

N.Y.B.L. Podcast Ep 147 (Stacey Freeman)

[00:00:00] Welcome to another episode of Negotiate Your Best Life. I'm Rebecca Zung and it is my pleasure to welcome Stacy Freeman this week. Stacy is a writer and a journalist and the founder of Right On Track. She has a brand new book out. I am super excited to be talking about that, but before I go into that, I just wanted to tell you a little bit about her.

[00:00:29] She's appeared in the Washington Post and Good Housekeeping and Cosmopolitan and women's. Day and all kinds of amazing things. She's a massively popular writer. She's, uh, an incredibly accomplished writer. But this new book is going to be so transformational and actually kind of fun to read and [00:01:00] really. I think gonna be life changing and inspiring for everybody, so I can't wait to dive into this and listen to the title I bought My husband's Mistress Lingerie.

[00:01:17] what, what is that about? So let's dive into this incredibly cool book. Welcome, Stacy. Thanks for being. Hi, Rebecca. Thanks for having me. . Yeah. So this book is, is brand new. and tell us like about this. Where did this come from? What was the inspiration about that? Well, the title is actually a spoiler. I did buy my husband's mistress lingerie, so you can kind of guess.

[00:01:55] Uh, there's a little bit of a story here. I had Opened [00:02:00] my husband's suitcase at the time. He was traveling back and forth to Hong Kong for work, living there most of the time. That's a whole separate story, which I go into in the book, and I realized it wasn't just the two of us in our marriage. So as Princess Diana said, a little crowded.

[00:02:19] A little crowded . So yeah, so, I handled the lingerie and I confronted, uh, my husband about it at the time. And so, so you explained to people, did you, did you buy it on purpose for her or by accident or? No, it was on purpose. , I, when I found the lingerie, It was a big shock to me as I, you know, would imagine it would be for a lot of people.

[00:02:50] And you know, in that moment I took scissors and I cut it up. So, and then I put it back in the suitcase and didn't tell him. [00:03:00] And you know, at that point I was just reeling and I was trying to. Figure out my next steps. I just didn't know what was going on. It was very lifetime movie of the weekish. And you know, I started asking a lot of questions and I had asked questions, you

know, during the previous few days just because, you know, something just didn't feel right and, you know, there were other clues and, but I finally elicited, elicited a response from.

[00:03:32] Then husband, which, you know, I didn't like, obviously. And you know, I told him what I had done with the lingerie, which was cut it up. And, you know, in that moment he just turned to me very calmly and said, I'm only going to buy her another one. And at that, oh my, my God. , oh my gosh. . Yeah. That's like very so to hear.

[00:03:59] Did you [00:04:00] like wanna like kill him in that moment? No, I was frozen. I was just, wow. Absolutely frozen. And then in that moment I just turned to him and said, I'll do it. I'll buy, you know, I'll buy another one. I said, I'll do it. and I did, and I left my house. This was in the middle of the day. And I went to the mall and walked right into the store and bought the same piece of lingerie, which, you know, I talk about.

[00:04:28] So you went out and did it? Oh, I did. My God. What made you do that? I just, you know, I was reeling, but I had enough sense about me to know that I just didn't wanna be that. You know, person who is like this vengeful person tearing up lingerie with the scissors and just, you know, being this kind of irrational person.

[00:04:56] And believe me, you know, there were irrational moments that followed this [00:05:00] because, you know, when your whole life explodes you, you, you're just constantly having a rush of emotions. But something told me, okay, like I don't wanna be this person. I don't wanna. Do it, you know, go through, you know, whatever I'm gonna go through in the next few months.

[00:05:16] And I really didn't know if that was gonna be a divorce or trying to get my, my husband back. It turned out to be a lot of those things. But I knew that just this didn't feel right. This wasn't who I was, you know, someone who's gonna cut something up. And it was very sobering when he said to me, I'm only going to buy her another one, which told me like, this isn't going away and this is something I need to face.

[00:05:40] and it's not like I had all these next steps in front of me, but you know, I only looked this far in front of me and just it came up from inside that, you know, I'll buy her another one. And I did that. I, that is so crazy to me. Like insane. Like I can't imagine like, what is [00:06:00] going through your head that made you go, I'm okay, I'll go buy it.

