

Linda: Deconstructing and reconstructing her life, without alcohol

Jule Kucera 00:07

Hi, I'm Jule, and this is *Hard Times and Hope*, a place for real conversations with regular people about a real hard time. We talk about what it was, how they got through it, and something good that came from it.

My guest today is Linda McLaughlin. Linda and I met in the Akimbo Podcast Workshop when we were participants, and then we stayed in touch during the next session of the workshop that's just wrapping up now, where we both came back as All-Stars, which is something like a peer coach. We have one of those relationships where you like the person, but you only know them online. You've never had a real live conversation, until last week, when Linda interviewed me for her podcast. And this week, I'm interviewing her.

Linda McLachlan is a podcaster, a coach, and is in the middle of writing her first novel. Linda's podcast is [The Arena: Living a Courageous Life](#). It's a place where she and her guests explore what it means to consciously show up to lead a courageous life doing it not because it's easy, but because it's hard.

I don't know what Linda is going to talk about for her hard time. But I have hope about what she's going to talk about. Let's find out.

Linda, thank you so much for being here today.

Linda Mclachlan

Oh, thank you so much for inviting me.

Jule Kucera

It's a real pleasure to see you again.

Linda Mclachlan

That's how I feel.

Jule Kucera

I felt like we got a conversation started. And I'm glad we get to flip it around, because now I get to learn about you. So thank you.

Linda Mclachlan

You're welcome.

Jule Kucera

What's the hard time you're going to be discussing today?

Linda Mclachlan 01:45

Well, there's a list. But I think the hard time that I want to talk about is the one that I most recently went through in 2018. I would say there's about 18 months there of a hard time, but certainly the beginning of it was the worst.

Jule Kucera

And it's all balled together in one big thing. So what happened?

Linda Mclachlan

Well, I feel like my life had gotten to the point where I was completely toxic. I had gotten to the point where I physically was unrecognizable from three to four years earlier, I was self-medicating using food and alcohol to try and make myself feel better and soothe myself. And so physically, I was really, really unwell and was expecting to one day wake up and discover some sort of horrible disease had taken hold. I was walking with a limp. I didn't fit into any my clothes, that sort of classic thing and I was just chronically depressed. And, and yet still functioning still...

Jule Kucera

Still working.

Linda Mclachlan

Yep. Yep. And, and just driving myself really, really hard to continue to achieve and show up and be everything that everybody else needed me to be

Jule Kucera 03:21

So you had this drive to achieve and you were working really hard to accomplish it. But soothing yourself with food and wine or beer or whatever. How was that working for you?

Linda Mclachlan 03:34

Well, it wasn't, it was making me probably a pretty difficult person to live with, with my partner at the time. And it made me a very, to just be really, all over the map emotionally and not sort of stable. I'm sure the people around me saw that I was unhappy but didn't quite understand what the issue was.

Jule Kucera 04:03

What was the trigger for you that made you realize "I'm toxic. This is not okay." You know, you're functioning, but you're not living the way you want to live. How did you come to that realization?

Linda Mclachlan 04:16

Well, there were three deaths that occurred. My father passed away suddenly, in 2017, of a massive heart attack. He died before he hit the ground. And so that was a sudden shock. And, and then a year

later, a friend of my then partner, one of his best friends, she discovered that she had cancer and she had had cancer before, and it had come back with a vengeance. It just sort of raced through her. And I knew her well enough and sort of observed what was happening. And what I observed was that she was trying to kind of wring as much life out of her remaining life as she could.

And in spite of the fact that she was so sick, there was just these, these desperate attempts to do this. And my interpretation of it, you know, again, the overlay of my own life, and what was happening in my own life was, this could be you, this is a wakeup call, you need to look at this. And I just, I just thought this could be my story.

And, and yet, I felt so unable to look at my life and go, oh, okay, I'll just make this little change. And it'll be okay. It was just so massive. As I looked at my life I'm like, how am I going to do this? How can I do this? And so I spent quite a few months examining this. And then meditation retreat, popped up in my Facebook feed, and I looked at it and went, I've always wanted to go on a retreat. I gotta do this. Yeah. So I jumped on to that, and went, and it was, like, 10 days, after I it popped into my Facebook feed. And so I went to it.

Jule Kucera 06:13

Well, so your father passes, suddenly, unexpectedly, your former partner's friend gets sick. And you think this could be me. You start asking yourself, what do I change? How do I change? And then boom, this meditation shows up in your feed, and you go. Then what happened?

