

EPISODE 206

[INTRODUCTION]

JB: After working all these jobs, I remember crying in Griffith Park, telling my mom, I wanted to go. She told me, literally, she said, “Your job is not done yet.” I didn't understand what she meant. That stuck with me, like my job is not done. Now, this became my job and were infatuated with it, because of my natural desire is to help people. That personality test when I was in high school, about being a doctor, helping people is still there. That's at the core of who I am. Me being the oldest, as much as I hated being the oldest, but I do get joy taking care and making sure people are good. Even though I hated it. I used to run away from that responsibility, but it wouldn't leave me, because that's at the core. That's who I am.

[INTRODUCTION]

Hey friend, welcome back to The Light Watkins show. I'm Light Watkins and I have conversations with ordinary folks just like you and me who've taken extraordinary leaps of faith in the direction of their path, their purpose, or what they've identified as their mission in life. And in doing so, they've been able to positively impact and inspire the lives of many other people who've either heard about their story or who've witnessed them in action or people who've directly benefited from their work.

The goal of these episodes is to expose you to as many people as possible who found their path and to humanize them and their story. And after hearing all of these stories, eventually, hopefully you give yourself permission to move further in the direction of whatever feels like your path and your purpose, because what you'll see is that anyone who does that has had to overcome many of the same obstacles that you might be facing today. And this week I am re-airing my conversation with Mr. Joseph Bradford, who started a nonprofit called B.A.R.E Truth.

Joseph is a Kansas City native who grew up with a young single mother. He was the oldest of five siblings. His father actually passed away when Joseph was only 7 years old and that event

catapulted him into the role of man of the house, where Joseph found himself cooking and babysitting and helping to take care of his younger siblings at a very young age himself.

And later their house burned down and he and his siblings spent several months in a shelter for battered women, where Joseph dreamt of playing basketball. But life circumstances kept getting in the way. And when Joseph finally came of age, he wanted to get as far away from Kansas City as possible. And that's how he wound up in Los Angeles. And one fateful night he was coming out of a restaurant and something inspired him to give a homeless person his leftover food. And then he thought, you know, if I was that person, I would want a full meal, not just a few bites of somebody else's leftovers.

So he went out the next night and he gave someone a full meal. And the next night he did it again. And this became his thing night after night, he would drive around to 711s and he would pick up food that they were mandated to discard after midnight, and he would redistribute that food to the homeless. And he basically became a one man food bank. And by the way, this was while he had a full time job during the day and a young infant.

Joseph eventually started a nonprofit called B.A.R.E. Truth. And he recruited other volunteers to help him pass out essentials to the homeless population on Sundays down on Skid Row in Los Angeles.

And in this very in depth conversation, he shares the entire backstory of how exactly he found his mission. And I think you'll really appreciate hearing how it all came together because he didn't have some master plan. He just took a few steps in the direction of helping whomever he could help with whatever he had. And of course he was tired and he was a new father and he had all the same excuses not to do it that anyone else could come up with. But because of his upbringing, he knew how desperately some people needed help, and this is what motivated him to keep going. And hopefully, hearing Joseph's story will inspire you to help whomever you can help with whatever you have right now.

That's how these movements start, with one person like Joseph, or like me, or like you, who cares enough to make a little difference in someone's life. And so, without further ado, let's dive into my conversation with Mr. Joseph Bradford and hear the incredible story behind the creation of B.A.R.E. Truth.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:04:52] LW: Joseph Bradford III. Welcome to the podcast. Great to have you, man.

[00:04:58] JB: Appreciate it.

[00:04:58] LW: Absolutely. I'd like to start these conversations off, talking about childhood. I was wondering, if you could take us back to Kansas City. I know your dad passed when you were seven. Before that, talk a little bit about your family dynamic.

[00:05:15] JB: I was raised by a young mother. My mother had me at 15-years-old. I am also the oldest of five, the dynamic of my childhood was really a lot of responsibilities on my side; some that were given to me by my mother. Others, as I look back at it, it's really the pressures that I put on myself to be responsible, or to take care of people, since I was older. she had a kid at 15, 16, 18, 19 and 20. Almost back to back to back to back. You know what I mean? We're all close in age. I'm 35, 34, 32, 31 and 30.

It was good, because we were so young, we didn't know any better. I had people always to play with. In all actuality, what was going on around us was a lot of not so good. Because of where we lived at, in the projects in Kansas City, or just the struggles that we had, because my mother was essentially a kid raising kids. You know what I mean? That part, it wasn't bad. Like I said, it was five-years-old, because you don't know any better.

[00:06:26] LW: What was your favorite toy or activity?

[00:06:29] JB: Play basketball. I'm able to play basketball. Yeah, basketball was my thing. It still is my thing right now. I really love that for some reason. I just took to basketball. My father, at that time, he was still alive, but I don't really remember him being around as much. I know, I've seen him, but I don't really remember every weekend thing. We were always widow. I always remember being with my mother.

How I took him to basketball, I really don't remember. I just remember teaching myself how to dribble the ball between my legs at four-years-old. I really have the memory of let me lift up my leg. I was trying to do it and recreate what I was seeing on TV, or the older kids, or the adults at the park. Basketball was my thing.

[00:07:19] LW: What was it about basketball that you loved?

[00:07:22] JB: It seemed exciting. because I was so young, so I was with older people, so is that yearning, or that pool to play, to be with the older kids. Since I was the oldest, everybody that was younger than me, they always needed something from me. To me, it was like, I guess, like an escape, to be able to do something else that didn't have anything really to do with my siblings; as much as I love them. It had nothing to do with them. It was a way where I can get away from them and really do and be my own thing.

[00:07:55] LW: To be able to go from being the mentor to being the mentee in a way and find that connection.

[00:08:01] JB: Yes. Really, because I didn't have it, because there wasn't really – My mother is my mother. We don't look at her that way. She's a authority figure. It was really somebody, something, somebody else to learn something from, or pull from them when things, or questions that she might have. Just regular life questions. Not even nothing serious, but it's just an escape.

Honestly, as I'm thinking about it, I never thought about that until right now. It was more of a, I got to get away from them. Let me do something that had nothing to do with my siblings. That

mentor and mentee thing, it's going to come into play later. I'm glad you said it, because that's exactly how it felt for me. Because I was the oldest. Even then, out of my group of friends, I was the responsible one and they're the one teaching, or the one helping.

I never really had nobody else helping me or saying, "Hey, let me help you, or let me teach you, or let me show you." It was like, I got to figure it out. That goes to even with me teaching myself how to dribble between my legs. My father wasn't there to say, "Do it this way. Or do it that way, or let me show you." It wasn't that. Even my mom didn't. I remember, it was I. I got to figure this out.

[00:09:23] LW: Was your dad not living with you all? Is that what you're implying? It's just your mom and the five kids?

[00:09:31] JB: Yes, yes. Yeah. He wasn't living with us. I don't remember where he lived at. Like I said, I remember seeing him, but just not regular. He wasn't there that way.

[00:09:43] LW: Was he the same dad of all your other siblings?

[00:09:45] JB: No. Just me and my sister that's right underneath me. It goes me and then two girls and then two boys. Me and the sister right underneath me, that was her dad as well. The younger three have a different dad.

[00:09:58] LW: There was no father figure in the house?

[00:10:01] JB: No, not in the house. No. I remember seeing my younger sibling, their dad more. That's also because my daddy passed at seven. Their dad, even today is still alive. You know what I mean? I could still see him during time. I don't know if that's jading my view, just because it's been – I had him technically in my life longer. When I think back at it, yeah, I don't – I know we live with my younger siblings' dad for a little part during that time, because obviously, he was with my mother. When we got about six, seven, eight-ish, no, he wasn't

there. As far as living in the house, he wasn't. I never really recall the time where it was like, a man was living in the house with us. No.

[00:10:49] LW: Do you mind if I ask how your dad passed?

[00:10:51] JB: He had a seizure. He had a seizure. It was due to drug and alcohol abuse.

[00:10:57] LW: Did you know what that meant when you were a kid, when you're seven-years-old? Drugs and alcohol and how that can affect people? Or was that something that you didn't process until later on?

[00:11:06] JB: No, I didn't really know how it felt. I mean, I didn't know what it meant at all. Because by now that time, when my father passed, I remember exactly where I was. They ended up calling the house and told me actually, because they asked for me, whoever, it was that called. We were living with my grandma. It's actually my mother's great aunt. It was my great, great aunt, but she raised my mother.

My mother called her mama and I called her granny obviously. I didn't know what it meant. I just knew, once I started asking the questions like, what happened or whatever. It was like, he had a seizure due to drugs and alcohol abuse.

[00:11:49] LW: Do you remember any lessons, life lessons that you were told when you were a kid, either by your mother, or your great aunt, or any of the caregivers that you were surrounded by at that time, in terms of know what to do in life?

[00:12:06] JB: It was really about taking care of people, like my siblings, because it was so many of us. I think, a lot of that what I learned is that, because even my grandma at that time. She was a more loving lady. It was she always had his. I'm going to tell you, I was a favorite, because he always protected me, even when I did stupid stuff around the house. She never let me get in trouble.

