

THE BLOODLINE WITH LLS

A PODCAST FOR PATIENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Episode: 'Creating Something Bigger Than Myself Despite Cancer: Brett Hagler's Story'

Description:

Join this conversation as Alicia, Edith and Lizette sit down to chat with Brett Hagler. Brett is an author, cancer survivor, and CEO of New Story, an organization that pioneers solutions to end global homelessness by working to create the world's first 3D-printed community. On this episode, Brett explains how his chondrosarcoma diagnosis helped to refine his focus and future goals, putting him on the path of creating something bigger than himself. Despite diagnosis, Brett challenges patients to reflect on the question, "How do I want to remember this moment 10 years from now?", to help gather strength and purpose to push forward. He also describes the crucial role of caregivers and the importance of having a supportive community rallying around each person facing a serious illness.

Transcript:

Alicia Patten-Madera: Welcome to *The Bloodline with LLS*. I'm Alicia.

Edith Aquino: I'm Edith.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: And I'm Lizette. Thank you so much for joining us on this episode.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Today we will be speaking with Brett Hagler. Brett is an author, cancer survivor, and was recently named to the 2016 Forbes 30 under 30 list. Congratulations and welcome, Brett.

Brett Hagler: Great to be here.

Alicia Patten-Madera: We look forward to our conversation today.

Now, we're so excited to talk to you, and to give our listeners a background. I actually first learned of you and your company called New Story when my husband and I were watching a docuseries called *Home*, which explores the groundbreaking ideas and

inspiring stories behind the world's most innovative and imaginative dwellings, which we'll get into later, of course.

And as we watched more of the episode, you mentioned that your perspective on life changed after you received a cancer diagnosis. And I heard you speak with such passion and intentionality that I had to bring your story to the team. And as you know, LLS is an organization that provides educational resources and support resources to blood cancer patients. However, you were not diagnosed with a blood cancer. You were diagnosed with chondrosarcoma, a rare type of cancer that usually begins in the bones but can sometimes occur in the soft tissue near the bones. And with any cancer diagnosis, the person is thrown into the world of unknown that they have to navigate, of course, which we can all learn from.

So, firstly, how is it being on *Home*, which is an exciting experience?

Brett Hagler: You can download Apple TV, or you might have it already set up, but the series is called *Home*, and we're on episode nine. And, you know, we shot it for over a year, and seeing the final finished product, which is about 40 minutes, was, obviously, a dream come true. And I was just super proud to be part of the story and to, you know, have a crazy dream and then two and a half years later see that dream come to life on, you know, across millions of TVs and produced by Apple was, was pretty surreal, to be honest. And so, it's been really just humbling and quite a journey to, to have this story shared.

And it's connected us with a lot of people, you know, just like this, as an example, that, you know, are just kind of sitting at home watching, watching the series and then our episode comes up and it's, you know, a little different take from the rest of the episodes 'cause there's a lot of social impact and a big focus on our innovation from 3D printing helped us. So, I think a lot of people have been pretty happy after they viewed it.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Now just going back to what you said on the episode, which, again, is why we're here today, you said that your perspective of life changed after your cancer diagnosis. Could you tell us more about your diagnosis and maybe the signs and symptoms that you were experiencing during that time?

Brett Hagler: Yes. I was diagnosed when I was 18. I was a senior in high school. And it was the final year I was an athlete. Basketball was my main sport. And it was towards the end of my senior basketball season, which is a very competitive season, college aspirations to play basketball, all of that.

And, you know, it happened people say out of nowhere. It really was out of nowhere. You know, people that knew me in high school would kind of categorize me as kind of the stereotypical jock. Just very athletic, extremely healthy from, at least from the outside how I ate, how I worked out, my fitness, certain lifestyle habits all very healthy.

And so, you kind of add all that up and it just, seems like this wouldn't happen to me because of what I was doing as an athlete, how healthy I was, etc. And so it was the last thing anybody thought was going to happen.

