

Seth: Liz Scott joins us to talk about her daughter Alex, who, despite battling cancer, started a lemonade stand to help other kids like her. What began with a single pitcher of lemonade has grown into a nationwide movement for hope, healing, and childhood cancer research.

Today's guest is Liz Scott, co-founder of Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, and the mother of a little girl who changed the world. Diagnosed with cancer before her first birthday, Alex spent her short life raising awareness and funds to help other children fight the same battle.

Her idea? A lemonade stand. Her legacy? A movement that continues to fuel pediatric cancer research, support families in crisis, and inspire millions. Liz joins us to share Alex's story, the mission that drives their work, and the extraordinary impact of one determined child.

Karolyn: We're going to talk about Alex's Lemonade Stand. It's quite a story. I'm talking to Alex's mother, and her name is Liz Scott, and she's the co-founder and mother of Alex. Alex really had a very short life, but she left a really big mark on this earth. That's for sure. Perhaps you could begin by telling us how this all started.

I would love to. So my daughter Alex was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, which is a pediatric cancer, two days before she turned one, and she went on in her lifetime to fight her cancer continuously. She never was able to achieve her mission, even for a short time.

She passed away at the age of eight. When she was almost four years old, we were told she was incurable, and we started down the road of trying to explore anything out there that could help her, give her more time, maybe hoping that it might actually cure her, and it was around that time that she started talking about having a lemonade stand. Her idea was, if she could sell lemonade and donate the money to her hospital, as she said, her doctors could help kids the way they helped her, and that was truly how we started way back in 2000 in our front yard, with Alex and a pitcher of lemonade, with the idea that there was something she could do to make things better for kids with cancer who would come after her.

Karolyn: What a generous act. She was so young to be thinking of other people. So when she had these lemonade stands, she would stay out there and she would sell the lemonade and people would know this was for a charity.

When she told me she wanted to sell lemonade to help her doctors, I thought it was adorable. She always had these big ideas. I told her she would probably only raise five or ten dollars, and she said, I don't care, I'll do it anyways.

And that was really the beginning of what is now this idea that we can cure cancer one cup at a time. She raised two thousand dollars that day. We told people right away that she was giving the money to her hospital.

This was back in 2000. Kids weren't doing lemonade stands for charity. I think this was a novel idea, and I think it's one that Alex helped create now that's become much more common. And they were amazed, plus the fact that she herself was fighting cancer and she had been fighting for so long, I think inspired people to think, if she can do something, so can I. And from day one, we were absolutely inspired, amazed, grateful. The amount of people and organizations who came out and said, you know what, I can help too. It's really how it started and how it grew and how it continues to grow today.

Karolyn: Do you have any really distinct memories of Alex?

There's the little moments that are the ones that are so close to my heart where we, maybe it would be the two of us. We spent a lot of time together at the hospital. And at night, you know, when she couldn't sleep and we would be giggling or we'd be talking about something or we'd be reading a book together.

That feeling, you know, of just being close and feeling so safe and like everything was going to be okay. And then there's the, what I would call the big memories, the moments where Alex would say something or do something. And it would literally stop us, my husband and I, in our tracks because of the wisdom and the insight she would have.

And I'll give you an example. You know, I wasn't even there. She had a really hard time in her life many times. And at the end of her life, it was really hard because she wasn't getting better. Things were getting harder. You know, we couldn't tell her she was getting better.

And this was a particularly bad week. She had been sick, you know, all week. She didn't want to be in the hospital anymore, but we kept having to bring her to the hospital in the middle of the night for a variety of reasons. And this was another one of those nights in here, it's midnight, it's 1am. My husband, we're up with her. Finally, we say, you have to go to the hospital.

He puts her in the car to drive her there. And she is really, you know, hurting. And he turns around, he says, Alex, I'm so sorry. And she said, for what? And he said, for everything. And at that moment, without hesitation, when she was really at one of the lowest points, she says, there's one thing you should know about me by now. I'm happy for what I have, not unhappy for what I don't have.

And that's powerful, right? It was so powerful that my husband called me when he got to the hospital. This was pre-self-violence, it's how long ago it was. And I panicked because I thought, oh, no, why is he calling? And he said, I have to tell you what she just said.