Within that, I just learned that from her and my mother and how she was with us and always having us together and keeping us together and doing whatever she needed to do. I'm talking about my mother at this point. Doing whatever she needed to do to take care of us. Because eventually, my grandma died too, right around – not too long after my father. Maybe a year later or something. Right around there. I was no older than like eight.

It was always, we were together, we stick together, we figure it out. Then because I was the oldest, so when my mom was working, or doing whatever she was doing, it was always like, okay, I'm leaving. You need to watch them. They got to eat. They got to do this. They got to do that. It was a lot of making sure everybody's okay. My mother provided the foundation. I got to go, so now you're in charge. Make sure, make sure, make sure. Hey, they got their homework to do. Make sure, make sure, make sure. You know what I mean? At the core of it, it was that. Making sure the people around you are taking care of.

[00:13:39] LW: You were babysitting when you were seven-years-old?

[00:13:43] JB: Oh, yeah. I was washing dishes and doing that. I joke with it. If she here, she's going to feel a way about this part. I always telling people, I used to wash dishes at six. I remember being on the steps too, like washing dishes, you know what I mean? Really. I'm saying, taking care of them.

Obviously, I didn't financially do it. As far as physically having to do stuff for them. Yes, I remember doing it at six, seven-years-old. My youngest brother, because he's the baby, he didn't wash dishes until he was 12. 12, 13-years-old. It was because he was the youngest and everybody else had to do and now he just was the youngest. That was also a different time. We talked about 1993, where it wasn't so bad. Well, maybe it was still bad, but it wasn't so frowned upon for my mother rented a store and leave us at the house and say, "I'm about to go to the store real quick. You all can't go outside." We knew not to go outside. At the same time, it was like, "I'm in charge," while she's at the store. She went and did whatever she did.

[00:14:47] LW: What were the circumstances that led you guys into becoming homeless?

[00:14:52] JB: Now you're skipping a lot. You're good? Are we going there? Or are we –

[00:14:55] LW: Those fill-ins. I thought it was seven-years-old when you guys went to the –

[00:14:59] JB: No, no. We were seven when my father passed. Seven when my father passed. What lead to homelessness was when I was about 12,13-ish.

[00:15:09] LW: Okay, so let's fill in that gap then.

[00:15:11] JB: Between that gap, a lot of what shaped me is because my daddy died. My grandmother, lady I was telling you about, my daddy's father, my dad, he had two brothers, they both got murdered. My mother, actual mother got out of prison. She passed away too. I never got to meet her well, face to face. I know she probably met me when I was one. Then she went to jail after that Then she was in jail till I was eight or nine. Got out of jail and passed away.

From seven to 10-ish, I went to 10 funerals. All these people that I guess, had an important title in my life was going, except for my mother. My daddy, his two brothers. I had no uncles. My mother doesn't know her father. We can't even count him, because I don't know. You could be my brother. I don't know. Or my uncle. I have no idea. Only two uncles that I had, they were his daddy gone. That's for males right there, gone. Is just in my life.

I didn't have nothing else. That part was tough. Then, this is an important thing, too. The house that caught on fire, that was my grandma's house. The house, we end up living there after my grandma passed or whatever, we end up going back to the house, because that was also the same house that my mother was raised in. There was a guy that bought the house next door to us, to the left.

As a grown man, he was selling drugs. I know that. As a 11, 12-year-old kid, I had no idea what this man was doing. All I knew is he bought the house next door and then he put it back on it. He added a sliding glass on the side. He put a basketball goal in the back. He used to breed Pit

Bulls. He always looked good. Now, he took a liking to me, for whatever reason. Me and him, obviously got cool, because I used to admire him. He's had a latest Jordan. He always had Jordans on. He had on a Tommy Hilfiger sweat suit. These are different things that I was never privileged enough to get.

I see my friends have it, but I never got to see this. When we bonded over basketball, like I say, because he played basketball. Since I love basketball, he ended up putting a basketball court in the back of his house. Then, I would see them playing and I would use to ask him, "Can I play?" Or for a while, it was always, "You're too small. You're too little. You can't play with us. We're adults. No, you can't play with us."

Eventually, because I was taller, did he end up letting me play with him. Obviously, I wasn't good enough to play with him, but he still allowed me to do that. That helped me, because now I'm playing with adults and grow them in at 12-years-old. He also gave me a puppy, then gave me the money to go buy the dog food for the puppy. When our house caught on fire now, a few months later, I felt away, because he ended up getting killed right there in front of his house, while we were now not in the house, because our house is now vacant. Then somebody hid underneath our porch and waited till he got home. Because in the Midwest, our porches are a lot higher. We used to go underneath there to get rocks and crickets and all this other stuff we used to play. Somebody could actually lay underneath there.

You and me, grown men, we can lay underneath there if we wanted to. That's how they ended up killing him, waiting underneath their porch. We ended up seeing it on the news, recognized clearly that's our house. Now, they're filming about this man getting killed next door. That hurt.

[00:18:47] LW: He was into drugs. You didn't know that at the time. Apparently, you admired some of the things that he had. What was your idea of success at that age in your life?

[00:18:56] JB: He was. This man had a convertible car. He bought the house, like I said. This house was a rundown beater. He had it painted. He did all these home improvement. Oh, I forgot. When I went into his house, he had a fish tank in the wall with sharks and it's nothing like the – Like I said, this is the Nikes. I just didn't understand, because I've never seen nothing like

this before. He always had the latest shoes and the latest this and always look good. His friends always look good, whether they were men or women. He used to have these parties. I remember looking out the window like, "Damn, I wish I could go on these parties." Never could, but I was just too young.

It was like, if anything and being the little stuff that we were talking about. I can't remember it now exactly what it was. It was always to help me succeed in school. Like I said, when he gave me the shoes, or when he gave me the sweat suits, or some of the clothes, I know it because I was saying like, "Damn, that's nice. I wish I could afford a pair of Jordans. I wish my mama could give me something." It was like, "I got you. No problem."

[00:20:02] LW: How did your mom feel about him giving you stuff? She would have known he was a drug dealer, right?

[00:20:08] JB: Yeah. I'm pretty sure she knew what it was. I think at that time, he was cool, too. They was probably around the same age. She would go to the parties. She went over there. She was over there, whatever was going on. She knew. I don't think she opposed to it at all. I don't think it was never like that, because if you met the man, he was a really nice guy. He was a really nice guy, regardless of how he got his money. I don't know.

I'm pretty sure, if my mama needed something, he would look out for her. I don't know the entails of their relationship. I hope ain't nothing going on, but he would look out for and I know he would, just because of he seeing her with all of us kids and I'm pretty sure he did stuff for us.

[00:21:07] LW: What kind of student were you? What was your work ethic like at that time in your life?

[00:21:12] JB: I was a good student. I know, I always got A's and B's. I was always on a row. I know, I was never this 4.0 student like that, but I was always had good grades. For me, it was

like, school came easy. It was very easy to me. It was never really hard. I didn't, "Why didn't I try harder?"

[00:21:34] LW: Did you connect that to your idea of success? If I get good grades, then I'll be able to have things like this guy has things, or did you not understand –

[00:21:43] JB: No, I didn't correlate the two. I didn't. I didn't.

[00:21:47] LW: What was your motivation for doing well in school? To go to college? To play in the NBA?

[00:21:52] JB: Probably play basketball. Yeah, I wanted to go to the NBA. School and going to play basketball didn't – they didn't correlate to me. I didn't put those together. School was just one, I could get away from my siblings.

[00:22:06] LW: It was always about getting away from your siblings.

[00:22:08] JB: Yeah. Because even though we all went to the same school, because we were a fifth, fourth, third, second first. I mean, this always has been. I have my own group of friends. We could do that. Like I said, since school was easy and I was good at it. I think part of the success in school, because I was good at it. I really liked the recognition of it. Now, let's even take you back a little bit there.

Because one, I was darker, as far as skin complexion than everybody else. That was always a sensitive spot for me, because I would get teased about it. Then now, actually being good in school, I got praised about that. It was a way to offset and counter the laughing, because then I was good, because then I was on the honor roll, or I was getting another little plaque, or piece of paper, you know what I mean? Taking a picture of it.

[00:23:01] LW: You got teased by black people, or white kids for being darker?

[00:23:04] JB: I got teased by black kids. I mean, white kids, I don't think they don't get it that way. The black kids, yeah, for sure. This is a thing in our community, unfortunately.

[00:23:16] LW: How did your house burned down?

[00:23:19] JB: It was an electrical fire in the wall. The house was old. I mean, the house was old. The house wasn't – no good shape. I'm pretty sure. I mean, thinking back on it, they didn't keep it in good shape, because we live with roaches and rats. I mean, I heard them out in a good night, or stuff like that. The house wasn't in the greatest shape.

[00:23:36] LW: Were you guys in the house when it caught fire?

[00:23:38] JB: We were in the house at that time. Yeah. We were actually in the house and didn't remember – I'm pretty sure my mother must have called 911 to help and then anybody know anything about fire, I mean, the home might be small, but then they go over and beyond to make sure there's no extra additional fire in the wall. Really, the house had a huge hole in the back, in the kitchen.