[00:06:04] That's just, I don't exactly know, but I knew I didn't wanna be this like, You know, erratic person just cutting things up and, and being crazy about it. But, and so you come home and you hand it to him. Here you go. Yeah. , what did you say? I don't remember exactly what he said, but it was all very calm. There wasn't fighting.

[00:06:27] And he must have felt so guilty then him. Yeah. When you handed it to him. I don't, I don't know how he was feeling. I can't really speak to that. He was very stoic, I will tell you that. And you know, I, I can't speak to what someone else was feeling, only to how I was feeling, which was I was in absolute shock.

[00:06:47] Yeah. And, you know, but I knew like I was gonna have a rough road ahead of me, however this was gonna pan out. And you know, I think there was a little part of me that thought I would appease him by replacing it cuz I [00:07:00] had done. Bad and like kind of just like a misbehaved child. And I guess in some respects, I think I wanted to just appease him by buying another one, you know, because I had done this misdeed, I guess, of cutting it up.

[00:07:16] But I knew also that this is not who I wanted to be. I didn't wanna look like this crazy person. And when he said, I'm only going to buy her another one. I saw the writing on the wall like this wasn't going to go away. This was more than just the piece of lingerie. So, yeah. Yeah. And did you think in that moment, okay, I, I wanna be divorced, I want to be, you know, you're outta here.

[00:07:45] I wanna save my marriage, or you know, what were you thinking in that moment? Oh, my first instinct was to save my marriage. I was fearful of what would happen. And I had been with my husband since I was 15 years old. [00:08:00] Mm-hmm. , we had met in high school and never dated other people. So, and, and how long my whole life were you at that point?

[00:08:07] I was 39. 39. So, wow. You know, I had. Life really before him, you know, except, you know, childhood and adolescence and, you know, no romantic life, no dating in high school. And it was just, my whole life was very much wrapped up with my husband, my children, my household, my children were I think 11, 10 and six at the time.

[00:08:33] So we were wrapped up in, you know, going to school and activities and, you know, living in our community. And he had two years prior to that, started commuting for work. And I say commuting he was coming home every, uh, couple of months going back and forth to Hong Kong, but he was living there more than he was home And.

[00:08:55] It just, you know, we kind of said, oh, we'll be like military couples when [00:09:00] we decided to do this. But it, you know, did not work for us like that. And you know, we got to the point where, you know, here I was standing there with torn lingerie that wasn't mine. And the writing was on the wall. Yeah. And how old was he?

[00:09:16] Was he the same? As, as me. Mm-hmm. He's a few years older. We're around the same age, you know, he was in his early forties. Yeah. Okay. So, and you wrote in the book that you hadn't been with anybody else ever, you know, sexually Nope, Nope. Never had dated anybody. I think I, I, I write about it. I think I, in the book I had.

[00:09:39] Date, uh, in 1987, a double date with a girlfriend of mine from high school. And, you know, it was nothing of nothing. It was what high school kids do. And then shortly thereafter, I had met my, you know, boyfriend who became my husband. And just never had, there was never a breakup even, we always dated each other.

[00:09:58] It was always long [00:10:00] distance. We went to different colleges, different law schools, and You know, when this Hong Kong, uh, arrangement came up for his work I figured, okay, we can do this. We've done it before. But I guess at that stage of the game you know, it just, it did not, it was not going to work for us.

[00:10:18] And you know, and had he been with anyone else before, Do you know, like before you, not to my knowledge. I don't know. Mm-hmm. , not to my knowledge. It doesn't appear. I, I really don't know. I have no, I have no way of knowing. It didn't seem so to me, this came for me out of left field.[00:11:00]
[00:12:00] [00:13:00] [00:14:00] [00:15:00] [00:16:00] [00:17:00] [00:18:00]

[00:18:48] Yeah. And Did you ever, I mean, and, and so when you wanted to save the marriage at that point mm-hmm. , did he wanna save the [00:19:00] marriage too, or? He seemed open to it, but not at the very beginning stages. He, he had, you know, what was getting to me is that during the course of the week that he was home, cuz he had been home for a conference He repeated the same thing, which was, you know, he had said the week before he came home that he was done with our marriage, but I like, I just didn't understand what he meant.

[00:19:26] I thought maybe he was jet lagged, but over the week that he was home, he just kind of. Kept saying, you know, it was done and, or he needed to see this through. So when he left at the end of the week it was left kind of open

ended that, you know, he was involved with somebody and he needed to see this through.

