

Brady Gilchrist

The Aloha Project

Combating the silent and pervasive epidemic of loneliness.



Design thinking and the loneliness epidemic

Design thinking is a way of solving problems that starts with people—how they feel, what they need, and what might make their lives better. It's about putting ourselves in someone else's shoes, working together to come up with ideas, and trying things out to see what actually works.

When it comes to challenges like loneliness, design thinking helps us take a closer look at the real experiences of those who feel isolated.

By listening to their stories and focusing on what truly matters to them, we can create solutions that not only work but also make a lasting difference. It's a flexible, creative process that lets us experiment, learn, and adapt along the way—so we're not just addressing the surface issue but building real connections that help communities thrive.



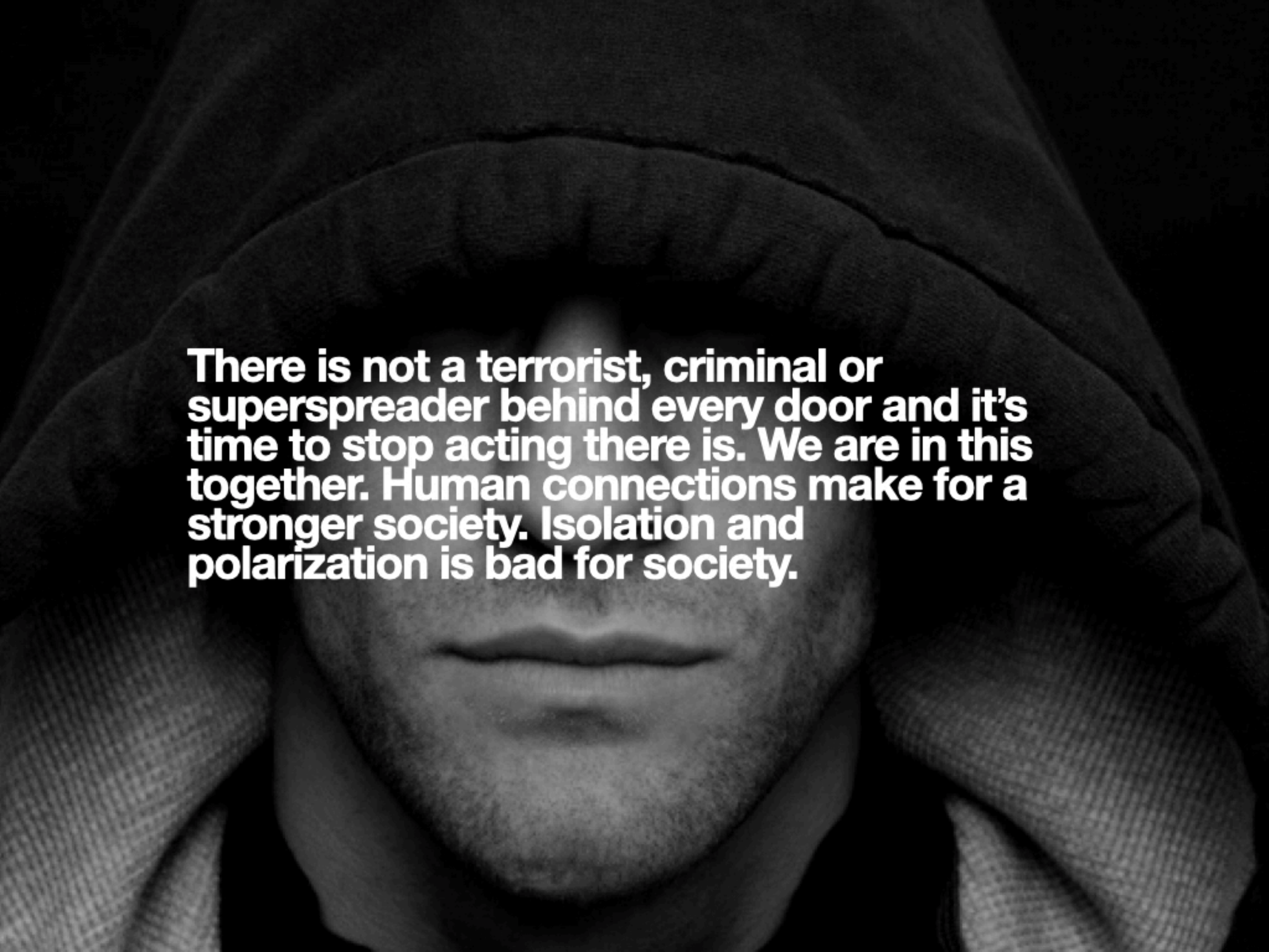
Friends couldn't happen today

“We were jokingly saying that if Friends was created today, you would have a coffee shop full of people that were just staring into iPhones.” There would be no actual episodes or conversations.”