[00:24:00] LW: Was it a standalone house? Or was it connected to – it's like a row house?

[00:24:03] JB: No, it was a standalone house.

[00:24:05] LW: What happened once the house burned down?

[00:24:09] JB: That night, we went to the motel six, the American Red Cross gave us a voucher or something. We stayed in a motel six for three days. Then from there, we went to a shelter. We went to a shelter. We was in a shelter between the regular shelter and we went to a battered women's shelter. We were there for four or five months. That was because it was trying to build back up and my mother get some money and whatever it is she was doing to try to get us an apartment or something from there.

[00:24:39] LW: Does she have a job at the time?

[00:24:42] JB: I do not remember. I would like to say, she did. At that time, I know she didn't always work the best jobs. She didn't have the best jobs. I'm pretty sure it took her – that's why it probably took her a while just trying to either get some money, or find some assistance for us to help us get a place.

[00:25:01] LW: Now you're the man of the household and you're in a shelter. How does that make you? What's your mental state in that situation?

[00:25:09] JB: Still got to make sure we're good. Do we keep us together, or my siblings don't veer off, because in a shelter is not – we didn't have our own space. Once we did have our own room. The other one was really a wide open space with beds, or cots, or bunk beds of some sort. Within that, it's other kids there. There's other people and doing all these different things. It was just trying to make sure that one, we kept doing our homework, because we still went to school. She still got up, took us to school every day. It was really trying to not get in trouble, in a sense. Let's just stay to as we – like I said, we had enough of us to play with each other, so we didn't necessarily need to go outside of that. Because the shelter, it was pretty dirty. I remember, just rat traps and all that, like I seen. You wake up and it's a rat that they caught in the trap. I really didn't want to do too much outside of that. It was really stay right here together.

[00:26:12] LW: Was it something you were hiding at school? Or did you not really care what people thought?

[00:26:17] JB: That would have been something I would have hid back then? Just because as much as people talked about me, I was still a little bit more popular. I think that that would have hurt to tell people what we were going through at that time. Even though, I wish I could have seen it, but I don't think my little pride at 12, 13 would have allowed me to say we live in a roach, rat infested shelter down the block and we don't have no place to live. I wouldn't say that.

[00:26:46] LW: Were you playing ball for school at this point?

[00:26:48] JB: Yeah. During a time when it happened, I went to a different school. every year. I went to school, sixth grade, seventh grade, because then we end up moving. Because the house caught on fire my sixth-grade year. Then the next year, we went to a different school. Then it was like, we moved again. I think, maybe I was in seventh grade. I'm sorry. We just kept moving. I wasn't able to play anything like the schools where it was. We didn't have a basketball team in middle school. Might have had some sports. Because of my home life was – the stability of my home life, then I wouldn't even felt comfortable doing that, at that time. Especially then now, trying to get any extra fees, or if you needed new shoes and stuff like that, we wouldn't have been able to do it that way. It really wouldn't happen that way.

[00:27:38] LW: Did your mom know about your basketball ambitions?

[00:27:42] JB: She was well aware of it. At that time, that wouldn't have been her focus. As much as I would have wanted her to push that and do obviously, what I say whatever she can. It was us being together and having a stable home was her main concern.

[00:28:02] LW: Let's move on then to the next. You're out of the shelter. You're in a house. What's your thinking in terms of your life, where it's going to go, what you want to do? Because you now have an idea of what your skill set is, compared to where it needs to be and all of that.

[00:28:19] JB: Just to rewind a little bit. Our mama ended up dating this white guy. I'm pointing out that I'm saying this white guy, because we were very inner city all black kids. Then now, for you to introduce this white overall wing man to us was different for me, because now I'm 13. What happened is we met him, because he was working on our house. The house that caught on fire, she met him somehow and he was coming over to make little repairs. The light was out, or we have little electrical something. He would do that.

I ended up starting to work for him in 13, remodeling houses. I guess, over her picking me up, they ended up connecting. Now, when we do got our apartment, he ended up moving over there with us. That's also a lot of changes, because now I'm in a very unfamiliar area as far as

where we live, because now we moved out of the neighborhood that I knew somewhere in the suburbs a little bit more. Then now, you take that now I'm in a different school, and now he lives with us as well, so that was all a bit different.

Then also, because he provided more of the stability, then our lives changed a little bit too, because in ninth grade, I end up going to obviously, high school, but it was a school that I never even heard of, because now we're out in the suburbs. We never went there. As far as I like, we ended up getting the house, because we was in an apartment before when we got to the shelter. Now we're in a house, we got a swimming pool in the back.

It wasn't in the ground. It was above ground one, but we got a swimming pool. We had our own basketball court. We had almost every animal. We had four or five dogs at one point. We have fish. My sister had a journal and we had a fair – we had all these other things that his name is Bruce. Bruce, in a sense, helped provide that. Owned his own business and was able to do that.

Life change in a sense for the better that way, as far as home stability. Once I accepted the fact that he was white, I got over that. You know what I mean? Just being honest. I felt like, I could finally breathe and not really be the man of the house. Because here, now to do that. I can do my thing. Then at that point, then now, yes, I am playing basketball in ninth grade. I am on a team. I am in a traveling basketball team now.

My brothers is playing peewee football, and they own a traveling basketball team. Even my sister played on Pop Warner football. She played with my brothers. Things are better. You know what I mean? That's how to the naked eye feels that way. Things are better. It was like, like I said, I could breathe. At this point, it was like, yeah, I'm focusing on basketball. I played football at that point, too. It was really about me.

I worked with him on the weekends or at night, so I still made some money at that time. Life then is great. Oh, I mean, life ain't that bad. I will tell you this, too. During that 12, 13 is the time when the house caught on fire, when we not doing all that great. Went to my cousin, I start selling drugs too at that time. I don't know. I missed that one. That's what happened. Because

for me, we needed some money. My mama didn't know. She found out later, but I wanted stuff. I wanted to be able to feel normal. I didn't want to – is different between when you know you're poor and you just don't know you're poor. I knew it, felt it, and felt the responsibility and wanting to do something and my cousins that was three, four or five years older than me, provided a way to do that. I did it.

[00:32:10] LW: Were you any good at it?

[00:32:11] JB: I was. That was a during the times where I realized that, unfortunately, the drug game and the whole world of it is a little different. Then that's what I started to know, when you asked me earlier about when my father abused it. I didn't do it, because now, I was selling it, but I told myself, I would never actually consume it, because I didn't want to end up like that. Because then for me, I have my siblings and my mother still to take care of.

[00:32:40] LW: Is that when you also realized your neighbor was selling drugs, and that's how he must have been making his money?

[00:32:45] JB: Yeah. It was all starting to come around. Because then when selling drugs, I was meeting so many different people. I wasn't meeting the people that the TV told us that drug dealers look like. We were going to the suburbs, to these nice houses, with the nice cars and selling drugs. My cousins would be like, "Oh, he's a doctor, or he's a, or she's a." Then it was like, "Jesus Christ. The same people that's operating on people, they had his problem." Then that's what I've – my cousin told me to turn their functional drug addict. I never heard of that before. In that moment, it's like, it made complete sense.

Then, it was like, now I could realize other things that I'm seeing outside in the world. Because this man next door, when I look back at it, he never got up and had a uniform on. He didn't wear a suit and tie. He wore some Jordans, a t-shirt and some shorts. He did whatever he did. He was providing for the community, but they made more since then.

[00:33:49] LW: Were you never afraid that somebody was going to be hiding underneath the porch waiting to shoot you?

[00:33:53] JB: Mm-mm. No, because I wasn't mean about it. We just did what we did. It wasn't no problems. In the time when I had the problem, then that's when I really stopped, because I'm not the person. In that business, we're in that line of work. You got to fully commit to it. I wasn't willing to fully commit to everything that I would have to do when problems came around.

[00:34:20] LW: Tell me, what does that mean exactly? Can you be specific?

[00:34:23] JB: This one guy robbed me for \$20,000, whether cash or product. Now I'm mad. Obviously, I can't go talk to my mom about it. At this point, I'm 16. Can't really talk to her about it. Now, I'm going to talk to my friends, or my cousins. Then now for me, I was going to murder this guy and his whole family.

[00:34:45] LW: Because that's the code. You have to [inaudible 00:34:47]. Otherwise, everybody's going to punk you.

[00:34:51] JB: Yeah. Everybody, I'm not about to be the guy that everybody just going to keep robbing me. They don't make the money. They don't make sense. I'm not naturally a person that just gets even. I'm going to go over and beyond to let you know and everybody else know, don't do this to me.

[00:35:06] LW: You're going to do Keyser Soze on this one.

[00:35:07] JB: Yeah. We're going way over and beyond. That's why I'm saying. Then, it was like, I had a whole Journal of what time his mother came home, left, his daddy came home, left, siblings, everybody. It was the perfect execution that I'm planning. I'm still going to school acting like a normal person, but I'm planning to kill everybody.