And then how it started was the chondrosarcoma was in my jaw near my wisdom teeth. It started to have some bleeding back there and I felt like some kind of like lump or something. And I was just like, "Oh, this is like an ingrown wisdom tooth or something that's just annoying and it'll go away. It needs to go away because I'm trying to finish my basketball season." And so, I kind of just like ignored it for a couple months. Maybe a little less than that.

And then it continued just to bleed. And my mom finally made an appointment with the dentist. Just, the dentist, you know, no fancy oncologist or anything like that. And when I went in to do my, the dentist to look at it, they took X-rays and they saw that the bone was decaying. And so right after that, on the next day I went and got a biopsy and, and that came back. And it was a stage II chondrosarcoma that was about the size of a golf ball.

And so, you know, within 48 hours my life changed, and I'm sure folks listening have had similar stories of how quickly it happens. But that was, kind of the origin of it.

Edith Aquino: At the time of your diagnosis, what support resources did you feel were missing for someone your age being diagnosed with cancer?

Brett Hagler: I was extremely lucky. I have two extraordinary parents that were just a ten through this whole process. My brother as well. And so, the immediate family was just off the charts when it came to care and love and resources. The school I went to also really came behind me. It was a small, little Christian private school, and they really, really cared for me. And that was the best of like, I guess, resources and were just like care and a community behind you. And that's what I remember, this was about 11 years ago now. And so that's what I remember. And then we, fortunately, got in contact with some excellent doctors in South Florida through the University of Miami, a clinic down there. And that was kind of my setup.

And, you know, I, obviously, knew nothing about this. My parents didn't know anything about this. You can, do your research and I know there's different points of view on, people doing, insane amount of research. Some people trust in the doctors. I think it's just kind of your opinion of what you want to do. And we, we ended up I think more so trusting the doctors and, and it ended up working out. But those are the resources that I recall. There was nothing else that I really turned to or knew that was available. Maybe I missed out, but I don't recall any other resources.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Awesome. And, Brett, you touched on something really important, actually, earlier when you said, "It was kind of just having that support or community around you." I think that is what a lot of people are looking for, especially in a time like that where you are thrown into a world, some people may have, been in the healthcare world, may not be, but you have no idea how to navigate once you hear those words that you are diagnosed with cancer. And so LLS, in light of knowing that people need each other, we created a resource called LLS Community. And what it is, is basically a community of blood cancer patients, survivors, caregivers who can create a profile and connect with each other, ask questions, join a specific group and really build off of the strength of others because you had great parents and siblings around you, but sometimes people don't have that. And so we saw the need and created that.

Brett Hagler: That's amazing! And that's active right now?

Alicia Patten-Madera: Yeah, as of today, over 14,000 Community users.

Brett Hagler: Wow! That's incredible.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Yeah. And, and over 73,000 comments, so it just speaks to the engagement that people are finding to be useful on there as well.

Brett Hagler: Yeah. I love that. That's wonderful.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: Yeah, a lot of patients like to hear from other patients, you know. Kind of like that I'm not alone, you know, not going through this alone.

Brett Hagler: Yes, very much so. Love that.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: I also watched a TED Talk with you. And I know that you had mentioned that going through cancer really put your life into perspective and you went through it at such a young age. And I know that you kind of changed your trajectory in life at a young age. Do you think that the cancer diagnosis spurred that for you?

Brett Hagler: Yeah. I mean I do, and I think, you know, obviously, right now people that are listening are most likely impacted somehow by the word cancer. But I know all of us, you know, in the world are, obviously, impacted through the adversity of COVID-19 right now, right. And so-

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: Right.

Brett Hagler: -the way I think about that was when I was 18, up until that point, I had not faced like real adversity in my life, And, I think looking back, and I don't just say that to sound, like mister smiley positive guy 'cause it's not true. It really was a gift because it ended up shaping my attitude, my perspective, my grit, my resilience, and my character. And if it would not have, have come to me at that point, I don't know how long it would have taken to shape my character or shape my attitude the way that it did.

