Hard Times & Hope

Episode 1: Laurie

**Jule**

Hi, I'm Jule. And this is *Hard Times & Hope*, a podcast about the challenges of life, whether the difficult questions, the unwelcome losses, or the gut-wrenching choices. We talked about how to navigate the hard times, and how to have hope.

Today we have on the call Dr. Laurie Anderson, and I call her Laurie because she's my friend. Laurie is a PhD psychologist with over 25 years experience. Yes, some individual counseling, but mainly coaching executives in global corporations. I think she's fantastic at that. And she's a wonderful friend. And I'm so glad, Laurie that you're here.

**Laurie**

Me too. This is exciting.

**Jule**

Yay. Anything else you want people to know about your background?

**Laurie**

I appreciate your summary.

**Jule**

Oh, cool. Okay. As you know, this podcast is *Hard Times & Hope*. I'd like you to think of a hard time from your life and not to share what it was but the kind of hard time it was was it? Was it a difficult question, or was it a loss? Was it a choice? What was what was this hard time that we're going to be discussing?

**Laurie**

Such a great topic. Jule, if I could just say that, because I think we don't talk enough about these things. So I'm just so excited to be part of what you're doing even a small way. So I was thinking about the questions that you pose and answer in your work. And I realized that I, it's important for me at this phase in my level of awareness, personal and social to just start by saying I am a white, middleclass woman. So when I think about hard times, that's a context. You know, after experiencing the past several years with Black Lives Matter, you know, I just realized I walk around in a field of privilege, you know, so my hard times are almost discreet. They're not, “I was walking to the store, and I got arrested, just or I was called names” and things like that. So I just want to say that about that.

**Jule**

Yeah, thank you.

**Laurie**

And I, when I think about a heart time, I think about one recently, because it, it really happened almost largely in my head, which is where I've come to believe much of the suffering is located. So for me, I had a very long, protracted recovery slash transition from raising children to having an empty nest. And this was a few years ago, but it took me probably two years, to have a sense of a new normal. And in that time, my kids were great. They went off to college, there was nothing, you know, dramatic about the events, the loss I felt of a life chapter and what it had brought me as kind of a sense of purpose was so disorienting and unexpected, I would have to say that about that it's a normal life milestone, like you don't want to be a psychologist with kids in the basement, that would be bad. So it was so great when they moved on happily and loved college and they've gone on and live in other states with professions, but the feeling of that might have been the most happy I ever will be was heavy. And I I hit a depression. I wasn't just feeling depressed, I was depressed, which is defined as you know, not really being able to function the way you normally could. And I had never experienced that. And I was embarrassed and ashamed that I wasn't, you know, how could I be such a terrific advisor and psychologist if something as normal was hampering my, my joy and my movement and, and I also just to anchor this there, there wasn't a problem. I didn't need to move. I didn't need to start a new career. I had support. And I and I'm grateful now. It changed me. I I've literally had not experienced firsthand what it's like to be so challenged in my head. And I think that's important. An experience and one I'm now way more compassionate in working with others.

**Jule**

There were a few, there were a few things in there that you said that I thought, wow, even though you and I are friends, it never occurred to me. And we've talked about your sons were gone, and how you raised them by your, essentially by yourself and now they're gone. And the idea that here you are a psychologist and you're supposed to have it together, what's going on with you? It's just a normal thing, never occurred to me that that would be part of the experience for you.

**Laurie**

Oh, I was I was I was locked in my head. With why is this taking so long? What is wrong with me? Other people were like, wow, oh, and men in particular would say, Oh, you just got a pay raise, because you're not paying tuition. None of that mattered. None of it. And it was, and some women would say, who might have had a more emotional relationship with that part of child rearing? Because it does. You know, you do, they didn't die. Someone said to me once they didn't die, and I’m like, I know, I withheld, I did not tell people. For the most part, I literally did not share this, and I am a sharer. I am a talker. And I held back. So the reason why that's so important for me is when I'm talking to someone about a hard time I know their stuff, they're not even saying and that's okay, like that's, that's not something to be interrogated about. I just now know, something I didn't know. And, and I'm a better person. Because of that I am more kind. I am more compassionate. I am more gentle.