[00:35:28] LW: Did you own a gun, or guns?

[00:35:30] JB: No, but I could get one. I mean, I had money, so I could get whatever I wanted. It just came to a point where it was like, God, I know this thing. I know, this is not right. Because then now, I started thinking like, okay, now I do this to him. Now, he come and kill my mother, brothers and sisters and everybody else. Then now, my job is protecting them. I didn't do that. Then, I just had to take that loss and keep moving.

[00:35:57] LW: What made you realize that? Is there something? Did you just watched a movie? Did you have a conversation with somebody to make you realize that? Because you're a 16-year-old kid. Kids can't make a lot of connections like that. What made you be able to –

[00:36:12] JB: It was just literally, I was just looking at my siblings and my mama. Like I said, I just started thinking – Since from a movie standpoint, I didn't want to live my life on the run. Because then, I would have had to do this. I was going to do it myself too, because I just had to believe that I don't want nobody to be able to snitch on me. Nobody's there, I didn't tell nobody, then I can get caught, because I'm not going to snitch on myself. I didn't want anybody to end up finding out that it was me.

In the end, like I said, they're my siblings or whatever else, because they're still little. They don't know. They're just kids. My sisters and brothers didn't live a life like this. I mean, they might have did stuff when they got older. At that time, when they were 11 and 12, they don't move. They just living life. I just didn't want to do it. It never felt natural. I knew it was wrong. I knew it was wrong. I knew all the stuff that I did was wrong back then. I didn't care, because I needed some money.

[00:37:08] LW: You paid the 20,000 to get out of debt?

[00:37:11] JB: No, no, no. That's what he stole from me as far as money.

[00:37:14] LW: Right. You said you got out of the game. How did you do that?

[00:37:18] JB: Oh, yeah. I mean, I had some money. I mean, I ended up getting it back, not as far as that money. I'm saying, I just clear, whatever. Not debts in a sense. When I just don't go back to the say, get more product, or whatever else doing is just – I mean, I got the phone calls like, “What's up? Where you at?” It was like, “Man, I'm done with this.” It was just that easy for me. A lot of movies make it seem like, you got to do a bunch of stuff, but it's not. I didn't experience that. I don't know anybody that did experience that type of thing. It was just saying what I want to do.

[00:37:58] LW: Was there a college in your future? Talk about the next stage.

[00:38:01] JB: Yeah. I end up going to college. During high school, I was, like I told you, I always had naturally good grades. There was something about these tests that they made us complete this profile page that best identifies what your interests are, like an interest profile. Mine was medicine. For some reason, I guess, based off the way I answered the questions. It was about medicine and different things of that nature.

Kansas City has a really good medical program. I was on the verge of being a doctor. They put me in all these special classes and different things that I would take on Saturday mornings. I was taking advanced science and math. Even my first two years of high school, I took a ton of math and science classes, because I was trying to get it out the way. Because then, I'm taking physics in ninth grade. I just kept going and going. Back at that time, that was my backup plan to be a doctor, but I wanted to play basketball.

After my sophomore year, my mother and Bruce ended up separating. Now, that safety blanket that I had to live my life is gone. Then, I stopped playing sports, because my thing was now, I got to help her. I didn't continue with sports in high school, because of that. That's my truth on that.

[00:39:22] LW: You got a job at Best Buy or something to work into it?

[00:39:24] JB: Yeah. I worked at a bunch of nursing homes. We was in the kitchen, picking up people and stuff like that. We were doing a lot of that at that time. Like I said, I stopped selling drugs. That was gone too. I was doing that. A lot of my friends, or cousins, or something that was doing I work at a moving company. We would do, move people on the weekends, or evenings and stuff like that as well.

Then I ended up stopped going to medical classes and stuff like that too, because now I'm 17, rather be 18-years-old. Then now, it was like, really, where am I going to go to school? When I'm literally looking up being a doctor as far as how much schooling you have, how much money that's going to take and the loans and everything like that, it was overwhelming. Because then I knew, I wasn't going to be able to pull that much support from my family circle. Even when I tried to get the loans, or try to see if my mother can do the loan. She couldn't. My grandma, because all credits and everything bad, or I didn't have any extra money. I ended up choosing to go to a computer school in Florida, because it was like, "Well, at this time, this is now early 2000s." It's like, okay. Well, computers are taken over. We still have some interest in that as well, and so I ended up doing that. Then I moved to Orlando, Florida.

[00:40:43] LW: Was your mom insistent on you becoming – reaching the higher level of education, so you didn't end up in a situation like this? Or was this all your own self-driven motivation?

[00:40:54] JB: She encouraged college, but she didn't force college. I say that to say, because then I watched her my junior year in high school, she end up getting her GEB, and she enrolled into college. I actually watched her do it. It wasn't saying, well, you have to go to college. You're going to college. You need to go take the SAT. You need to do this. You need to do that. You need to do that. She never did any of that. It was really like, if I wanted to do it, she supported it. It wasn't like, "You need to do this. This is what you got to do. Let's prep. Let's do this. Let's do that." It wasn't that at all.

[00:41:31] LW: You said later on in an interview that one of your regrets was you didn't encourage your siblings enough. What did you mean by that?

[00:41:40] JB: I was the kid innocence that always had good grades. I didn't get in trouble. I got to do what I wanted to do, as far as being out, because I had a car and doing different things like that. I didn't drink, or I don't smoke. I wasn't getting in trouble. You know what I mean? Like that. As my siblings grew up and I went to college now, then when I would call back home, because now at this time I'm 18-years-old, so my youngest brother is 13. He doesn't need me as much anymore. He's in now middle school, or whatever, about to be in high school.

When I would call back home, their lives and their dynamics to what I knew them to be, drastically changed. My mother moved again to the state of Kansas, which is right over the border. It's not as far. She moved 10 minutes, 15 minutes away. Now, so now their circle of friends and everybody that they knew changed. Now, I don't know these people. When I will come back home, even now people are dropping out of high school, people are having babies, or whatever else. It's like, I don't know who you are. I'm saying that, because the now you dropped out of school, or you're not even in high school. You didn't complete it.

Instead of me, I guess trying to figure out, or being more patient about who they are and figuring out now necessarily how to help them. I just spoke down to him, because that's who he was and that's where they were already going. I don't understand how innocent you – everything changed, just because now I went to college. I went to college to better my life. You were good. You know what I mean? We had it and it was like, at that time, I don't know what to say to my brother or sister, now when I hear you dropped out of high school. Or, what do you mean dropped out of high school? It didn't make sense.

Then, now you're dropping out of high school to do what? I didn't know as an 18-year-old how to respond to that, other than, what the F are you doing? You know what I mean? That's not necessarily encouraging. Because then now, they might have been going through something too, but then also now, I'm not home enough. Now we got cellphones. If I'm making a call, and then now, obviously, not a conversation and going away, they feel like they grown there too, so they hang up. Then now, I got to continue my life.

[00:44:02] LW: Let's say you have to do it all over again. What would you do differently? What would you say differently that you didn't say the first time?

[00:44:09] JB: I would listen more. I would listen to them talk. I would ask them, what's going on and listen. Not what's going on? Well, I graduated high school, or I did this, or I did that, so you can do it. I think I should have listened to them and what they were going through, because I just thought that because we all grew up in the same house, we got the same mother, that it would have been the same.

I didn't realize at the time that regardless, if you grew up in the same house, we all got different experiences on the same thing. That was the biggest thing, because I'm thinking, at the core of me, I'm no better than you. If I could do it, you can do it too. If I graduated high school, you can do it too. I went to the same high school all four years. My siblings moved schools, different friends, different this, different that. I didn't account for their instability, versus my stability.

Even when we moved, because I was so vested into the school, the school let me stay even though we moved out of the district. Because I was on a sports team and I did this and I was good grades and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. The school let me stay. My sisters ended having to go to another school. Then a couple years later, then my brother is now in high school, now they had to go to a different school. You know what I mean? It was a lot of instability during that time. As far as where we're moving and doing different things of that nature.

[00:45:31] LW: Now you're in college. You're becoming a young adult. You're no longer at home. You're not technically responsible for your siblings anymore. Are you still staying away from the alcohol and all of that? Are you indulging a little bit?

[00:45:44] JB: Never. Never drank. Never smoke.

[00:45:48] LW: What is that about? Why didn't you indulge?

[00:45:51] JB: Is 100% because of my daddy. Because I feel like, he didn't care enough about me and my siblings to be here for us. He chose drugs and alcohol over us. Now, I know that might not be technical, but that's how I view it.

[00:46:06] LW: Did you look down on people who did drink and do drugs?

[00:46:10] JB: At one point, yes. Yeah. At one point I did, because I thought it was a very selfish act. This is the thing. I never seen anything positive from it. I've never seen, let's say functional addicts, as far as the people that I knew. Always seem the ones that are outside, broke, stealing. They look bad. They're not doing anything with their lives. That's how I correlated. Then we were losing. Was going to funerals all the time. I never knew that, until I was a little bit older, in a sense, how you can still be successful, in a sense, and maybe have a habit over here on the side.