And when I look back, I'm just like so grateful for that because, ultimately, even though it was a, terrible hard year going through everything, it built me into, I think, the kind of leader I am today, the kind of friend I am today. Definitely helped as an entrepreneur and as a CEO was, was going through that understanding at an early age that when you're on earth, nobody goes through earth without problems and difficulties to overcome.

And when you get to experience with that at a younger age, I think it kind of sets you up for the rest of life knowing that there are going to be problems; there are going to be difficulties. This is definitely one of the, more difficult ones, sometimes the most difficult one that someone goes through in their life, but I think for those that are fortunate and lucky enough to make it through, you're only going to be better for the rest of your life in my opinion from my experience, but I just know how much that shaped me. And, obviously, I don't wish this on anybody but going back, I know how much it shaped me and how much it changed me and how much it made me better.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: Yeah. And I know we're going into, what you do, and the big part of that is that you want to help others. And I think that's something that can truly come out of, you know, at a young age, just getting that type of perspective in your life.

Because it takes, a lot of people a long time and a lot of wisdom to get to that point.

Brett Hagler: That's right, very much so. And the other thing I realized and, you know, this has happened with other experiences in my life since then, but, whether

people like to hear this or not, ultimately, you're not in control, right. When I was diagnosed with cancer, 48 hours before that, I had a whole different life trajectory. All different plans for my next couple years, where I was going to go to college, all of this stuff, right.

Similar to what's happening right now in the world with this virus, right. Two months ago, none of us were thinking we're going to be here today or how is this going to impact our businesses in 2020, 2021, 2022, right? So, ultimately, you're not in control. I'm all for making plans, having goals, you know, striving toward something, but at the end of the day, you never ever know when something's going to happen and when it's going to come. The only control is how you respond to it and your attitude in responding to it.

And so I think what it also did was it made me realize at an early age that I'm not invincible, that I'm not Superman, that in this life, I'm not guaranteed to just have life the picture perfect way that you think it will be when you're young, right. Like, "Oh, everything's going to be great until I'm like 100." And, you know, that's not how life is. And so the earlier you get to understand that life is a gift and it's not all for your gain and you cannot control everything that happens, I think that puts a whole different perspective on how you live life, and that's what it did for me.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: Yeah, I know that uncertainty, something like you said, at this time, you know, patients, caregivers we're all living with that uncertainty and have come to a place where now we understand that all our plans may not-

Brett Hagler: Totally.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: -come into fruition, but just how you have handled it. And I know that we're going to go into your inspiration and what you've done with that. But just along the way with your story and how you've built your organization does speak to how you've overcome uncertainty.

Brett Hagler: That's right. Absolutely. Absolutely. I'm 30 now and, you know, I'm an entrepreneur. That's like, what I am. I'm an entrepreneur and I lead an organization. That's what I do professionally. And there is no doubt that I am better for this job, by having gone through that adversity at a younger age. And I think you'd find a very similar trend of other entrepreneurs or other executives or doesn't even have to be business, right. It could be anything that people do. You'll see an outlier that a lot of those people that are in those positions, a lot of them have gone through some unique experience or some adversity, right, because it just, it shapes and it really

frames how you handle challenge and adversity in the future. And I don't know what's a better like skill to have than that and if you have, goals and then things you want to do in your life, being able to have that muscle to confront a challenge and confront adversity and to, of course, have some, let there be grief, let there be lament in the beginning, no doubt even throughout, it's totally part of the process and it's super important not to bury that away, but to ultimately come out of it with a, you know, stronger attitude, better character, more resilience.