**Jule**

You're answering questions I haven't asked you. But it's so you know, one of them was What did it feel like?

**Laurie**

It felt disorienting, it was unexpected, even though their departure was completely expected, completely. Like Christmas, December 25. That was horrifying for me, like really? Did you? Did you not think this would happen. So let me say this about that. There is no intellectual preparation for an emotional experience.

**Jule**

I gotta write them down.

**Laurie**

And when my dad died, who was going to die because he had fatal colon cancer. We knew he would die for six months and hospices there. And he died. I fell to the floor. And part of it was like, What? So? Yeah, it was fascinating to me that I didn't really know that I did not know how I would actually experience it. And that's okay, what was not okay. And this was the real the clinical nugget, that has become so important in my work and my handling anything, you know, including cancer, which I have, what's so important is knowing the difference between how something feels and what I'm saying in my head about it.

**Jule**

Can you say more about that?

**Laurie**

Yeah. And I, you know, as a clinical psychologist, I was trained and I was skilled and I was oriented to differentiating shades of feeling, you know, Is it fear? Is it anger? Is it guilt? Is it these are, these are shades, I would have to say to you now that I am way less invested in that I am more like, does it feel bad or good because it is almost irrelevant for the path. The point really is for relieving the suffering, not the pain, but the suffering. That distinction that I learned pain is inevitable suffering is optional. Is the thinking. So what I recall vividly, was somewhere about 18 months into this, I really could separate out what I was feeling which again, I'm going to summarize as bad. Yeah, even like and what I was saying to myself, I can vividly recall sitting on my couch and differentiating, this is taking me so long. And I sat back and I had done a lot of learning from the Work of Byron Katie, and she has these questions that guide you through some unproductive thinking and unproductive not in a judgmental way, but just kind of like take a look at that. And the first question is, “Is it true?” that this is taking me so long. And I knew it felt true. And I know it feels bad. You don't have a feeling about a fact. It's just a fact. And I have a PhD, and I'm a researcher, and I'm a geek and I study things. So I actually knew very quickly in my brain, that the way to know if it was taking me so long, was to do a randomly controlled study of moms, you know, on one hand that said, you know, and how long on average should it take? So I'm at 18 months was that longer than average, and I'm like, giving myself a headache, thinking I've no idea. Like, it was like, I actually don't know if this is long. Because long means more than average, like long. This is taking me as long as it should, which is, you know, how long it takes to make a baby is nine months, you know, it can feel long, it feels long, but it's not long, unless it's 12 months inside, that's nine months. It feels long. It's not long. That's a distinction that matters. I sat there on my, you know, big couch. And I thought, I don't know if this is long. And then I sort of like, Well, you know, probably is and then her next question is, “Can you absolutely know that?” Oh, man, I absolutely cannot know that. And then I thought, well, how does it make me feel? To think it is taking me soooo long. So so long, you big fat loser, you so big, fat loser. How does that make me feel? Bad? Bad times two, bad times four, it makes me feel ashamed. So I thought, Oh, I have made this up. What I made up was not the feeling. I made up the judgment.

**Jule**

Yeah, and a judgment of shame.

**Laurie**

And then I figured out because of her guidance, and this is guidance that's available through her work. It's not I wasn't talking to her, changed everything. For me, I'm a learner. What would it feel like to think the opposite? So the opposite in that case was? What if it's taking me the exact right amount of time for me to be amazingly effective in my next life chapter? What if this is a training ground for increasing my agency and service and care? And then I thought, well, then I'm in. I am all in. So that happened around 18 months or so. And people will say, Well, did you feel better? And the answer's no. But I stopped suffering.

**Jule**

I didn't feel better, but I stopped suffering.

**Laurie**

Yeah. That's what happened there. So it continued, and then I've had hard times since but they haven't been quite as skillful. Mm hmm. My God when I was first diagnosed with melanoma, I was like, Yeah, and I thought, Okay, this is gonna take me a minute. It was like it was more that Mm hmm. Then, and then I got oriented. So it's, I still have hard times. I know hope comes, but not always immediately.