[00:46:54] LW: What was your idea for your life at this point, now that you're finishing up computer school?

[00:46:59] JB: Well, my sister ended up getting in trouble, running away to Florida to be with some guy, and then she ended up moving in with us. Now again, I'm in college, full-time job, full-time student. Now my sister's here. End up doing that and that didn't work out. We had our little issues there. Then, I moved to California. I was 22. At this point, I just wanted to go. Even going to Florida. I literally did not apply to any school. One, I hate the cold weather. I didn't apply to any school where it was cold. If it's snow there, or got cold, I'm not going. Vacation, we didn't travel. I just knew there was a world bigger than Kansas City. I wanted to see it. This was my opportunity.

I got accepted in Florida. I'm out. I'm going to Florida. Then now, I've been in Florida for a couple years. Now I was like, "Well, I want to go to LA." Literally, it was that. I want to go to Los Angeles to see what it is. At the time, I'm young. I have been working, so I saved some money. I had \$4,000. I didn't make a lot of money, but I'm young. I have no kids. I don't have no responsibilities. It's just me. My work ethic is good enough to where I find a job. That's how I

looked at it. I found a job. I never had no problem finding a job before, so I found a job and I just wanted to go and see it.

Literally, me and my cousin drove down to LA, ran out of gas twice, hitchhiked once, we're good. We're good. I end up finding a job in a month. I lived out in the valley. Most expensive rent that I've ever had. I didn't know places cost as much when I moved out here, because I'm from a smaller city where, renting this bad. In Orlando, in Florida, the renting, they're bad. Three months later, guess what? Now my brothers are living out here with me. Had some issues in Kansas City. My mom was going through a few things and now I have my brothers again. Not again, but now they're with me.

I had to enroll them in school. I had to be that again. I'm trying to work and take care of my brothers. During this time as well, my mother was having some issues. Bruce was now by this time, her and Bruce had got back together. He was supposed to help me. He was supposed to help out with my brothers coming out here. He ended up dying. Then come to find out, he had a drug problem too. Here it goes again. Somebody else with a drug problem.

Now they're not here doing what they told me that they was going to do. Because when I moved to Florida, it was like, "Oh, I'll help you out do whatever. Try to help out." Cool. Then now, I got my brothers literally three months after I moved to Los Angeles. Know to help again. I got to figure it out. From there, I was just – I moved to Vegas for a year, because by this time, the girl that I was dating, she had a little daughter and I had my youngest brother still with me. I was trying to be more of a family guy.

[00:50:09] LW: Did you have proper jobs at this time?

[00:50:11] JB: Yeah, but not the greatest jobs ever. The first job that I got when I got here, I was doing maintenance. I was doing maintenance for this property in Reseda. That was the first job. Then by this time when I started, when I moved to Vegas. I was actually working. I was doing maintenance for 24 Hour Fitness. I was actually getting paid something decent. That was now, I'm 24 or something like that. It wasn't that bad. Like I said, now moving to Vegas, it was

cheaper. It was cheaper and it was like, "Oh, I can do this." I was able to get a house and all that other stuff. Like I said, I had that girlfriend with a young daughter, and my brother, put him in school as well. It wasn't that bad either. Then we ended up moving back to California.

[00:51:02] LW: How did you get introduced to the population on Skid Row?

[00:51:05] JB: Fast forward, it was really sitting there, not really doing much for my life, because I ended up getting hurt at a job, and so I had a lot of free time. Because I was acting and modeling for one point, because I didn't have anything else to do. I was on workman's comp for years. After I got out of that, it really was a pool on my life to do something different. I felt incomplete.

Really, it was in those moments, trying to figure out what am I going to do. I used to promote clubs in Hollywood. We ended up going out every night. I ended up giving a guy half of my meal. Then just started thinking like, "Damn, he wouldn't want half a meal. Let me give him his own meal." That's how the birth of it was. Because I would see the same guy outside of Denny's and Rascals in Hollywood every night. Every night, I was saying –

[00:51:59] LW: After you finished promoting at a club, you would –

[00:52:01] JB: After we went out. Yup. Went out –

[00:52:02] LW: Go to Roscoe's, get some food.

[00:52:05] JB: That 3, 4 in the morning. I will see him. Then I would end up talking to him after a while. Gave him the food. Then he's like, "Hey, man, why are you out here every night?" Just started doing it. Like I said, that pull on my life, because we once were homeless. It was an easier conversation. When I would ask my friends like, "Hey, can you buy another meal? We can give out two meals tonight." Nobody would do it. I just did it by myself.

[00:52:31] LW: When you saw this guy, who did you see? Did you see yourself? Did you see your dad? Did you see somebody you crossed paths with?

[00:52:38] JB: No. I just see somebody that needed help. That correlated with my life, because all along here, I feel like my life would have been a little bit better if people help me. I always had to struggle to do different things. I always wish that damn, I wish somebody could help. Somebody could help me. If somebody could help me out, can move. I could move this journey alone a lot faster. When my car broke down, or when this happened, somebody was there to help me. If I could call back and say, "Hey, can I get \$600 for fixing my car?" That would have been a great help. For me, it was just a compassion to help and want to help and really listen to him and what he was going through.

[00:53:17] LW: When your friends refused to help to even buy one meal, what do you think the psychology of that is?

[00:53:24] JB: It was all about self for them, because they were going to do whatever they was going to do. I didn't necessarily like it, because my friends at that time were just the only people that I knew, when I just first moved to California. Essentially, I was forced to be around them, because then I needed, I wanted somebody to be around. Because I'm used to having all my siblings around, as much as I didn't want them around. Now when I'm gone, it's like, "Uh, this is boring by myself." I spent a lot of time by myself moving, doing different things.

Me and those same group of friends back then, we're not even friends today. I know them. They're not a part of my journey and what I'm doing today, because we just grew apart, because I always knew that that wasn't really what I wanted. That was just where I was forced to be at that moment.

[00:54:11] LW: You started buying the guys a couple meals. Then what happens?

[00:54:14] JB: Yeah. Buying the guys a couple meals. I just kept doing it not as regular at that time. I just did it here and there, here and there. Then, I really created a plan for housing,

because I was where I was living, that was my biggest bill, my rent. I wanted to reduce the amount of rent, but I also wanted to provide people housing, because then I would see now more people now on the streets. Now at this point, I'm conscious of homelessness. We always knew it, you know what I mean? Now I'm very conscious of it.

Damn. A lot of people over here are me walking around at 2 in the morning. On a scene stand over there. I've seen John over there. I actually now know them by name. It's like, they're sleeping outside when they could be sleeping inside. I really outline a vision on how to reduce my rent and eventually one day, get housing. What I did is I created a plan as far as if I managed the properties, or became a property manager, then I could live there for free.

Then also, I targeted companies that helped homelessness. Then now, I wanted to be a property manager for places that worked with homeless people. Because then, for me, I didn't know enough people to be able to ask the questions. What I did is I worked there. It was a paid internship. If I worked there, I work inside of the mode, now I can learn. I can ask the questions. I can look at the paperwork. I can see who's coming in and how they were doing it. Because this in my life I've never been. I just don't feel I've been fortunate enough to know the right people.

It's always been a struggle to get information and how people are doing it. Especially now, I'm living in a big city like Los Angeles. People are doing a bunch of stuff out here, but I don't know them. Now, let me work there. That's what I did. I started working at a property management company first. Well, I lied and said I did it in college to get me in the door. I moved from my one-bedroom apartment to a studio apartment, unbelievably small. Now I'm a property manager. I don't have rent.

That provided me the flexibility to now go out and now seek the other company. Then when I found a larger company that actually did what I wanted to do, end up applying there. Now, I actually have the skill set that they need. Because I didn't have it before, but this was a smaller company, so it's fine. Now I'm going to go into this bigger company. That's where it was a very strategic plan of how I went in there and introduced myself and how I got that job.

Then from there, it just – I worked for them for six years, learning how to get into people, where are they getting people, what does this mean? Meeting the social workers and just really talking to them and going through the de-escalation training. I literally said yes to everything that they wanted me to do. Because in my plan too, I'm also now figuring out bare truth and what I wanted to do with that. At that point, I need to have a name for the organization as well. It was literally okay, God. This is the speed. This is where I need to be.

Not necessarily working for somebody, but how can I make it better, because then, I also noticed a bunch of flaws within what they were doing. I also, because now I'm the property manager, I'm depositing \$30, \$40,000, every month into somebody else's account, and they don't even treat the people as good as I know that there has to be a better way. That's where really the birth of it. Because when I did it, I didn't necessarily know it was going to be what it is today. I just knew that the passion for the homelessness, because of what we went through before. Also, now I'm actually getting to know these people. Now hearing their stories, versus just walking past them like I did on another years, or drop a dollar here and there. You know what I mean?

It was literally that. Then I also remember, even when I would drop the dollar, I always had a little slight conversation with people. Like, "Hey, what are you doing?" I would really tell them, it wasn't my thing. Hey, man. Do something good with it. Because in my brain, I'm trying to steer them away from drugs and alcohol, because for me, that's probably why they're here. Now for me, I lost everybody due to drugs and alcohol. I didn't want that. Yeah, I want to help you, but it's like, I don't want to feed into your habit.