I mean, to me, I don't think there's anything more valuable than that. And that's what, you know, caregivers are listening and I can't even imagine how, frustrated you understandably are and how disappointing things can be and, you know, not knowing if there's hope, etc., like I totally get all that. But I think having hope of imagining the person you're caring for, five, ten years from now and imagine them, whether it's talking to their company or talking at their school or just talking to a classroom, and telling students about how the, the adversity they went through made them better at whatever they were doing, it's a real thing. And, then you as caregiver you're going to be part of their story and their lives and they're going to be eternally grateful for you. And that's just, that's a unique position to be in. And I know it can suck right now, but like the long-term outcomes I think are more favorable than some people might realize when you're in the middle of it.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: Right, cause its caregivers also, not just patients, that are trying to find something that we can control in this kind of situation. So very true.

Brett Hagler: You know, what I tell my team a lot is "There's, so many things that we, of course, can't control right now," right. You have the COVID era. There's so many things we can't control. But two things that I say we can control, number one is our character and part of that is our attitude in that, right. And we do get to choose every morning how we're going to respond, how we're going to think about things; and that is in our control. A lot of other things are not. And so what I've really been just kind of encouraging my team with and other folks I talk with and advise is, you know, "Control what you can control during this time and know that if you are strengthening your character through whatever adversity you're going through, that is a significant, significant win for, for the rest of your career, for the rest of your life, etc." And, that is something right now that, you know, patients and caregivers can control even though it's hard and, you know, you get, you need to give yourself grace because you're not going to have a great attitude every day and you're not going to be perfect and nobody's trying to set a standard like that. But, but you can control your character.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: Sure. And I know we do have a lot of young adult listeners that were diagnosed at an early age as you were. Do you have any advice for the younger adults that are listening?

Brett Hagler: Yeah, I do. I would say that, , if you're younger, you may feel like, you know, a lot of your friends don't, aren't going through this, people at your school aren't going through this, or people, if you're in college or a young professional, aren't going through this. And at least what I felt is that you are different, right. And I think if sometimes people can hear the word different and maybe not, not to live into that, right. Maybe just want to be normal and I totally understand that. But the more I, you know, as I grow in my career and I look at people that I really respect and are really doing things that matter in the world, they're all different, right. The word "different," those are the kinds of people that make change happen. It doesn't matter, it doesn't have to be a big thing, but they do things that matter and they make an impact and they make an influence on this world while they're here.

And, ultimately, I don't think there's a higher purpose for what we can aim for, more and more fulfilling purpose of what you can aim for while you're on earth. And so, so, yes, right now you're living a different kind of lifestyle. And I know there are values in that and a lot of it is not fair and it sucks. Trust me I get all that, but like that difference is, in my opinion, can be what really separates you and differentiates you in your life. And I would just say take a long-term view on that. Try to have a longer-term vision and I know it's harder when you're younger because you care so much about, this year or graduation coming up, and, and I get all that. But if you can think a little bit more long term and then work backwards from there, I would recommend that. It's just to start getting into more of a, a long-term vision mindset of this is where I want to be in 3 years, in 5 years, in 10 years, in 20 years and envisioning that and, and thinking of yourself.

I used to do this all the time. I used to think of how will my story that I'm going through now, how will I tell it in 10 years and how will it impact me, and how can I use that to encourage others and inspire others? And that is something unique that if you go through difficulty and you go through hard times, you now have a story worth telling, right?

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: Yeah.

Brett Hagler: As opposed to if you were just like, like everybody else, right, just doing the normal life, which is not bad. That's a good thing. I'm not saying that's a bad thing. You don't really have as much of a story to tell, right. It's a little bit-

Alicia Patten-Madera: Absolutely.

Brett Hagler: -more of the status quo. But you've now been gifted with this story and then it's up to you of how you want to tell it.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: I love the way you said that you're gifted with this story because everybody is gifted with their own story and you've definitely differentiated yourself. And I know Alicia's going to get into now how you have differentiated yourself and how you have dreamt big, using your words. I just wanted to say that it's great. My daughter wants to be an entrepreneur. She can hardly say the word itself, but she definitely-

Brett Hagler: It's a hard one to spell too.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: -yes. But that is what she has chosen, and just you saying, you know, going into classrooms and talking to, to the kids, I think is very important because they're learning in a whole different way at this point. They're learning how to problem-solve and they're learning how to work together and collaborate and come up with bigger ideas. So, I think it's wonderful that your story can really resonate with so many people.