Jennifer Aniston

More than 40% of people feel fundamentally lonely.





There is not a terrorist, criminal or superspreader behind every door and it's time to stop acting there is. We are in this together. Human connections make for a stronger society. Isolation and polarization is bad for society.

A close-up photograph of several people's hands clasped together in a circle, symbolizing unity and friendship. The hands are of various skin tones, and some are wearing red wristbands with white polka dots. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting with a clear sky.

**All friends were once
strangers.**

The Idea.

The **Aloha Project** asks:
What if we could prompt
people to connect in a
simple, risk-free way?



By creating small moments of connection—through a smile, a kind word, or a shared story—we begin to break down the barriers that keep us apart. The Aloha Project is built on the belief that fostering meaningful human interactions doesn't have to be complicated or intimidating. It starts with simple prompts that make reaching out feel natural and safe, encouraging people to engage in ways that brighten their day and others'. In a world that often feels disconnected, these small acts of connection have the power to transform loneliness into belonging and build stronger, more compassionate communities.

The Aloha Project is simple and welcoming, designed to create a moment of connection in a place you already know: your local coffee shop. Imagine this: You walk into a cozy café on a cool morning, the hum of espresso machines blending with soft chatter and the clink of cups. You step up to the counter to place your order, and the barista smiles and asks, "Would you like the regular coffee sleeve or the Aloha sleeve today?"

Curious, you ask about the Aloha sleeve. The barista explains, "The Aloha sleeve is for people who are open to saying a quick hello or having a light chat. It's our way of helping people connect." The barista adds with a friendly laugh, "Don't worry—it's not a date, it's just a hello."

You choose the Aloha sleeve. It's bright, cheerful, and printed with a simple phrase: "**Say Aloha! I'm open to a friendly hello.**" Below the phrase, there's a QR code linking to a short guide with suggestions on how to start conversations and tips for making them enjoyable and easy. You grab your coffee and look around the café, noticing a few other people with the same sleeve on their cups.

The Aloha sleeve comes with a few simple rules:

It's Not a Date, It's a Hello: This isn't about pressure, flirting, or awkward commitments. It's simply an invitation to connect for a moment, nothing more.

Keep it Light: This is about friendly, non-intrusive conversation—nothing too personal or heavy.

Mutual Respect: If someone doesn't feel like chatting, that's okay. No pressure.

Take the Lead if You Want: A smile or a "Good morning!" is all it takes to get started.

As you find a seat near the window, someone nearby notices your sleeve. They smile and say, “Aloha! I guess we’re both trying out the sleeve today.” You chat briefly about how nice the café is, share a laugh about the weather, and then return to sipping your coffee. It’s simple, it’s warm, and it’s enough to brighten your day.

The Aloha sleeve also includes activating artifacts: prompts like conversation starters or small compliments you can try, designed to make breaking the ice even easier. It’s not about forcing connections but inviting them—creating a space where it feels safe and natural to say hello.

Most importantly, it’s not a commitment to anything beyond the moment. The Aloha sleeve is a way to remind people that connection doesn’t have to be intimidating or high-stakes—it can just be a shared smile, a light exchange, and a moment of kindness.

The Aloha Project turns an ordinary coffee moment into an opportunity to combat isolation, one smile and one “hello” at a time. By opting in, you’re not just saying you’re open to connection—you’re helping create a ripple effect of kindness and belonging in your community.

Let’s get people talking together again.



Why It Matters

Loneliness has quietly grown into one of the most pressing public health challenges of our time.



Loneliness more than just a fleeting emotional state—it's an epidemic with profound consequences for individuals, societies, and economies. From the United States to Canada and the UK, loneliness has reached alarming levels, making it a priority for immediate action. The Aloha Project seeks to address this crisis by fostering human connection through simple, creative, and impactful design.

