I should go ahead and, and be induced. And we are to try that we could at least have one twin. So we get into the hospital and they can't find the other heartbeat.

**Jule:** Oh.

**Stacy:** So, yeah. Hmm. So we go in, go into labor and no, neither twin is living. So you go through the whole caring and then labor and delivery and you end up having babies, but neither are breathing.

So you're prepared. You have the baby room prepared, but instead of having births, you end up figuring out what to do with a funeral.

**Jule:** Oh, Stacy, I'm sorry.

**Stacy:** No, don't be sorry, because honestly it makes you who you are today. Yeah. Because you deal with this roller coaster and it's certainly a hard time, but you learn so much about who you are and the support that you get through this.

It was just amazing, right. Like a family. But again, I had them four days after I turned 22. And then I, you know, you end up in a place where you feel the strength that you have inside you, that you didn't quite know that you ever had.

**Jule:** Yeah. I want to talk about both of those, the support that you've discovered from your family, and then also, I want to hear more about the strength you discovered. So let's start with the support that you had. You're on bed rest. You're 21…

**Stacy:** …going on 22. Yeah. I lived in Cincinnati with Jim. And no family here. My family's all in West Virginia, so they're three hours away. So luckily, they were amazing at sending me coloring books and crayons and word puzzles, um, and things like that.

My parents worked at the time, so I didn't necessarily have the luxury of having them here with me 24/7 or things like that. But I had great friends who, my friend, Julie, who would stop by and see me quite often after work. And she brought me lots of, lots of books and things like that to do. My parents shipped me things. And I talked on the phone. Endlessly.

**Jule:** Yeah, for sure. So the strength that you found, it sounds like your view of yourself changed. So what, what did you find out about yourself?

I think I, I'm not sure that anybody at that age really feels like they would be able to get through something like that, or even think that they would ever have to go through something like that, nor did I, by any means.

And I wasn't sure how I even got through sadness because I certainly dealt with postpartum and I would tell you it's not something I talk about a lot. It's something that my family and I hold dear to my heart. And it's something like… we have ornaments on the tree. We celebrate birthdays. We certainly go in and make sure that we visit the graves, things like that.

But you know, I don't know exactly how I got through it, but I would tell you, there were some great folks that I met who have gone through some similar things. I'm not sure I would have said that I was a person who believed in support groups or things like that until you go through something like this. I needed to meet other people who experienced the loss, I needed to understand why me? I, everybody, I think goes through that when you go through an experience death, we, we certainly went through that, but I also think whenever you understand the science behind it, I'm also somebody who has to really get down and understand that. And I was able to do the research. I wrote articles.

**Jule:** Wow.

**Stacy:** I got involved in an organization that dealt with moms who had lost in multiple births. So people who were pregnant with more than one, one birth, um, and they lost either one or more throughout this. So I became a network for other people. And again, I didn't really have the internet. I had something called Web TV at the time.

So I started making connections, then emails and things like that. And you learn to build a network of people and for me, the thing was I wasn't alone. I wasn't the only one that had experienced this, although I was the only one I personally knew at the time, I was able to reach out and make other connections.

And I wasn't someone who traditionally asked for help. I mean, I'm the only girl in an all-boy family essentially. So doing that was not something I was ever used to.

**Jule:** Yeah. How did you find the support group? Was that through the hospital?

**Stacy:** Yeah. So the hospital made some great connections. There was actually another family in our area who had experienced something very similar about two months prior.

So they made a local connection for us. And then they also made the connection in the multiple birth support group as well, which was more of a national connection.

**Jule:** Yeah. So it sounds like people who've experienced something similar helped. And the fact that you really investigated, helped. When you described what was happening with the twins when they were inside you I thought, Oh, she's using all the medical language.” What about with Jim? What was this like for him?

**Stacy:** I would say he was right there with me. He experienced the loss the same way that I did every step of the way. I mean, God loved him, like, support somebody on bedrest. I'm a type a personality. So me not being in charge of every aspect of my life was something very difficult for me, which made it very difficult for him.

So he was a trooper. He got up every morning, packed a cooler beside my bed before he left. And it was kind of, “Please just eat what I packed for you” kind of thing. And you know, him doing the switched roles because I was the one who managed everything. And that's the personality that I am. It was hard for him to kind of figure out how to support me again, someone being a strong personality.

I don't think everybody knows how to deal with that. And particularly someone who doesn't know how to ask for help. And I am that person. And sometimes I have to remind myself or quite often I have to remind myself that it's okay to ask for help, particularly in times when you're feeling down or sad.

And that, that is probably my biggest lesson through this, because at first I was like, stubborn. I don't need help. I'll figure out how to get through this kind of thing, but it took me a while to get through it. And, and once I learned asking for help and it wasn't anything to be embarrassed, humiliated, mortified, those kinds of things, I was able to get myself in a better place for me and for him.

**Jule:** Yeah. I think our culture has so much shame around weakness. You have to be strong and mighty and asking for help, that can be hard.

**Stacy:** Yeah. It's still not an easy thing for me to do.

**Jule:** Yeah. Same here. It's getting easier though, because what I'm learning is that people want to help, you know, they generally feel good about doing that. As you think about it, is there anything else you want to say that describes what this was like for you?

**Stacy:** Um, you know, I would say, it’s just such a rollercoaster of emotions. Like you had good days, you had bad days, you had hope you had sorrow. I would just say the feeling of wanting so bad to have a twin or both twins survive was such a, was such a dream and passion. And then when it doesn't, your dreams crash. Yeah. You know, trying to figure all that out was just was hard to get through.