Brett Hagler: Yes, exactly. Exactly.

And the people listening, you have to, again, like I said earlier, that's a choice you could make, right. You, can make the choice of envisioning yourself five, ten years out from now and what is the story you're going to tell? And you get to do that.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Absolutely. Brett, you said something earlier that I thought was really moving. I remember speaking to someone about two or three weeks ago and she's getting ready for college. And she was talking about how she had this fear of the unknown. Again, with the pandemic that we're in, she was, you know, scared about that. She was scared about college. She was scared about how college would look. Everything because there is a fear of like Lizette said, uncertainty and what that means for each person.

And I think it's our job as people to learn from the experiences we go through. But I remember just thinking as we were talking and I was like, "If we use this experience, this pandemic or any, any life challenge as the tool to teach us to be more graceful to be softer, then we can see this experience as not it simply being the horrible thing that it is." You know what I mean?

Brett Hagler: A hundred percent. That's right. And, you know, I think that, over the next five years, once we come out of this, pandemic, the kind of the people that have the right attitude towards that, those are the ones that are going to do positive things over the next five years. And that could be, you know, at their companies, that could be in their classrooms. Wherever it is, those folks with that mindset are going to be the ones that make things happen.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Absolutely. Could not agree more. So just reading more-

Brett Hagler: Yeah.

Alicia Patten-Madera: -about your story, Brett, I remember reading about your trip to Haiti. And it was 2014, correct?

Brett Hagler: Correct, yes.

Alicia Patten-Madera: And you mentioned that when you got there, you kind of just looked around, you didn't like what you saw, and, essentially, you decided to do something about it, which ties into what you said earlier when you said, "How I view today will help me to determine how I tell the story in ten years." And so, you joined forces with other like-minded people who committed to doing things differently. Could you tell us more about the driving force behind the creation of New Story and what you saw around you that was really fuel to create something new and be different and do so intentionally?

Brett Hagler: Yeah, for sure. So, I went to Haiti. I was pretty young; I was about 23. And so, the problem I saw when I went was kids being born into tents. They were living in tarp tents, which is, as bad of a living environment as you could have. No protection from storms, intruders, trees, they had nothing. You're just living in survival mode is what we call it. And so that was the first thing I saw.

And the second thing I saw, and this is why I mentioned how young I was, because I was so young, I had a certain vision of how I thought a charity could operate. And the more I looked around, especially for kind of the sector that I was looking into, which was more of the housing space, I just saw a lot of organizations operating very similarly. I don't mean this in any bad way, but like very traditional and not super modern and not really being in front of new technology and new innovation. And that's what excited me.

And so, I thought that it made sense to actually start an organization, if we were going to be founded on those different principles that was going to be so much just

differentiated from the other nonprofits out there. And, and that's how we got started. It was me and two young cofounders who were 23 and 24. We had no experience really. We had no big successful wins before this. My resume was very average at best. But what we had was a confidence that we could start and we really had conviction that what we were doing needed to exist in the world. And we had the courage to try it knowing that there's a good chance it wasn't going to work, and we would have to say, "Oh, this was a failure, etc." But I think kind of what I mentioned earlier about being different, I relish in the idea of being different. What scared me was being normal. You know, what scared me was-

Alicia Patten-Madera: Same, right.

Brett Hagler: -having just a normal, yeah, exactly. Was having a normal job.

I would rather say, "Yeah, hey, look, I tried to start this thing. We took a swing at it for two years. We helped people and like, you know, it turns out, it just didn't work for X and X reasons. I learned a ton, onto the next." And, I knew that a lot of people, or at least people that I was trying to connect with, would respect that more than if I went and just got a regular, normal job that I wasn't as passionate about, right. And so that was one of my mindsets.