[00:19:46] So, You know, here I am at home. This had just happened, but I had to kind of move throughout my day, you know, taking care of my kids, not knowing what was gonna happen. And that was very nerve-wracking [00:20:00] because you know, anyone who's ever been faced with an extramarital affair, you know, all you can think about.

[00:20:08] Is what the other person is doing or not doing. And also, you know, so far away I had no control. It's not even like I could, you know, drive by or see what he was doing or stop by and or even talk to him in person if I wanted to, you know, I could call, he wouldn't pick up the phone. It's like your mind starts to run away with you.

[00:20:29] So very nerve-wracking. And this went on for a long time. What does that even mean? See it through? . That's what I said. What does this even mean? And he had become involved with this person and I guess he wanted to see what the relationship was going, how it was going to evolve. But where did that leave me?

[00:20:50] And where it left me because I let myself be left. Like this was in limbo. Yeah. But that's seems to me like he still wants to [00:21:00] see this other person. Like maybe he's in love with her, maybe, you know? Oh, yeah. Yeah, he wanted to see that through. He wasn't, you know, I was not, I was clearly not the priority nor what was going on in our household.

[00:21:13] Not the priority. No, definitely not. And it, it really came out of left field. I mean, we were, we were on a family vacation a few weeks prior to that, so it just was absolutely shocking to me ing. Devastating. Absolutely devastating. So, I did you have a quote in your book, uh, where you quote, uh, author JK Rowling, where you say, rock bottom became, this became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.

[00:21:50] yeah. You, you, you find a place where you're just not willing to, you know, be stepped on anymore. And you know, I did not know it was going to [00:22:00] happen, so I did after he went back to Hong Kong to see this through, I did start inter interviewing divorce lawyers right away. Because I knew that that could be a definite possibility.

[00:22:12] So while he was seeing that through, I was exploring my possibilities as well, which is something I think that is important because you know, if you're

standing at some sort of crossroads, you wanna really Make sure that you have options and, and start preparing yourself and protect yourself. So I did end up retaining a lawyer, but kind of putting it on the back burner and saying, okay, you know, I have, you gave him a retainer and said, okay, I'll talk to you whenever, maybe never, but you're here if I need you.

[00:22:50] And so, you know, for the next, I'd say three months, while he was seeing this through. And you know, apparently there [00:23:00] was a breakup, I don't even know. And for about a week, you know, maybe the following April, this happened in January, the following April, a few months later, we sort of reconciled for about a week or so.

[00:23:13] and, you know, we're having a holiday dinner going to the movies. My children were looking at me as if we were both insane. You know, they were all watching this. So, at that point, you know, this was going on, but I still had no clarity about anything and certainly no confidence in what I was looking at.

[00:23:33] And You know, just too many things were up in the air. Would I move there? What would happen if I moved there and we didn't work out? I'd had my children, you know, I would have my children over there. It just, there were too many what ifs for me. And at one point, like we started arguing and I said to myself, You know what, this is not where I wanna be in my life.

[00:23:55] My kids were watching this kind of craziness. It wasn't good for them. [00:24:00] And I just, I called my lawyer and I just said, okay, we're, we're gonna move forward. And that was the beginning. Did you ever go to counseling with him or anything? Yes. There, yes. So I was pretty insistent because I, again, I was trying to work things out and I really.

[00:24:19] You know, heavily requested that we go to counseling, which he you know, he agreed to kind of reluctantly cuz I really don't think that he was interested in reconciling and it was gonna be his way or the highway. If we stayed together, I would have to move over there, which, you know, was the whole issue to begin with.

[00:24:41] And I talk all about all of this in. and he just did not seem, you know, you have to have two people to work on a marriage. One person can't do it alone. And so it became pretty evident in one two hour session that this was absolutely going nowhere. So, or [00:25:00] nowhere. Good. And, you know, just again, you know, right after that is when I, I said, you know, I told my lawyer to, you know, Send a letter that we were engaged and to go find for, he should go find, you know, a divorce lawyer.

[00:25:17] We were done. And before the, he found this other person, was he like that in the marriage as well? Like kind of his way or the highway or, no, I wouldn't say that. I think that we were very much business partners in our lives. We had known each other so long and I think there was. A very sharp division of labor.