**Jule**

Yeah. I would think not often, immediately, probably, well said probably, we'll see what I would say well said or when you were talking, I thought the way you changed your question, if what I'm going through now is going to make me amazingly effective in my next life chapter. As you were saying it, I felt relieved, it was weird. It was just so I can see how it would be freeing and relieving for you to change your thinking like that.

**Laurie**

I use that with clients. I mean, again, what I'm saying to you is that was a tool, which I might have known about. But it became a lightning rod of impact in service. I have used that to support someone's experience. And they will describe it as one of the things that was most helpful. So I literally believe it.

**Jule**

Yeah. Oh, I can tell. I can hear it in your voice you believe it when when you say pain is inevitable. Pain is pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.

**Laurie**

It's optional. So again, so much is useful in reading inspirational material. And that's another thing that was a big aid is to sit back and know what's happening and open up to the guidance of others who've walked harder paths, or whatever is their hard path. It doesn't matter and not rebut what they're saying, but take it in. So the notion that it's a journey versus an event, which I am now taking not by choice, but because something happened which affected me. This way, changes the conversation from should you feel bad other people don't feel bad like, you know, other people, blah, blah, blah, other people's had it harder, all of that stuff, all true, not effective, not useful. In that moment, in the moment of pain, my mom is nearing the end of her 92 years, and I will be on the floor. What's helpful is to say, I am all here for this. And at some point, it'll be transformed, but not now.

**Jule**

Yeah, it sounds like going through this experience moved ideas and concepts from your head into not even your heart, your whole body. It's just changed for you.

**Laurie**

It did. Well said, that's really it was a deepening. And I think that's what they call wisdom versus just knowledge. The wisdom is really that you walk with it. Mm hmm.

**Jule**

What else helped you get through this hard time?

**Laurie**

Well, recognizing that turning on myself, was causing suffering. So I believe that words that other people speak, that feel or strike us as unsupportive are just reinforcing something we're already telling ourselves.

**Jule**

Oh, wow.

**Laurie**

So I wouldn't say encouragement, helped, acknowledgement. Boy, this seems to be a moment for you, how could I support you? is the way to respond, I believe, which is not to try it out, you'll get through it, you'll get through it doesn't help. It was more, you are in something. What could I do with anything? And I'm right here, it's just, it's just a confidence in a journey. And you know, my ex-husband was amazing at that. Just a really deep spiritual man and a very good friend. And he also, you know, missed our kids, but had a different experience. So he was, he could see me having a different experience and wasn't trying to change my experience. And that's the big thing. Not trying to change somebody else.

**Jule**

Just honored it. I'm glad you clarified that. Because earlier, when you said reading and things that were encouraging, I was wondering about, and you just clarified it, it's not. You can do it, Laurie, the world will be brighter tomorrow,

**Laurie**

It's, hey, this might teach you something this might transform you. And again, I underscore might, because it still gave me space to think that sort of self-pity thing. Like there's a human experience in this, which is just, you know, what about me? And this is hard and sort of whining. So it's it's whining? From 80%? down to a point.02%. But it's they're still point .02%. They're still I don't think that goes to zero. I'll let you know. I haven't had that. I just like I know I whine less. Yeah. In my head.

**Jule**

Yep. So this time made you more compassionate, more empathic. It sounds like it's changed how you do your executive coaching, or at least for some moments of it.

**Laurie**

No question.

**Jule**

It'd be interesting. Have you asked any of your clients if they've noticed a difference or no?

**Laurie**

Well, I, you know, that's a great question. I happened. Oddly enough. I work with executives, who have very big egos. I'm not sure they know. I don't know how to tell you that.

**Jule**

Yeah.

**Laurie**

I'm just saying they're paying you for it to be about them. I will say what the one person has used what I said to him, he doesn't know exactly where that came from. So I will tell you and by the way, that's mostly a relief because I'm not someone who loves a lot of attention focus. And that way I'm anyway, so yeah, yeah, there was a shame piece I literally held bad and will of course, told you on the air. Thanks a lot.

**Jule**

And, and I did want to I do want to make this a safe place where you share what's comfortable. If you're to a point where it doesn't feel comfortable, then please just stop. We don't want that.