And I think that I'm by no means gifted with anything special as far as like certain talent or intelligence but what I-

Alicia Patten-Madera: Your story. You have your story.

Brett Hagler: -yeah, but what I had is I just think like the courage to do things that a lot of other people just won't do. And I'm like, well, that's-

Alicia Patten-Madera: Right.

Brett Hagler: -my competitive advantage is I'm going to do it, and then I say this all the time with our organization is that "bold ideas attract bold people." And that's really how we've grown so fast and how we've done some of the things we've done in really just our first five years is because when you're trying to do bolder things, you're going to attract bolder people that want to work for you, that want to fund you, support you, companies that want to partner with you, etc. And that's a choice. Again, that's a choice anybody can make, is how bold do they want to be.

Alicia Patten-Madera: You also quote this often where it says, "crazy until it's not," which I love because usually when you're different or you have a different idea or

approach or anything like that, people are kind of like, "Yeah, that's a crazy idea." And that's the language around it until it's done and then we realize it wasn't that crazy from the beginning or you just had to have the courage to be crazy and do exactly what it is you set out to do. And from my personal life, my husband he is a cyber security engineer, and when he talks amongst his friends, and which I think ties really well into what you said about having like-minded people around you, when he talks to his friends, his mind and vision of the future of tech is so out of this world but they're all on board. You know what I mean? And I think it speaks to having people who are courageous enough to join with you with all of your quote/unquote "crazy ideas" and know that anything is attainable if you have the right people in place.

Brett Hagler: That's right. That's right, yup. The "crazy till it's not" is definitely a mantra at our organization. And how that started was, you know, it's almost a couple different ideas, but we used the 3D printing homes example. When we first had the idea to want to help invent and create the first 3D printed homes for our families, that didn't exist at the time, right. There was no 3D printing machine that printed houses for our families. There wasn't a 3D printed house in the world.

And so, when we first came up with that concept, we didn't invent the idea. The idea had kind of been around but like nobody actually had done it. And so, when we said that we wanted to take a really good swing and a good effort at trying this, the majority of people told me like, "You're crazy. Why would you do this? Just like stick to what works. Stick to what's normal. You know, use that money to build another 20 houses the same way they've always been done before. Don't put it into R&D [Research and Development] when you don't know the outcome," like, etc. That's always going to be the conventional wisdom and the quote/unquote "prudent" wisdom.

And the thing about prudent wisdom is, yes, you need to be smart, you need to listen to it, but anybody can give you that advice. It is the, easiest, cheapest advice to give, which is basically like, "Be more prudent," Right, like anybody could say that and make it sound smart, right.

But we definitely, in my opinion, you have to be smart about things, but you can't be so risk averse and prudent to everything or else just nothing great is going to happen.

So everybody told us this and we said, "Okay, we hear you. However, we think it's worth trying." And so, we tried it, and it ended up working. The first house, we created kind of with our partner ICON in Austin, Texas. And then from there, that's when we got, started to get a lot of press and started to get a lot of funding for the next version. And then we made the next version of the machine. And then Apple

called and said, "Hey, can we do a documentary on this because you're trying to create the world's first 3D printed community? Like, literally, is the first kids that are ever going to live in 3D printed houses and like can we document it?" And so, of course, said, "Yes."

Alicia Patten-Madera: So awesome. Yeah.

Brett Hagler: Yes. And that's why we say, "It's crazy till it's not." Right.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: Right.

Brett Hagler: The Apple call is only going to happen after you make a bolder choice to do something that the majority of people are going to tell you is too crazy or is too risky.

Alicia Patten-Madera: So, I know that it started with 16 homes and then you were given the challenge of doing 100 homes in 100 days, which you surpassed, right?