[00:25:42] I, you know, had early on we had decided together I would stay home with our children. He worked a lot he traveled a lot. And you know, we made that decision that I would stay home, you know, with the kids. They were young and you know, , however, that, [00:26:00] however many years that turned into I don't think it was ever supposed to be as long as it was.

[00:26:04] I ended up living in Hong Kong from 2003 to 2005 with him. So, you know, I went there with two babies, came back with a third baby that we had over there. And you know, the years go on, you know, you have three little kids. You know, you get involved in your life and then all of a sudden, you know, you're 39, I was 39 years old with three kids and you know, a house and a cat and you know, a life.

[00:26:32] So, you know, it really was very jarring that all of this happened. But you know, you have to start where you are, you know?

[00:26:46] Would you say that he is narcissistic or no? No, I wouldn't say he's narcissistic. I think that divorce can bring out the worst in anyone especially when you're [00:27:00] first going through it and you know, you're going through these traumatic experiences. I think, I do think having, you know, met more people since I.

[00:27:08] You know, got divorced and dated and everything. I think that people can exhibit, I think there are narcissists. I'm convinced there are, but I think other times that there are people that it's a spectrum and people can. At sometimes exhibit narcissistic personality. You know, it's definitely a spectrum.

[00:27:28] Traits. Traits like behaviors, but not be narc like a narcissist per se. But I think it doesn't really matter at that point. I think you have to be aware of. Behavior, you know, from somebody else that doesn't serve you. And that can be emotionally abusive. So whether you wanna slap a label on this person's a narcissist, because you know as well as I do narcissists don't admit they're narcissists and they certainly don't.

[00:27:56] You know, it's very infrequent that someone is labeled by a doctor [00:28:00] as a narcissist because they've sought treatment. And you know, that

it's just, it's hard to get a clinical diagnosis, but these people exist in our life. But no, I don't, I don't think my, my ex-husband's a narcissist, but I have come across those people when I was out and about dating and I knew from nothing of this.

[00:28:21] It never, you know, gelled until I started dating and then I was like, oh my God, these people, I didn't, I couldn't even identify what the behavior was that I was looking at until one day I started reading about it and it was just like one thing after another. It was like this light bulb went off in my head.

[00:28:41] that, oh my God, I'm involved with someone who's, you know, likely a narcissist or is, you know, behaving in this way. And it's, it's so doesn't serve me. And I couldn't identify. What signs did you see? Oh, I mean, you talk about this in your videos all the time, [00:29:00] hoovering when you're dating, just you break up, somebody comes back over and over again.

[00:29:05] There's never a goodbye. Just, you know, I've seen these patterns in different people. You know, there's been so many nice people that I've dated, but you know, from time to time you come across this type of behavior and, you know, If you are not aware of it, if you don't know the signs of it, it's very easy to become victimized by it.

[00:29:24] And especially if, and I wrote about this, you know, this may not appear in the book, but I've written about it elsewhere, that when you leave a marriage and you're separated, you are very vulnerable and There's people out there who know about your vulnerability and they prey on it. And it's just very easy if you don't know the signs of, you know, a narcissistic person and that you really can be victimized in so many ways.

[00:29:52] Oh yeah, absolutely. And so what did you do to. [00:30:00] Stronger and recover and start your new life and break free and become a stronger person that you are now. Well, first and foremost, I hired a therapist, which I think anyone that's going through a difficult time or trauma, uh, I think that it's so important to have somebody that you can speak to confidentially and who is trained and it's a safe space and you know, you have this appointment on your calendar that you really you know, you've committed to going to that appointment.

[00:30:38] And it's, it's just, it's something just for you. And I used to look forward to it. And I think that for anyone going through a difficult time, especially a divorce I think that it's important to get a therapist and I think

learning about people who can take advantage of you, I think [00:31:00] is super important.

[00:31:01] So you can pull yourself away from behaviors that are hurting you. , very important. So that's why your videos are so helpful to people. Because someone like me, I really had no idea of certain behaviors that I was looking at. And , I think, uh, spending time, you know, being creative, doing something that is only for you.

[00:31:24] Mm-hmm. is really important in the healing process and having time just to yourself. Now, for me, that was a little more challenging because I didn't have joint custody. I had, you know, full physical custody. So, you know, I spent the money on babysitters. My mother and stepfather were very helpful. To watch the kids so I could go out on dates that I could go on a vacation with a friend that I could have a little bit of time to myself.