Linda Mclachlan 06:35

Well, I went with a question, "What am I going to do?" And it came to me very quickly. And the first part of that answer was, I needed to leave the business that I needed to extract myself from the stresses of that and the, the parts of, of being in that business that I no longer wanted to do that I felt that had accomplished as much as I could or wanted to. And it was time to move on. I couldn't imagine myself continuing for another 10 years doing the same thing or trying to do more. So I just thought, there's just no way I can do this anymore.

Jule Kucera 07:17

Isn't it strange how when you get out of the environment you're in so you don't see your phone, you're not interacting with your work things and you get away from it, it gives you such a fresh perspective? So you go to that retreat and you realize I need to leave this work, you come back and quit, or what happens?

Linda Mclachlan 07:37

I'd been having a conversation for some time with the then CEO. And he and I had various conversations about what does my role look like if we made some changes, and I realized that there was just kind of no amount of tweaking and this and that, because I had tried that before where I kind of pulled back and I would do something different, and it was just impossible for me to stay on the sidelines. So I came back and sat down with him first. And, you know, he could pretty much tell by the look on my face. And it really, you know, wasn't as though I worked with these terrible people or that oh, my God, I hate all the people

that I work with. It was absolutely the opposite. I work with some wonderful people. And they made things very easy for me to make the decision that I did.

Jule Kucera 08:30

They could tell that you were, you were finished.

Linda Mclachlan 08:33

I was Done. Done. Really done.

Jule Kucera 08:34

You're really done. You tried to do the semi-exit, I'll just go to the sidelines. And that didn't work for you.

Linda Mclachlan 08:41

Yeah, no.

Jule Kucera 08:42

You said you blew up your life. So you left your work. What else did you change after this realization that your life was not working?

Linda Mclachlan 08:53

I've described it as feeling like an oak moved. Because when I was at the retreat it was like an oak moved, because I knew that there was a lot more that was going to have to change. And the next thing that changed was the relationship that I was in. I moved away from where I was living, away from that town. And as a result of, of leaving the business, I was contemplating a new career. So I went back and I began training with that. And what followed me, and I was beginning to eat better and kind of look after myself a bit better. But the the long shadow was definitely the alcohol. And when I moved from one city to the next, what followed was the alcohol and then when I moved into my next permanent home, I decided it needed to be a dry house.

Jule Kucera 09:57

Wow. That's a big decision. How did you come to that decision?

Linda Mclachlan 10:03

Because it was a clarity that I needed of mind and spirit, that I was not allowing myself by continuing to self-medicate. And to just numb everything that I was feeling that I really needed to be able to sit with that pain and sense of loss There was just a lot of grieving that I wasn't really consciously aware of that I needed to process.

Jule Kucera 10:38

And if you're working like crazy, you can keep it in the closet. And then when it starts to come out, you can have a drink.

Linda Mclachlan 10:47

Well, and I, I started my career as a as an actor. And what I realized in leaving that part of myself behind, and in being someone who likes being an actor, is that your ability to put on characters, I mean, the whole being the host of cocktail receptions all the time, as an introvert it was, it was daunting for me. And I, I figured out how to do it, you put on the persona and all that sort of thing. But that persona was a drinker. And that was part of the process of getting ready was kind of putting on that the costume, the clothes, the showing up in a particular way. And so realizing it's like, okay, who have I become? Or? Or is that the real me? Or is that a leftover from that other time and that other person? And sort of picking and choosing? Picking through that and figuring out, who do I want to be now? Who am I really?

Jule Kucera 12:03

Yeah, you blew up your life and then you rebuilt who you want it to be.

Linda Mclachlan 12:09

And I still am.

Jule Kucera 12:11

Was it scary when you did all this, made all this change?

Linda Mclachlan 12:15

It was certainly at times. I had to really get comfortable with not knowing and letting go of having certainty. And I think in many respects, I was just so desperate, you know, when you're really at the bottom, you just sort of feel like, okay, I don't have any other choice. I don't have any other choice except to embrace faith, and change. And so as much as I feared it, I also just had to make friends with fear and just kind of go, "Look, you can come along for the ride. I know you're there. I acknowledge your presence. But we're going anyway. So sit in the passenger seat, sit in the backseat, whatever you need to do, just let's go." So there's definitely a sense of forward momentum.

Jule Kucera 13:07

And how interesting that your podcast is all about living a courageous life.

Linda Mclachlan 13:15

At the time, and since then, people have said, "Oh, wow, you're so courageous. That's, that's so amazing that you did that." And I acknowledge it, I get it. And I do sometimes sort of go, holy cow. But it happened in stages. It wasn't overnight that this happened, it was a year to 18 months of gradually making these changes. And as I say, it continues.

Jule Kucera 13:44

You changed a lot of things externally in your life. How are you a different person, internally than you were before you made all these changes?

...And can I just share something with you that it is really hard for me to believe that picture you posted of yourself, call it from the before times? You don't even look like you?