Brett Hagler: Correct. That was, a couple years earlier. That's how we kind of got started, but yeah. That was an example from the early days of just trying to set a larger goal and knowing that it's probably a little bit too big, but then when we set goals or aspirations like that for yourself, it really forces you to think differently, right.

So, what we would think is, okay, well, instead of having to do 20 houses, what if we had to do 100 houses in the same period of time? And if you say, "Okay, if we had to do a 100 houses in the same period of time, then we need to go talk to these different people or we need to get these people involved because there's no way we could do 100 houses without their help or this or that," right. And so that, that framework just kind of forces you to be more creative and to think bigger about how you can get other people involved to help you.

Alicia Patten-Madera: So, to date, how many people has New Story impacted and provided homes for?

Brett Hagler: We reached now, it's almost 3,000 homes and, on average, there's about almost five people per house.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Wow!

Brett Hagler: Yeah, yeah. So, we're very happy with what we've, our partners and us have been able to do in our first five years. And one of the other mantras we have

I was going to say is, you know, those sound –and they are. They’re encouraging and those are impactful numbers, but what I always say encourage people that are listening is to “dream big but to start small”.

Right, so when I started, you know, of course, I one day wanted to like be able to help more people and be able to, to scale it more and all that stuff. But then when you start to think about how you really grow something, it could be very paralyzing because there’s so many unanswered questions that you don’t know, and you’re not supposed to know. And so what that can do is that can paralyze people from not starting because they get too overwhelmed, because they’re like, “Oh crap, I don’t know how I could do 100 homes and this and that.” And it’s like, you don’t have to figure that out. What you have to figure out is how to do one home. And why I love that is because it really takes out, in my opinion, any excuse, right. When I encourage people to dream big and to start small, when I say, “Start small,” I mean write your first blog, write your first manuscript, right, fund your first house, write your first business plan. Like nothing is stopping you other than your choice not to do it. And then you can figure out all the other stuff later even if you want to keep going or whatever, but you don’t have to have all that other stuff figured out just to start small.

It doesn’t matter how big or not big their dream is, your dream is your dream, right. Your dream could be to be an astronaut. Your dream could be to be the best elementary school teacher in your state. Like, it doesn’t matter. Like it’s your dream. And so, the best thing you can do is just make sure you’re starting small on whatever that dream is.

Lizette Figueroa-Rivera: It actually reminds me of, I know that I was in front of one of my supervisors one day and he gives me a phone book. So people on the line, phone books used to be books that were really, really, really thick books.

And he gave me a phone book and he said, “Rip it.” So I looked at it, and it’s this big, huge book and he wanted me to rip it. And I’m thinking, I’m not strong enough to rip this book in half because it’s so big. And I just thought you know, I don’t know how to do it. It’s too big. I’m not strong enough. And then when he showed me that I could do it by ripping one page at a time, that made me realize that those big things in life, if you tackle them the way that you’re saying, you know, dream big, start small, you can actually envision yourself getting there, whereas you’re not paralyzed anymore thinking, oh my gosh, I can’t even start.

Brett Hagler: That’s exactly right. Yup, that’s right.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Brett, when I was watching the docuseries, it followed a man and his family, and he used to be a construction worker and fell on the hard times. And when you guys allowed him to go into the home and just, you know, with him and his family look around and see what space would be theirs, and like it drove me to tears because the amount of pride you could've felt their self-esteem. They walked in and they had such an appreciation for this home that would be able to shield them from the elements because, you know, comparing it to where they had lived previously, they couldn't allow their newborn child to even crawl because of how dirty the floor was.

Brett Hagler: That's right.

Alicia Patten-Madera: And so, I can only imagine how many stories like that exist for you, but based off of, 3,000 homes, 5 people per home, you've helped over 15,000 people. Is there a family or place or project that sticks out the most for you?

Brett Hagler: Oh, yeah, good question. I think the ones that get me the most are just seeing families that –and I just think about this so much of like, I was so lucky to be born where I was born. I did nothing to deserve it; it just happened, right. And a lot of these families that we work with did nothing to deserve to be born where they were born, which happens to be in, environments where there's been extreme poverty for decades. And when I say extreme poverty, I mean usually less than \$4 a day, sometimes closer to \$2 a day in income.