That wanting to help you now when my organization goes even further, because now I can give you housing to really move you off the streets, and then now work on those other little issues. I got to get you safe first. That was always my thing. Because it still goes back to helping people by getting you safe and making sure you're good, as best as my ability, obviously, because now we're adults. Still, it was that. Housing is you make sure people are good, because I've

been without a house before. We had to sleep in a car a little bit, in the snow, or be in a house with no heat. I get it. How can I make sure that other people don't have to go through this?

[00:59:27] LW: You're in your mid to late 20s at this point?

[00:59:29] JB: Yeah, by this time I'm – Yeah.

[00:59:31] LW: I know a lot of people in that age, they're just looking to make as much money as possible. They're looking to go on as many dates as possible. You're sitting around thinking, “How can I get all these homeless people off the street and get them safe into houses?” That's what you were thinking about. Was there a motivation underneath that? Were you looking to make that into a business?

[00:59:52] JB: Not at that time. I wasn't. No, I wasn't looking into making into a business. I was just looking to do it, because I had been trying to do stuff. After working all these in jobs, I remember crying in Griffith Park telling my mom I wanted to go. She told me literally, she said, “Your job is not done yet.” I didn't understand what she meant. That stuck with me like, my job is not done. Now, this became my job and were infatuated with it, because of my natural desire is to help people.

That personality tests when I was in high school about being a doctor, helping people is still there. That's at the core of who I am. Me being the oldest, as much as I hated being the oldest, but I do get joy taking care and making sure people are good. Even though I hated it. I used to run away from that responsibility, but it wouldn't leave me, because that's at the core. That's who I am. I sacrificed a lot of money and everything else by doing it this route.

[01:01:05] LW: Your mom knew what you were doing? Is that why she said that, your job is not done? What was she referring to?

[01:01:09] JB: She said, “If you came back to Kansas City, you wouldn't be happy.” She said, “As much as I want you to be here, obviously close to me,” I just know that you wouldn't be

happy being here. Because one, she know I don't like the cold weather, but I'm pretty sure she wasn't thinking that. For me, I like the opportunity to be great. At that time, I probably wasn't able to articulate it in a way that I may be able to do it now. I feel like, she was wise enough to see that in me. Everybody around here is not doing nothing. Your friend. She might even still seems like, my friends is like this. They're not doing their thing.

I'm out here now meeting people, whether was promoting clubs, and I'll tell her like, "Mom, I've seen Snoop." She really loves Snoop. Even little stuff like that, because of where we grew up, that doesn't happen for us. She clearly seen in it somewhere the excitement, or knew something else about me that I didn't know about myself to say, your job is not done. She wouldn't let me come back home, even though obviously, I could. She was like, "No, you need to stay there and figure it out." It was like, I guess, maybe she didn't want me to quit either. Because she knows that's not who I am.

It was so many different things of why she might have felt that way. I know some of it is how she might feel about her own life, or what she didn't do. Or maybe when she'd been scared to move, or jump outside of her comfort box. Then she don't want that for us. That's why I love her for that, because she – a lot of my motivation, or what I do right now is because of my mama and for her support, even though it wasn't financial, even though when I was a kid, I wish she had more money or did whatever else. She always loved us and she never gave up on us. This was a perfect example. When I wanted to give up on myself, she didn't give up on me. She made me look in the mirror and keep pushing forward.

[01:03:03] LW: Were you a one-man show at this time? Or you got help?

[01:03:06] JB: No, I was a one-man show at this point. Because then, it was an organization. It was now, I'm working for this company and I'm in a sense, still in a resources, or how – we're getting food donations from him and I sidebar to people, "Hey, man. I go out at night. Can I get some food too?" I would literally be driving around the city, or the bridges by my house. I used to get the food from 7-Elevens, that they were going to throw away. Just because of the date, even though it wasn't bad, but per their rules, they have to throw it away.

They used to tell me no, because they didn't want to get sued. I was persistent and I just kept going back. Please, man. Can I get it? Can I get it? I don't want to dig it out to trash, but I will. Then it was like, one 7-Eleven was good that he was like, "Oh, call my buddy. I'm going to call him right now and tell him you're going to go get the food over that 7-Eleven." Now, I had five or six 7-Elevens that was giving me food at a time. I would go do that. I would be walking around the promenade, in Santa Monica at 3 in the morning passing out food.

Then, I'm also always talking to these people. I'm talking to them. I actually know him by name, or they looking forward to now me coming. Then it was like, "Oh, I know the people at the building that I'm managing, they go to this mental facility." "Hey, why don't you go here? Just tell them I sent you." Because now I know the people too, because now I work at the job. That's where it was like, this is great.

By this time now, I did create the name. Literally, I'm a guy that when I hear something, or you say something good to me or whatever, I keep it in my notes. Really, one day when I wanted a name for now what I'm doing, it was in my notes. Not in the order, but it was there and it literally shifted. I watched the letters form. It was B.A.R.E. Truth. It was there.

Now, by this time, now I got the shirts printed up. I remember, I was in Culver City passing out some food. One guy and this guy said, "Hey, are you a non-profit? I didn't have a clue what this man was even talking about." I was like, "Nah." He was like, "Damn, and I was going to give you some money, but you can't even give me a write-off." It hurt, because it's like, I'm seeing the humanity of people from a random stranger that I don't know, but now I came providing what he needs. That happened to me too many times over the course, now maybe two years, because now I'm focused on doing the work.

I was like, I just got to give the people the food, or the clothes, or whatever else I can give them. I didn't really understand the business side and why that was so important. I was doing the work for years before I turned it into a official business.

[01:05:42] LW: This is sounding a lot like a full-time job. Are you working on a part-time job to make your ends meet?

[01:05:48] JB: No, I'm still working at I'm managing an apartment. I manage an apartment building. I did that literally by day. I was like Superman at night, or Batman at night. Because and then, I will be killing myself, because I'm up, going around a 7-Elevens, picking up food and then going to pass it out and trying to find –

[01:06:04] LW: By yourself in your car.

[01:06:06] JB: Yeah. Every once in a while, maybe the girl I was dating or whatever would come out with me. Or I could maybe get one of my friends. For the most part, consistently, it was always me.

[01:06:17] LW: What did your friends think about this? They know that you had this alternate life?

[01:06:22] JB: Yeah, they knew. They do. They just was like, “Be careful.” You know what I mean? Literally. Because then now, I'm starting to see stuff and do stuff, or whatever. I tell them about it and it's like, “Oh, okay.” Like I said, sometimes people will come. It was like, everybody that I knew at that point always had their own separate agendas, doing whatever. It was frustrating, because then I'm thinking to myself, “I'm doing this good. Why is nobody helping me? Why is nobody with me? Why wouldn't nobody come out? Yeah, I know, I'm tired in the morning, too. You can come with me.” I just wish that people seeing the vision at that time.

[01:07:04] LW: Let's say, somebody is listening to this and they're doing something on their own. They're a one-man show, and they want to recruit help. Now that you've had all this experience looking back now, because you have volunteers now. Is there something you could have done, or said that could have enrolled people to help you a little bit easier?

[01:07:22] JB: In my experience, honestly, it wasn't the people that I knew. I had to step outside of that bubble. There was complete strangers that started coming with me. Unfortunately, it sucks to say that. Then, I also say for me, too, my family in Kansas City would have helped. I believe that they would help, but I was just in Los Angeles. You know what I mean?

[01:07:43] LW: Who was your first volunteer?

[01:07:46] JB: My barber.

[01:07:48] LW: He's cutting your hair, and you're like, "Hey, man. I'm going out tonight to 7-Eleven. Would you want to come?"

[01:07:52] JB: My barber gave me \$200 and I cried right there. Because it was like, he actually believes in me. Yeah, he gave me \$200. That was the first time. I mean, people gave me a \$1, \$10 or something. He gave me \$200.

[01:08:06] LW: That actually makes sense, because your barber is like your therapist, right? He's listening to your story all the time.

[01:08:11] JB: I'll be talking to him. Yeah. Yeah. He really supported that. Like I said, it made me – it was one of those confirming moments where it was like, "Okay, I'm doing the right thing." I got my barber to give me \$200. Mind you, his job is to collect money from me, paying for a service and he gave me \$200. He said, "I believe in you." I was like, "All right. I'm good."

[01:08:36] LW: Prior to that, you weren't even sure if you were doing what you were supposed to do?

[01:08:41] JB: No. No. I was just doing what I felt was right. Regardless of what people said about me, regardless of why would you want to go out there with those people? It was always something. It was like, mind you, these are now people that came to my kids' birthday parties

at this point. These are close people to me that wouldn't support, or wouldn't help out, or do nothing. Literally nothing. Maybe they prayed for me, you know what I mean? That's about it, that I know. That's what I would always say. It made no sense. I don't understand it.