It was such an insight, right, into how she managed to live fighting so hard for seven and a half years and still be able to look past her own pain and suffering and say, I can do something to help other kids. She was so grateful for what was given to her, the moments that she did feel better, for everything she had in her life. And if you can feel that way at your lowest moment, I believe you can conquer anything and you can do great things.

And she showed us that. And that's why that memory of Alex has been so significant to me as a mom and as I've grieved her over the years to just remember those words.

Karolyn: Do you think that her courage and her kindness came from your parenting skills, from what you had shown to her? Or was this just something that she was born with?

As much as I would like to take credit, I really believe she was born with it. I mean, she wasn't even one when she was diagnosed. And, you know, we were young parents. We did our very best, as any parent would.

I really believe she was born with this incredible ability to look out for other people. And, you know, unfortunately, but I think the positive is how it created this incredible person. Her suffering, I think, required her to be strong, almost required her to gain this composure and this wisdom and this acceptance that I think most people never achieve. And if they do, it's often later in life. Right. And I think her life sort of propelled that and accelerated that.

I think she taught me so much more than I could ever take credit for teaching her. You might say she was an old soul. She was an old soul.

Karolyn: So what do you think you would say to her today if she was here?

I would have so much to say. I wish I could have a conversation with her. You know, I would tell her I love her.

That goes without saying. But I think you can't say it enough, especially when you don't have the opportunity to tell somebody that anymore. I would thank her for what she created and the gift she's given not to us. We get to carry on this work. That is a gift. But to all the kids out there whose lives have been changed and saved and who received cures because of her. And I would tell her that, you know, we miss her and I'm still sorry that she didn't get the cure that she deserved. Today, the research has continued on. Every day, something new is discovered and it's going very fast.

Karolyn: This research, do you think it's going to continue on in this positive manner? And Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation supports all of this sort of discovery and investigation and the things that they're trying to find and to help. Is that going to just continue on?

It is. The way we've been studying cancer the past, let's say, two decades, particularly the past five to 10 years, is really exciting. And the technology has changed what we know, the biology of cancers has changed.

And what that means is we're seeing faster progress. You know, it's been too long since we've had new cures to offer kids. And what's really important about the way we're studying cancer now is we're looking at ways to cure cancer without all of the collateral damage that we're causing in children now.

And children are especially susceptible to the toxicities of chemotherapies, of radiation therapy, even surgery. And we saw that with Alex. I mean, the lifelong side effects for survivors are significant in many cases and really can affect quality of life.

We're focused on funding projects that are going to learn something new about how we can cure kids with cancer, and then giving them the money to take that knowledge and turn that into a treatment for kids with cancer. We've seen new cures come out of that.

We've met kids, literally their parents contact us because their child was considered incurable like Alex, and they went into a clinical trial that we helped support in some way, oftentimes as a primary supporter of it.

And now their child is a survivor, and they want us to know that Alex is living on through them. That's going to continue. The progress is making us see that we've got a long way to go, but look how far we've come. And we can see that we're going to get there. It's on the horizon. It's just going to take, you know, a lot more work and a lot more patience and a lot more funding.

But I'm hoping in my lifetime that we can really look back and say we really moved the needle, right? We went from 78% curable to 98% curable, and we did it with less toxic therapies. And I believe that will happen. The cures that we know now were once a research idea that someone had that somebody had to fund to get off the ground, right? We're not going to create new solutions to pediatric cancer or any cancer if we're not trying to find and explore new ways to treat.

We're not going to find a new, better chemotherapy. We need the next cycle of cures, and they need to be targeted cures, immunotherapies, things that are much more precise in how we're killing cancer. And it's happening. Just got to keep pushing. So that's what you would say to someone who is having to deal with their child and having cancer. There is hope.

There is hope. I think, you know, there's a lot of cliches, but cliches exist for a reason. It can be one day at a time when your child has cancer or, you know, adults who are battling cancer, any serious, even chronic illness where, you know, you've got to focus on what's in front of you, right? In front of you and get through in that survival mode.