**Laurie**

And let me say something about that. Okay, here's what you do to make it safe. The way you ask the question, embodies an appreciation of the humanity. So what you do that makes this as safe conversation is so multilayered, that you're doing this, that you're asking that question that your voice has depth to the question, what you're doing is so important. As it stands now, human kind, learns a lot about this very subject, which is ridiculously predictable and all life stories. We learn about how to do it, perhaps underscore perhaps, from our parents, perhaps, because they may not share it, they may not be skilled at, or the movies or the media which we know makes up things for. So the fact that you honored this topic gives me hope, for us becoming better students of this part of life that is so inevitable and yet precious and often squandered.

**Jule**

Can you say more about the squandered?

**Laurie**

We just want to get through it, we just want it to be done, all gone. Don't bring it up. We don't, you know, burn a brown, we're not vulnerable, we don't want to reference it done. And especially in my world, so I work with people that are, you know, lauded for performance. And again, that's just worked for me, because as I was raising kids, they were lower maintenance and had a budget. But the point still is, is we don't like getting specific or concrete. about those are emotionally hampered times. Nobody skips it. How to do it is a curriculum, I don't see it taught. Someone might learn it in therapy, again, very white privilege, for the most part, you know, very culturally specific experience, church, different messaging, great messaging, important messaging, not the same as this.

**Jule**

Alright, so we're on the other side, as you look back, what's a good thing are some good things that came out of you've talked about the change in you and the, you know, the compassion and the empathy. But I'm wondering about specific tangibles outside of yourself that you can point to that happened that never would have been able to happen without this.

**Laurie**

I just think I'm steep in my appreciations for whatever it is that someone describes as a hard experience with my children in particular, you know, if they're having a hard time, it triggers me in a different way. I don't want them to have any hard times. I know that's not realistic, but I want to quickly solve it. And so it has made me a tad, an iota. You can check with them if they've noticed it. It's possible it is imperceptible, but I know I'm working on it. People that you love having a hard time is, is just you want to relieve that. So I'm better there. I guess I would also say that I'm appreciative. I’m in my 60s now. So there is a life review process that happens where you'd actually you and I can say us as people in general, again, I'm a white woman. So there's a cultural limit there can look back and say, Oh, look at all that made me me. So I definitely put that in significant experiences, although things that might have been externally more shocking or unexpected have happened. And but I love using that example, because it was literally my own experience.

**Jule**

Well, you have answered and more than answered everything I'd planned to ask, what else might you want to say? Or?

**Laurie**

Oh, I know. There was one other thing that came out of that, that I hadn't thought about it till you asked these great questions. It cleansed me from a chapter so I it took me time. I loved my career. I love many things. I love where I live, it was all fine. But it cleansed me from the experience of living in that house doing those things with those people for that purpose to looking ahead, so I remember walking around the town I lived it. I want to move that I want to leave my house like it was but I could ask it in a cleansed state. And I that helped me because I literally grieved that ending. I did. Yeah. I felt it. And I remember I had some inclination towards that. I remember when I had my first child, I took a week off just to experience the end of my life as not being a mother and I remember taking a week.

**Jule**

I almost picture it's like crossing a river between one life and the next and crossing that river cleansed us. So as you're now, it sounds like on the other side, or at least you've got only wet feet. after crossing the river. What do you see on this side for your life on this new side across the river?

**Laurie**

It's a whole different relationship with my children who are young adults. It's very different. It's just supposed to be different. I do it well because I have made it different I think, which is I'm a guide, an influencer maybe but not mother in that full-hands around them way. I'm in a different place, I see newness ahead. So I'm reexamining. I'm facing changing my work. There's no mourning of that interestingly by and so, but well said about the wet feet you know, some are some rivers are in the Mississippi and some are little streams that was the mothering was a Mississippi.

**Jule**

I wish you know, I wish with the podcast, people listening to the podcast, can't hear that I have had the benefit and the blessing of hearing is you interacting with your sons, and I love to be with people who love each other and it's apparent. And what I see with you and your two boys is one of the most adult to adult relationships I can think of it's just it's amazing how you have how you've raised those boys to be really good men. Really good man.

**Laurie**

Thanks.

**Jule**

Thank you for listening. I'm Jule host of *Hard Times & Hope.* My website is Jule kucera.com. That's julkucera.com. Take care. See you next time.