Then for me, I'm always on the flip side of that, you want to do something? Let's go do it. They didn't. I appreciate them for that, because then it makes me work harder, to prove to them that this is what I was supposed to be doing. I still work on me today. I have a little conversation with them now, but I'm working with them, because we need the help and support. A lot of people told me, "Hey, man. I didn't I didn't see it. I didn't know what you were doing. I didn't get it," or whatever else they told me. I was like, "Well, thank you. I'm glad you see it now."

[01:09:49] LW: You had written down in your notes. Balance, ambition, respect, encouragement, truth. Then later on, that became the acronym, B.A.R.E. Truth. Can you just talk a little bit about what those words mean to you?

[01:10:08] JB: First of all, the B. B is for balance, because I believe, truly believe that you have to be balanced in your life. I'm talking about, even within getting enough sleep. People don't even understand work-life balance, or family life balance. You have to be able to give things appropriate amount of time for it to grow. If you're trying to grow something, you got to put in the water and you got to really remember that. If you're standing, if you're off balance, you will fall down.

Actually, being balanced is actually one of the best things for you. Being balanced is also knowing when to talk and when to shut up, when to go, or when to stop. We all have to have that sense of balance in our life.

The A, ambition. Ambition is just that drive that's within you to do something that you want to do, regardless of what's saying it. People used to call me crazy for going out and feeding these people at night. I'm saying these people, because that's what they said to me, these people, they don't care about themselves. Why do you care? It was really something that I put on my own wall and said, "I'm going to get that, regardless of what's in the way."

The R is for respect. The respect is really just respecting myself, respecting people. When I go out and I see people in the streets, that doesn't matter that they don't smell like me. They don't look me. They don't have a house like me, or drive a car like me, but it's still respecting them as a person. Actually, understanding their shortcomings, while not putting them down, or making them feel less than, just because I'm handing you a sandwich.

All the time. I was out yesterday, they said, "Thank you, Joseph. God bless you. I really appreciate it." It's like, no problem. Because there's not no problem to me to do this for you. I really want to help you, versus taking something from me. I always tell my volunteers, free sandwiches, free water, free this, because I need you to know, I don't want nothing from you. This is free. This is from me to you. Okay.

The E is for encouragement. Like you said earlier, the E, I dedicate that 100% to my siblings, because I did not encourage them enough. I try my hardest right now to make sure that I encourage people on their journeys, whatever journey that is. Even if I do not like your journey, even if I don't necessarily respect the journey. I respect you enough to encourage you through that. "Hey, if that's what you want to do, then you go do it." I wouldn't do it, if you're asking me. If we're in that type of relationship like that, where I can say that. A lot of times, I don't say. A lot of times, I just look and just say, "Keep going."

I tell people, a lot of times, I tell my students that I work with, "Keep going. Keep going, because at the end of the day, we never know what tomorrow holds. You never know, once you kept pushing forward to do something." Right now, years ago, when I was out by myself, I never dreamed that I will be talking to you on this platform what we have today. I didn't. All I did is did the work and I kept going regardless of how tough it got, how hard it got, whatever. I just kept going. That's what I tell people all the time.

I wear truth on the back, because I have a truth, you have a truth. I'm not trying to force my truth on you. I don't want you to force your truth on me. I just feel like, we can live in a place together and make it better. Regardless of what you believe in, who you are as a person, or

whatever, that doesn't matter to me. If you need the help and I can help you, I want to help you. When I was a bit younger, that probably would have been true, because my views are also a little bit different coming from where I came from.

Now as a grown man, it doesn't matter. My thing is we all need help. That's what I used to complain about, too, when I was younger. We needed help. Who was there that's going to help us? I don't feel like enough people were. I want to make sure that I'll do my best to do what people are doing right now. That's what I'm doing right now with my organization, just trying to do my best.

[01:14:09] LW: What has been your outlet, or your spiritual foundation, or any practices that you've turned to to help release stress from all the pressure you must have been feeling doing all this and burning the candle at both ends for years at a time?

[01:14:26] JB: First of all, I believe in God. I'm a Christian. That's where my faith lies. Also, I would go home to Kansas City to get some type of say, normalcy for me, because I'm very familiar with that, familiar with the people. Just, that was my outlet. I talk to people and I really do enjoy giving back. If there was a time that I'm feeling something, I really would say, let me just go out and be amongst the people and where we go get some sandwiches, where there was 10 sandwiches, or 10 burgers, or whatever it is and really do that. Because at the end of the day, it's a constant reminder for me that life could be way worse than what it is and probably what I'm complaining about really isn't really that bad.

[01:15:16] LW: I'm living in some urban area. There's a homeless area within the urban area. I'm inspired by what I hear. What are some of the things in the playbook that I would need to know to go and help people?

[01:15:31] JB: One is compassion. I go down the Skid Row to let people know that they're not forgotten and that they are loved. For one, we started there. Then from there, it's really having the conversations with people and really understanding them. I was a victim of my own doings, I would say, because I would go down the Skid Row, or give people food and think that they're

homeless. They're hungry. Of course, they're hungry. They go and eat the sandwich, or they go eat peanut butter, or they go and eat this. Why not? Then really, not looking at them as people to think that just because he homeless, that don't mean that he doesn't have a peanut allergy. You know what I mean?

I never thought that. I'm just like, "He hungry. Of course, he's going to eat this." Those moments, realizing that they are people too. Then now when you talk to them, then they tell you exactly what they need. That's why I know that fingernail clippers and socks are really a big thing amongst a homeless community. Because they turn around, they use their socks to wash their face, or to wash up. Now if they had socks, and then now they had hand towels, they could use the hand towel for their body and use the socks on their feet.

A lot of them don't have nail clippers to clip their nails. Then that end up tearing up the socks, or tearing up the shoes. It's all these different things that we don't know, or we don't pay attention to. I would tell everybody to pay attention to that, as far as what they're doing on that side.

[01:16:57] LW: I have a friend, who, he's a homeowner and he's in Los Angeles. There's a homeless – there's a little tiny little homeless encampment underneath one of the overpasses in his neighborhood. He was out one day and he was taking a picture of one of the tents, or whatever they had set up. The guy got upset and started chasing him. He got he got spooked, as anybody probably would.

[01:17:24] JB: Of course.

[01:17:25] LW: Then, he became really concerned about this homeless encampment. I said to him – I said, and this is just completely off the cuff. I'm like, instead of trying to get them removed necessarily, I said, "Why don't you go to your neighbors and raise some money and pitch in and try to help these guys?" Then he said, "Well, if we do that, then more people will come and move in over there." I think a lot of people think like that. I think a lot of people are scared, because they think people are mentally imbalanced, or they'll try to stab them with a

hypodermic needle. What do we get wrong about homeless people? Maybe, even the ones in our neighborhood?

[01:18:01] JB: I tell people, the fears that you do have are valid. Just like, we all know some bad people, there's also good people. People are people. At the end of the day, like I said, once you really talk to them and see, because just because you help them out, that doesn't mean that people will come. Because then now, if you help them out, then you have maybe probably understand some of their challenges of why they're there.

It could be something political. Maybe you might have a political influence in your community, or in your city. Now you can go to a local politicians, or when it's time to vote for there's different propositions, or different things of that nature, to bring more money to them, or to the homeless shelters. A lot of the homeless shelters are really bad, so that people don't want to live in there. They would prefer to live on the street than to live in a homeless shelter.

Now, let's imagine that we volunteered at our local homeless shelter to clean up the homeless shelter, then now more people might decide to stay inside, versus outside. It's just a way of changing the way we think. If we change the way we think, we change our life. It really starts with the people, because we think that we know what everybody wants and that's false. You don't know what your neighbor wants. The only way that you know what anybody wants is if you talk to them. A lot of times, we don't talk to each other.

[01:19:21] LW: Yeah, I interviewed another woman who does a lot of work on Skid Row. She said, "Look, everybody comes out with food on Thanksgiving and Christmas, but what about the day after Christmas? What about the month after Christmas?" If someone wanted to invest time and volunteer, are there better days? Are there better times of day to impact the most amount of people?

[01:19:42] JB: Yeah. I would say, like my organization, we go out every week. We're out there every Sunday, like I said, making sure to let people know that they're loved. Giving them these different supplies that they can use during the week. There's always something I tell people.

Some people have more time than money and some people have more money than time. We need it all. We also need the resources and we also need the support. You know what I mean? If you understand that your car ran out of gas, then it'd be easy just to go put gas in your car. You've got to know what the problem is. Most people don't know what the problem is. That's why I will invite you out. You could walk around the streets with me and we can have a whole conversation and you'll get to see who these people are, what they're talking about, versus just driving past some and saying, "Uh."

Because a lot of the people are, does have mental illness. Then, you think Los Angeles has the largest mental health resources in the country. It only makes sense that a lot of people with mental illness move here for the support. You know what I mean? It's that same thing that they need it, we need the support, we need people to come out. We need the volunteers, because for me, I used to be one person buying one sandwich, or one burger and fries. Guess what? I can only feed one person.