But you have to believe that what you're doing is going to get the outcome you want, which is a cure. And when that changed from probably not being able to be cured, our goal was we are going to make the time that she has left here as good as possible. And that's why we went down the road of clinical trials. She got four and a half of her eight and a half years. So I would say if you feel there's more that can be done for your child, you should fight for that. Right?

You should always fight for your child having the best care possible, having the best chance at a cure possible, being most comfortable as possible.

There's no reason they should be in pain. And there's always hope. Even when we knew Alex wasn't going to survive, we had so much hope that we could, you know, have her last days or months with us be really valuable, precious months.

And we had hope that even after she passed away, we would be able to carry on and to keep her spirit alive in some way. And you have to hold on to that hope. You can't ever feel like it's hopeless. That's a big part of it. And then you're not alone. It feels very alone.

But there are people who want to help. There are organizations that want to help. There are other people who've walked down the path in front of you who are happy to help.

So reaching out to family or friends or the social workers at the hospital or other groups online where parents are going through the same thing can be helpful. Alex eliminates Stan Foundation. Some of the things that they do, for instance, the Travel for Care program.

Karolyn: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Yes. So the Travel for Care program grew from the fact that we were increasing the number of new therapies or new treatments, clinical trials. We were funding them.

And the doctors were telling us, you know, it sounds bad, but the families can't get here. And that made us realize our family went through that. We traveled from Hartford, Connecticut, down to Philadelphia, back and forth for experimental treatments.

When you have a new treatment, it's not available at every hospital. So a relapsed child or a child who's at sort of the point where the known cures aren't working, often the family has to go to another hospital. So we provide through the Travel for Care, we've helped more than 10,000 families travel from their home hospital to a different hospital so they could have the latest innovative treatment that was available. What's unique about it is we pay up front. So we will provide gas cards. We will book a hotel room or provide you with a hotel card that you can use.

And really importantly, if a family has to fly, we will book the airfare for them. And a lot of the families have never flown before. The average income we help with through this program is about \$40,000 a year family income.

So they've never flown before. So our team will not only book for them, but talk them through what happens at the airport, make sure if they need assistance with a wheelchair that that's available to them, really make sure the family can get there and can feel like their child has the same opportunity as any other child who is battling cancer to get the latest therapies.

And that's really important because you don't want to create a system where kids can't be treated equally because they don't have the same financial means.

Karolyn: You have so many little trees of different programs through your organization. It must be very gratifying to be able to do this and to see the results in a positive manner.

It is to everyone who works at Alexis or even contributors, like really connected to our mission because they're good supporters. This is why we do this. You know, it succeeded for me personally. It succeeded anything I thought was possible from the Front Yard Lemonade Stand. You know, it's something that you just kind of step back sometimes and look at it and think, wow, you know, there are families who've been helped who I'll never meet, most of them. And certainly, you know, Alex never, who most of the kids weren't born when she was alive, but yet their lives are intertwined with hers in some small way. And, you know, as they grow up and grow old, you know, I feel there's a little piece of her and a little piece of the work that we're doing. And to me, that's such a gift.

Karolyn: Many of our listeners want more information on how to start their own lemonade stand to support this cause. How would they go about doing that?

They could go to our website. It's alexslemonade.org. If you were to search for Alex's Lemonade Stand, I'm sure we'd come up right there, but it's pretty easy, alexslemonade.org. And on there, you will see how you can join our monthly giving club. We have many ways for people to get involved, which is really something Alex showed us. People want to help.

So if you give them a way to do that, that feels right for them and fits within their capabilities, they're going to do it. I would strongly suggest people really check it out and think about how they can impact the lives of kids with cancer. There's no apostrophe or dash or period or anything. Just alexslemonade.org.

Karolyn: Tell me about the stores. Do you sell lemonade through the stores in any way? And do you get support from that?

We have thousands of lemonade stands every year. And when I say lemonade stands, I truly mean just what you might be picturing. We have families that do it. We have schools. We have businesses that do that lemonade stands.