[00:31:52] And I think that's really, really important. However, you can swing that and it's, it can be a challenge, but I think that [00:32:00] setting aside time for yourself and also being creative, it's, they're essential for healing. Yeah, absolutely. So for me it was the writing was. That was my therapy. And also, you know, baking.

[00:32:13] Yeah. So, absolutely. So any regrets? No, and I think, you know, we all have times in our lives where, you know, we do things we're not proud of. So in that sense, yes. You know, maybe if I could turn back time, I might have done, you know, something differently in an act or something I said, and we all make, you know, mistakes and Saying things in front of our children.

[00:32:39] I mean, those are things, you know, for me, like those are things that I wish I could erase, you know, maybe. You know, I always say to people, co-parenting takes practice. You know, you're hurting yourself and to really make your children a priority by not involving them in what's going on in your household, you know, between yourself and your [00:33:00] spouse.

[00:33:00] So regrets like that? Yes, but to a point, because I think that. When you have regrets, it's okay to say, okay, I regret this, but you need to move on from where you are standing right now. There's no sense in ruminating past the point where, okay, this happened. I own it. But what can I learn from it? Then you move forward.

[00:33:23] But if you stay rooted in your past, you're, you're hurting yourself and you're not helping your family. And especially for someone going through a

divorce, especially someone with children you really need to, to get it together and ruminating. It's just, it's useless. Yeah, absolutely. For sure. And how are you guys doing now?

[00:33:47] We are actually great. We have a great co-parenting relationship. We co-parent from 8,000 miles away. 8,000. Oh, cuz he's in Hong Kong still. He still lives and yes, so [00:34:00] he's there. But you know, he, he has a great relationship with our children. He speaks to them every night over FaceTime. He visits them, you know, when he can get here.

[00:34:10] The pandemic was awful, you know, you know, for so many people it was not good for us and our co-parenting because you know, he was unable to, to physically be here. So that was very challenging for all of us. But but you know, he has since come to visit, my older daughter graduated from college and you know, he's coming again.

[00:34:30] So it. , you know, you have to just. You know, deal with what's in front of you and, you know, learn how to get along. And we've really come so far in our co-parenting and we never really had a lot of the acrimony that you would expect from this type of situation. And during the divorce process, we kind of both committed like, we're just gonna get through this and not.[00:35:00]

[00:35:00] you know, give the lawyers a lot to really fight about. And you know, we were divorced once he hired an attorney, you know, within 11 months. Mm-hmm. and you know, could go about, could go about living our lives. And so, you know, you know, we get along and, you know, I'll call him for advice. We are on the same page about our children's education and.

[00:35:24] You know, things about the kids and we talk about, you know, this, we're 10 years plus out from this. So, you know, if I need him to ask him a question, if he needs to ask me a question, you know, that's it. Like, you know, this is our relationship and the kids are most important. . Well, but in the book, you talk a lot about how you were able to move on, and there's some funny stories in there about all your new dating experiences and having sex the first time, right.

[00:35:53] And mm-hmm. . Yeah. Uh, all of that. So I, I, I was reading some of that this, uh, this morning, which [00:36:00] is, uh, kind of funny. So everybody needs to go get the book. I'm not, Feel, uh, I'm gonna le I'm not gonna no spoiler alerts, but there's some funny stories in there about all of that. And, uh, so everybody needs to go check out the book.

[00:36:15] Uh, so where can they find the book? Okay, so, I'm at stacy freeman.com. It's s t a c e Y. Freeman, f r e e m a n.com. The books on Amazon, uh, I bought my husband's Mistress Lingerie and wherever, you know, wherever you like to shop, your local bookstore, you can find it online at IndieBound, my publisher, unsolicited Press, and Barnes and Noble and pretty much, you know, online.

[00:36:46] So just, you know, if you Google the name, you can find it. And we'll put links to it everywhere as well, so everybody can grab it. So go get a copy of her new [00:37:00] book and enjoy. It'll be a fun read for everyone. And you know, a way to Imagine and be inspired about how you're, you can start your new lives as well.

[00:37:10] So thank you Stacy, and thank you luck with the brand new book. Very exciting. Congratulations. Thanks. So fun. Great talking to you. You too. Recording. Stopped.