Now if we was all able to donate, or supply, or connect me to your buddy that owns the grocery store. Connect me to whoever it has making the grants, or connect me to your mom down the street that does whatever, then now I can feed more of the people. Then now, those same challenges are those same worries that we're worried about people that say, jumping in your backyard. I had a guy told me, what these people used to jump over my fence and steal my items. Well, we had a processes, where I could donate it to them, then they don't have to steal your tent out to backyard. I gave him a tent. I gave them the shoes.

I'm not trying to tell people not to do whatever they want to do with, or donate to any other charity. I'm just saying, we go directly from your garage to the streets. This is what I'm doing right now. I ask everybody to donate a dollar a month, just because those add up, because then now, instead of buying five pizzas, now I can buy 10 pizzas. I can feed more people. I can touch more people. For the ones that do want to get off the streets, then that's when I do have the housing.

If I can touch more people, we can do more. If you can connect me to more people that's in charge, pulling the strings, then I can do more. At the end of the day, just like your buddy that owns a house, I want those people out of his backyard too. I do. I want him out of there. I will prefer for them to be in their own house. I really don't like the fact that people have to sleep on the street. I don't. Or people begging for money, or people stealing, or doing whatever they're doing, or doing drugs, or needles and whatever. I really would prefer for people to do that in the comforts of their home. Right now, I can't afford it.

[01:22:48] LW: You've opened up, or helped to open up a few transitional houses, right? The Balance House, the Ambition House. How did that come about?

[01:22:58] JB: Working at that apartment building. It was literally that vision to say, there's ways, or there's opportunities to do it. Was it hard? I literally would tell social workers for two years before I got anything that I had openings. Because I wanted to establish the connection. Everybody might not agree with the way I did it. This is just how I had to do it, what I was faced with.

[01:23:23] LW: You have it, so that it covers their utilities, it's furnished. Are people donating all that?

[01:23:30] JB: Some people are donating it. Actually, there's a lady that was just texting me. She's telling me she had a couple of new couches that she would like to donate. Some people do donate to different things. A lot of times, I'm partnered with mental health facilities, or these homeless shelters where we have a working partnership as they get new clients, or as I get beds open. We can contact them and we can move them in. Then by that, it's the state is actually supplying the funds for those.

It's not like I just have this major grant, where anybody can come. It's person by person. Or some people are working themselves, because what people don't know is that a lot of those people that live in the streets and tents have jobs. They just can't afford the first, the last, this,

that, that. That's where we come in and try to provide an alternative that might be a little bit more cost efficient, but it covers everything as well.

[01:24:19] LW: If someone is in Los Angeles, the Los Angeles area, “I'm moving out of my apartment. I have some stuff I was going to give away to goodwill or throw away. I want to contact baretruthinc.org and see if I can give some of my resources over to you guys to give to homeless people.” Is there anything else that anyone listening to this can do to help or support?

[01:24:45] JB: I would say, yeah. We can go start by going to the website, or to the social media page, which is official_bare_truth. You can reach out and just ask the questions. I will say, just ask the questions. If you have something on your heart, you can go look on the website to see the programs that we have. Some people donate specific things for specific programs. That works. That's perfect, because each one of our programs need the additional support.

Like I said, I ask people to make them monthly reoccurring donations. You can do right from the website. There's a donate button. You can automatically do it and you can really see those fruits come to life with the actions that we do. If you do want to come out and volunteer, I have a lot of people too, like you said, some people are scared to go outside, or go to Skid Row. I have other people that make the sandwiches at home and just drop them off. There we go. We still pass them out.

You didn't have to go down and actually walk around with this. If you would like to walk around with it, I would love to have you out. Even you too, whenever you're back in town. Please come out and I could show you first-hand, exactly what we do and how we do it. Most people that come out, they end up loving it and just keep coming.

[01:25:58] LW: Yeah. I talked to Jordan Taylor, who is how I found you. She said that that – she thought it was going to be something she did once, or twice. Now she's –

[01:26:07] JB: Right, right. Me too. I thought it was something she's going to do once or twice. Now she's like, "I'm coming every week."

[01:26:13] LW: She started this other thing, 12 months of giving. She's considering taking a much – allowing this to become a much bigger role in her life. I'm sure you see that a lot as well.

[01:26:25] JB: I see it. I appreciate Jordan. I love her for what she's doing. Like I said, literally, so even where her – They took on my organization that first month. After that last Sunday in January, I was like, "Okay, Jordan. Well, I'll see you later, whenever." She was like, "Oh, no. I'm coming back next week." It was like, even that, so for me is I know I'm doing something right, because I had no idea that that's how it was going to happen. Like you said, those type of things do happen more. I'm always shocked that people, their continued support.

[01:26:57] LW: She posted about it. Otherwise, we wouldn't be having this conversation, because I wouldn't even know what you're doing. Let me ask you this, to just wind things down a little bit. With all of your experiences now working in the non-profit area, how do you define success these days?

[01:27:15] JB: I define success, how many people I helped, as far as when this 65-year-old man thanks me and cries to tells me, if I didn't have this house and I didn't allow him to come in, that he would have died on the streets. That's where I get my joy from now. All the other stuff is good. The accolades are people clapping, or people wanting to meet my mom, want to talk to her Those things are all good, don't get me wrong. I appreciate them.

When you truly help somebody – and a lot of times when I'm helping people, I'm even suspicious of them, because people tell me a whole bunch of stuff, "Or I'm going to pay you. I'm going to do this. I'm going to do that." A lot of times, I've been burned. I always knew my heart was in the right place. When my heart is in the right place, the people do what they say that they're going to do and they actually get a car, get a job, move out. Then now, I even helped him get furniture. Lady, give me a couch. Hey, man. I got an extra couch.

When I see the person come from wherever they was and now they're in a completely different place and now actually participating in society, it's great. Because it's like, okay, Jo, job well done. Because that's why I wanted to do it. That's why I did it. Now this man is getting his haircut. He's feeling good about himself. He is actually loving life again. That's what it's about. I think that's where we as people need to be, loving life and helping people at the same time. I'll actually show people, there's a way to do it at the exact same time. It doesn't have to be one, or the other. You can literally live this complete, purpose-filled life and enjoy what you're doing at the same time.

[01:29:08] LW: You still play ball?

[01:29:10] JB: Yes, I do. I'm a little overweight now. The pandemic ain't been so great. Having kids has not been so great, as far as my body fat number. I still play. Yes. Still play.

[01:29:24] LW: You're a foster parent, which is really cool.

[01:29:26] JB: Yes. I didn't get to take a kid yet, but my house has definitely improved into – that was something I want to do even with that story. Because if you really research it, and the people that are out on Skid Row, 60% of them are probably foster kids, because as they age out of the system, they have nowhere to go. Then, they end up down there. I only knew that by talking to them, to figure out where they come from, what's their story.

Then that's what made me want to be a foster parent, because we weren't foster kids. We've never entered that system. I don't really know anybody that was ever really into that system. Talking to them and going out there years over years and talking to people and really finding out their life. It just shined on me. Then, I started housing them in my transitional houses. Then I was like, I want to take that step forward and actually have a greater impact. Because by the time they get to my transition, they're already 18 plus. Then, I could do it here and make a larger impact on somebody that's a lot younger and catch them before they have to go into my transition houses.

[01:30:26] LW: I like to wrap these conversations up, looping back around to what we started talking about, which is your favorite activity, basketball. Basketball, obviously, is a team sport. As much as you wanted to run away from the team that you were born into, it ended up playing a pivotal role in really preparing you to help to encourage the people that you selected as your team, which was this this community, this homeless community, this foster care community. I think about that, that I don't know if it was Phil Jackson who said it, or whoever, Kobe. I see you have a mamba mentality plaque behind you, but there is no I in team.

To do what you've been doing, it's taken a lot of, obviously, motivation, self-motivation, but also just inspiring other people to see your vision and to be a part of that vision and to be a part of your team. I just want to acknowledge you for all the times you have to say yes, because I'm sure, even now with everything that you've done, you still probably wake up some days thinking, "I just want to throw in the towel. This is so much, having to ask people to help me all the time." You keep saying yes, because I think your mom said, your work is not done. Probably even, I'm sure you probably even think about your dad sometimes when you're out here doing this and you're thinking about how proud he would be in his most sober state, to see you.

[01:32:02] JB: Yeah. 100% I think that.

[01:32:04] LW: Stepping up the way you're stepping up and really making these people, the family you never had. Thank you very much, man.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Thank you for listening to my interview with Joseph Bradford. If you're in the Los Angeles area and you feel inspired to volunteer with Joseph's organization, B.A.R.E. Truth, you can get the information on a social media feed, which is [official_bare_truth](#). Or you can go to his website, which is [BareTruthInc.org](#), and I'll put links to everything else that Joseph and I discussed in the show notes, which you can always find at [LightWatkins.com/podcast](#).

And if you enjoyed this conversation and you're now thinking to yourself, wow, I'd love to hear Light interview someone like. Shoot me an email with your guest suggestions. I'm at light@lightwatkins.com.

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Alright, I look forward to hopefully seeing you back here next week with another story about someone just like me, just like you taking a leap of faith in the direction of their purpose. And until then, keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart, keep taking those leaps of

faith. And if no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you. Thank you.
Sending you lots of love and have a great day.