There are just so many layers on that woman. But you know, forget weight or whatever. There's just, it's sort of like a mask. And when you said you had a limp, I was shocked because you strike me as a healthy person. You look like a healthy person. You don't look anything like that woman. It's so... it's almost unnerving to see how different you look then compared to now.

Linda Mclachlan 14:30

If I didn't know better, I would say that she died.

When I was leaving the business, I had the opportunity to go to a number of the events that we had done and that I had been a part of for, in some cases, 10 years, and to see the people that I had gotten to know over that time and who in many cases were good friends and to say these goodbyes. And it was like being eulogized over and over again. And by my colleagues, by my business partners, the lovely notes and little videos and various things that were said, and I was an emotional basket case through all of that. But when I had the time to go back and read the cards, and watch the videos again, and hear what people had to say about the impact that I'd had on them, I, it was like, it was like listening to a eulogy, that gave me a sense of who I was, in the good ways. So that when it came time to rebuild myself, I had a real sense of the impact that I'd had. So having the chance to hear, you know, to sort of stand your own funeral in some respects, and then come back to live again, is a pretty powerful, it's a pretty powerful thing,

Jule Kucera 16:09

What you went through, that's an exercise that they do in a lot of life planning, life design classes, imagine your funeral and what you want people to say, And you actually got to experience it. How are you the you that you are now different from the you that you were then?

Linda Mclachlan 16:30

I think, certainly I'm more resilient. I have the ability to, to wake up again and start again, tomorrow. And if it means going to bed at 630. In order to get that happening sooner? That's what I'll do. Just, you know, there's some days, like maybe today, where you're going to be tested, and you're going to be sort of not able to find that positivity within you. I certainly know I'm, I'm more resilient. And I certainly know that I have a more positive look, as I think about the future than I did.

Jule Kucera 17:17

You're also feeling things more or letting yourself feel because the woman that you described before, she would never have talked about the hard day and maybe going to bed at 630, she wouldn't have admitted to that. I don't think.

Linda Mclachlan 17:32

In fact, I would have just drank myself to the point where I was in a stupor. Yeah, that was my way, so as opposed to, I'm going to sit down to read or I'm going to, you know, work on my podcast, or I'm going to do something else or we'll go for a walk with my dog. The solution at the end of the day was simply to numb myself until I would fall asleep.

Jule Kucera 17:59

Yeah, you can numb yourself in many different ways. But it's all the same activity, which is trying to turn off the feeling. And you have to feel the feeling. If you could say something to yourself back then from the benefit of where you are now, what would you say to the you before you blew up your life?

Linda Mclachlan 18:22

Gets better. It's... nothing is as bad as just staying where you are. And continuing to spiral downward. The hardest, the hardest days of climbing toward the life that you want is never harder than the day that you're sliding down further.

Jule Kucera 18:55

Chills. Very cool. What's one of life's simple pleasures that you really like?

Linda Mclachlan 19:06

Definitely having my hands in the dirt.

Jule Kucera 19:09

Say more about that.

Linda Mclachlan 19:10

Just watching something, grow and evolve and bloom and watching the bees and pollinators come and enjoy the garden. And I do my best to create an environment that is hospitable to them. So I don't clean up my garden until very, very late to make sure that they've got protection through the spring. So it always looks like hell, but...

Jule Kucera 19:42

The birds and the bees, the animals all prefer it that way. Somebody was talking to me about Coronavirus and just how horrible it had been. And really the only species that is suffering is humans. Everybody else is pretty happy. Linda is there any anything else you'd like to say about hard times or hope or anything?

Linda Mclachlan 20:04

My hard times are self-generated, there are plenty of people who have had things happen to them, not withstanding the deaths that happened, close to me. But those hard times are always followed by the hope. There's always hope on the other side have a hard time. And when they are self-generated, like mine, I just really want people to know that, as I said earlier, as hard as the days are when you are struggling to climb up that mountain, it's always so much better, so much better than when you're on the downward spiral. So whatever you can do to take just one step at a time, one tiny, tiny, tiny step at a time, take that step. Take that step and reach out.

Jule Kucera 21:03

Thank you for listening. That was Linda McLaughlin. Linda's podcast is [The Arena: Living a Courageous Life](#). You can listen to it wherever you get your podcasts. And you can learn more about Linda at her website, LindaMclachlan.com. That's Linda M-C-L-A-C-H-L-A-N .com

I'm Jule Kucera, host of *Hard Times and Hope*. If you think this episode would be helpful to someone, please feel free to share it. My website is JuleKucera.com. That's J-U-L-E-K-U-C-E-R-A.com

Take care. Take heart.

See you next time.