**Jule:** Yeah. The things that seems so difficult is first finding out that you have twins, you're having twins, then finding out--not finding out, figuring out for yourself--that there's something wrong because they keep bringing all these people in.

Then they tell you what it is. Then you do everything you can to save, hopefully both. And that's not how it turns out, but you spend all that time in bed and you’re doing everything you can. And then you said you walk away. You're not, you're not going to have a baby shower. No, you have to plan something else.

**Stacy:** That's right.

**Jule:** What did you do with the things that you had set up prepared?

**Stacy:** I would tell you that's where my friends and family did a really good job. Everybody held things. There are certain things that we had bought early and that we just saved. And I honestly still have them in my fireproof safe that I hold dear to my heart, but there was like, Cradles.

But as soon as my family found out that it was, going to be a rollercoaster, I think that everybody just kind of held off to make sure we were going to get through. I mean, the doctor did an amazing job of making sure everybody understood and he articulated very well where we were and the entire process and risks and benefits.

**Jule:** And you would have had to have that being type A. You have to have the answers or at least with what we know right now. Would you be willing to say one example of something that's in that fireproof safe or no?

**Stacy:** Oh yeah. Yeah. I have… one of the traditions in our families is when you find out you're pregnant, you just buy a pair of booties. So you just give someone booty. So I have a pair of the booties.

**Jule:** Nice. Yeah. Very nice. All right. Let's come up to the present and to help make that transition this is a question I like to ask, which is what's one of life's simple pleasures that you really appreciate?

**Stacy:** Yeah, I think that's so easy for me. And just bouncing off this, probably my simple pleasure is my son. Ironically, I had him very quickly after the girls almost a year to the day. Quite honestly, it's two, three days short of being one year. After I had them, I had him and he is my simple pleasure. He is a really good kid and he just turned out to be a great, great kid and he’s a sparkle in my eye for sure.

**Jule:** Yeah. Your face lights up every time I hear you talk about him. When you were pregnant with him, were you worried about the pregnancy?

**Stacy:** Mess. I was just a mess. I refused to accept it because I wasn't ready looking back. I certainly wasn't ready. Wasn't prepared, but he definitely turned out to be the best gift ever.

**Jule:** Yeah. I think he needs a t-shirt that says ‘the best gift ever.’ All right. So we have the benefit of space from that very difficult time. You said earlier that it changed you, you found strength you didn't know you have. If you brought the person you were back then up to today, and I'm wondering if you take the 21 year old, who hadn't gone through it yet, how would she be different from you because she didn't go through this?

**Stacy:** Yeah. So I've always been kind of that type a personality and in charge of things, but I would say like career desire was not necessarily there. Like I would be completely happy being kind of housewifey kind of first thing, you know, I didn't know what it was like necessarily to please myself first, if that makes sense.

I was really more about taking care of everyone else, because I was never the one to take care of myself. And so I think through the grieving process and working through getting help, things like that, I learned to be more introspective and learning to look at myself and understanding what I needed as a person and who I wanted to be, and really defining that and figuring out what I wanted to go forward.

**Jule:** Very cool. That's pretty amazing. That's a pretty big change. Your view of yourself and your world changed a lot.

**Stacy:** It did. Yes. And I kind of always look up and say, would everyone that I have in love looking down on me, be proud of who I am?

**Jule:** What do you think?

**Stacy:** I hope so. I

**Jule:** I'm pretty sure. If you look back to you back then, what would you say to the you back then, with the benefit of what you know now?

**Stacy:** You’ve got to figure out how to express feelings and holding your feelings inside is not healthy. You’ve got to learn to talk about how you feel and, and what it means to you going forward, because one of the things that I am really good at is holding my feelings in. And I certainly know what it means to kill your psyche by doing that.

And I also know what it does to relationships. I know what it does by pushing people away whenever you're holding things inside. And I would say I wish I would have learned that at, at such a younger age, That it's not weak to express how you feel. It doesn't mean that you're an emotional person.

It doesn't mean those things. Yeah. It means you're human. Yes. It's a good thing.

**Jule:** Feelings mean you're human. How did you learn? Was it through needing to ask for help? Was it through the support group? How did you learn to express your feelings?

**Stacy:** I think practice. Hmm, I think practice. It wasn't this one event, it's been multiple events in my life of loss and, and just pain that I learn a little more every time.

And it continues to shape me and it continues to, I think, make me stronger and give me more, I think, just aspiration of being better for others around me and being that role model and wanting them to not get into situations that I find myself in where you get this feeling of loneliness or sadness that you can't overcome.

**Jule:** When I think of strong people, I definitely include you in the strong people category. Is there anything else you'd like to say about hard times or hope or anything?

**Stacy:** I just think again, if I could just encourage all your listeners to make sure they're not afraid to ask for help and to make sure that they, if they see other people, encourage them to talk.

And do it more than once, because so many times I wish that people would have asked me more than once, because the first time I say no, but if they probably would have asked again, it would have been so much easier for me to just have better conversations with people, but the first time it's an automatic no, right?

**Jule:** Yeah. Ah, that's really great. That's such a good recommendation because the first time is kind of a surprise and it's, uh, I'm not ready to go there yet. So I'm going to say no. But the second time, you know they really care. They really want to hear what you have say.

**Stacy:** Yeah.

**Jule:** Thank you for listening. That was Stacy. I'm Jule Kucera host of Hard Times & Hope. My website is julekucera.com. That's J U L E K U C E R A.com. If you think this episode would be helpful to someone, please feel free to share it.

Take care, take heart. See you next time.