And then we have other companies like Florida's Natural, Country Time, and many others who have a product that they are saying, you know what, this makes sense. I'm selling lemonade. Why not give a part of that money to Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation? And then we have companies and individuals who participate in our other events. There's literally more than a dozen ways. What we don't have is our own brick and mortar stores. We have one office outside Philadelphia and really our chapters, like our feet on the ground, our boots on the ground, our people having lemonade stands,

and our supporters across the country and companies across the country that are out there setting up stands, raising money, letting people know this is a cause they can give to and collecting that money like we are a dollar at a time.

Karolyn: So how can people get involved and support Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation?

A really impactful way, and a lot of people don't realize what this means to charities, is you're listening to this. You're thinking about Alex's Lemonade Stand right now. Maybe you're thinking, I wish I could do something to help.

Signing up to become a monthly donor is one of the greatest gifts you can give to an organization. And I'm not exaggerating that because it's sustaining money. It also connects you to the cause.

Our people who give monthly, we send out regular communications about what the money is doing. Rather than constantly asking you to give, you're already giving. So we're sending you a lot of information about how you're having an impact.

And for us as an organization, building that group of people up who are sustaining donors for as little as \$5 a month really makes a big impact on our ability to think long term and how can we solve this problem. So it's a big focus for us. And I think it's a really simple way for people to have a nice impact without having to necessarily constantly remind themselves to send a check-in or to go online and give or to have a lemonade stand. It helps so many children and that's wonderful.

Karolyn: Well, can you tell me anything about the Crazy Eight Initiative?

We started developing the idea five years ago. And the idea is basically we've given out a lot of grants, which are significant, \$150,000 to even up to a million dollars for researchers working to solve the problem.

But we decided what would happen if we challenged the community to solve one of the so far unsolvable problems in pediatric cancer, one of the cancers for kids that we've not had success in curing. What if we challenge a community to try to get together to solve this problem? We gave them \$5 million to do it. We called it Crazy Eight because we had eight different problems we were trying to solve.

And we called it crazy because we wanted the groups who got together, the researchers who got together to really think big and think like beyond what they thought would be possible. And we set out to fund at the beginning five of those. So a total of \$25 million commitment.

Now we've given out six. We're about to give out the seventh this year. But the idea is that scientists can work together instead of working separately to solve the same problem. You can get the brightest minds on the same team. This is international. So there's researchers from all over the world working together.

And that by doing that, we can move the needle. We can change things for certain disease types that have been incurable. And so far, we're loving what they're doing.

We're seeing the progress that they're making. We're only a couple of years in, but we're really hopeful that they're going to have the intended impact, which is to really change things for some of these pediatric cancers. So this is finding better treatments and cures for childhood cancers.

Katrolyn: Yes, it is. Wonderful, wonderful thing that you are doing, my dear.

Thank you. Wonderful thing that got started by Alex. She was the spark.

Karolyn: If you could say something to someone to explain why supporting the fight against cancer is so important, what would you say?

I would say that supporting kids with cancer is something we should all be doing. Number one disease killer of children in our country is cancer. It's the second cause of death in children behind accidents. And we know that research finds cures.

It's a solvable problem. So in terms of having an impact, I think investing in pediatric cancer is a way to have an impact and really feel like you are making a difference against something that's a fairly significant problem in our society.

Karolyn: Well, I really appreciate your joining us today. And I think I'll always remember Alex.

Thank you. I appreciate that very much.

Karolyn: So we appreciate what you're doing to help these families who are dealing with that nasty disease. Hopefully, it's just going to get better.

That's the plan. We're going to put ourselves out of business is what we're going for.

Karolyn: I have to say, as the mother of Alex, you have certainly made her legacy something very worthwhile. And I think that people can recognize that and recognize your heart, which is so big. Thank you very much for joining us today.

My pleasure.

Karolyn: Don't you forget now, every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings and Alex has her wings.

Seth: Alex once said, I'm happy for what I have, not unhappy for what I don't have. In just eight years, she taught us more about gratitude and giving than most do in a lifetime. Her message is still changing lives, one child, one family, one cup at a time. So here's to finding light in the darkest places and to pouring it forward. I'm Seth Kennedy, and you've been listening to Zuzu: All Grown Up.