And so the most encouraging stories are meeting families that had been living in that environment without basic human needs, which what I would say is safety and shelter and usually clean sanitation; and then once they're able to get into just a simple built-to-last home where they have their basic human needs covered now, then they're able to start actualizing their potential. And that could be better test scores for kids in school. That could be the mom wanting to start the little microbusiness that she's always wanted to start but she just, couldn't save up enough money to do it or she didn't have a place to keep any of the product she's making cause people would just steal it cause you don't have a house.

And so, the stories that really fire us up is like watching these families and these kids that already had the potential they just didn't have the opportunity. And that's really what we try to create is opportunity in people's lives to transition them from the only thing they can do is think about surviving into a place where they now have the basics covered and they can now actualize the gift and the skills and the interest and the

passions that they have. And we see that all the time across the board and that's what's most encouraging to us.

Alicia Patten-Madera: That's awesome.

Brett Hagler: Yeah.

Alicia Patten-Madera: And what continues to inspire you? So, I know that it's the idea of you're helping thousands of people, your life perspective changing. Is there anything that you've realized that has been added to that toolkit based off of your experience that further helps to motivate you?

Brett Hagler: Yeah. I mean I think that I'm still very much motivated by just how tangibly you could help a family, you can help kids. And, you know, it's not rocket science. It's something that, really anybody could help with. And we've now been fortunate to create a kind of a community or a platform that, you know, can enable any person listening to directly help a family that in 2020 with, you know, all the technological advances we have, all of the societal advancements that we have, I mean like we're definitely living in the best time in history. However, there are still over a billion people that don't have adequate shelter and safety. And the fact that anybody like through New Story can, help families change that is really encouraging to me and inspires me. And so, you know, we really think of New Story as a medium to help other people around the world help connect them as a way that they can make an impact and a way that they can be generous because I just am entirely convinced that, you know, being generous is one of the absolute best virtues you can have while you're on this earth for the short time we have. And, you know, generosity can change people's lives. I mean you see it at LLS. We see it at New Story. You see it all across the board. And I'm very inspired by trying to get more people, to live out of a generous mentality and abundant mentality. And that, you know, to me is really encouraging.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Absolutely. I always say that if we truly lived out the golden rule of doing unto others as we'd have them do unto us, this world would be, we would have a whole different conversation. A great conversation, but it would be a different conversation.

Brett Hagler: That's right. That's right.

Edith Aquino: What is one thing you would like to leave with our listeners today?

Brett Hagler: Yes. I mean the last thing I can say is, for anybody listening that is having really difficult season and difficult moment, you know, I vividly remember just basically being in a hospital bed for, for weeks and then not being able to move once I got home, and I couldn't talk for a long time. Pain, like not fair missing out on, my first summer semester in college. Like all of that stuff is very real, and I know it matters. I would just really encourage you to think about, again, not the short term because there's things right now in the short term you can't control those things, and to think more about, about the future and to think and to have vision of 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, and then look back and think about the stories that you're going to tell of how you got over this crisis, how your attitude was during this crisis, how you treated people, your caregivers with love and with honor. That's what you're going to be proud of in the future and that's what's going to make you better for the rest of your life.

And you just have to grasp onto that and believe it because it's true. It's happened in my life. I know you've heard other stories of people that have gone through this, and so just encourage you to think more long term, and to try to have vision past the short-term valley that you're going through.

Alicia Patten-Madera: Great advice. Brett, thank you for joining us today and sharing your experience with us and our listeners. Your life is literally helping to build the lives of others, which is such an inspiration. And we wish you nothing but success and continued good health.

Brett Hagler: Thanks for your time. It's cool that you all are, you know have the podcast and you're trying to, again, just be a resource for people to listen to.