The Scale of the Problem

The United States

In the U.S., loneliness has become an escalating public health issue. According to a 2020 study by Cigna, 61% of U.S. adults reported feeling lonely, a significant increase from previous years. Loneliness is especially pronounced among younger adults, with 79% of Gen Z (ages 18–22) describing themselves as lonely. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this crisis: a 2021 Harvard report found that 36% of all Americans feel “seriously lonely,” including 61% of young people and 51% of mothers with young children. Marginalized groups—including low-income households, racial minorities, and individuals with disabilities—face even higher rates of loneliness.

Canada

In Canada, loneliness is equally pervasive. A 2021 Statistics Canada survey revealed that over 40% of Canadians experience loneliness regularly, with 13% reporting feelings of isolation “all the time.” Those most affected include single individuals, urban residents, and seniors, particularly those living alone. The pandemic’s social distancing measures underscored the fragility of social bonds, leaving many Canadians disconnected from their communities and support networks.

The United Kingdom

The UK has long recognized the severity of loneliness, appointing the world’s first Minister for Loneliness in 2018. Government data from 2022 revealed that 45% of adults in England feel lonely occasionally or more frequently. Among vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, the numbers are even starker, with 76% of seniors in care homes reporting persistent loneliness. Social prescribing programs, which connect individuals to community activities, have been a key strategy in the UK’s efforts to combat loneliness.

Why Loneliness Matters

Loneliness is more than an emotional burden—it has profound implications for health, well-being, and society at large. The risks of inaction are too significant to ignore:

Health Risks

Chronic loneliness is as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and increases the risk of premature death by 26%. It's linked to a 29% increase in heart disease, a 32% higher likelihood of stroke, and a 50% greater risk of developing dementia. Beyond physical health, loneliness fuels mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

Economic Impact

The financial toll of loneliness is substantial. Lonely individuals are more likely to rely on healthcare services, driving up costs for both individuals and systems. In workplaces, loneliness reduces productivity, engagement, and retention, costing businesses billions of dollars annually.

Social Cohesion

Loneliness weakens the bonds that hold communities together. High levels of loneliness lead to reduced trust, lower civic engagement, and increased social fragmentation, undermining the resilience of societies as a whole.

Why We Must Act Now

The Urgency

Loneliness has become a global public health crisis. The pandemic amplified the issue, highlighting how fragile our social connections can be. Without intervention, the ripple effects of loneliness will continue to strain healthcare systems, economies, and communities.

The Ripple Effects of Inaction

Loneliness creates a vicious cycle of social withdrawal, poor health, and reduced community engagement. Left unchecked, it perpetuates inequality and disconnection, leaving individuals and societies more vulnerable to future crises.

The Benefits of Addressing Loneliness

Investing in solutions to reduce loneliness creates transformative benefits that extend far beyond the individual:

Healthier Communities: Strengthening social connections improves mental and physical health, reducing healthcare costs and enhancing quality of life.

Economic Gains: Addressing loneliness boosts productivity, employee well-being, and economic output, while lowering the financial burden on healthcare systems.

Stronger Social Bonds: Combatting loneliness fosters trust, collaboration, and civic engagement, building more vibrant and resilient communities.

Happier Lives: Most importantly, addressing loneliness enables individuals to lead fuller, more meaningful lives, rooted in authentic relationships.

Final Thoughts: A Call to Action

Loneliness may be a quiet epidemic, but its effects are loud and far-reaching. It's time to treat loneliness as the public health crisis it is and to prioritize creative solutions. Initiatives like the Aloha Project demonstrate that even small, thoughtful interventions can make a profound difference.

By investing in connection, we create healthier, happier, and more resilient communities. Loneliness is a shared human experience, but connection is the solution we can build together. The time to act is now.

The background of the slide features a grid of nine coffee cup sleeves with various designs. The top row shows three sleeves: the left one has 'ALOHA' at the top and a handshake illustration; the middle one has a coffee cup with a heart; the right one has 'ALOHA' and a sun. The middle row shows three sleeves: the left one has 'SOCIAL ALOHA COFFEE SHOP' and tropical leaves; the middle one has 'Aloha' in cursive; the right one has 'SOCIAL' and a hand holding a heart. The bottom row shows three sleeves: the left one has 'Aloha' in cursive with flowers; the middle one has a sun and waves; the right one has 'ALOHA' in a banner.

The Aloha Project: Designing for Connection

The Aloha Project offers a fresh, design-focused approach to combat loneliness. By using simple tools like conversation-starter coffee cup sleeves, the project creates low-pressure opportunities for meaningful interactions. This human-centred design not only sparks connection but also normalizes reaching out, making it easier for individuals to take the first step toward building relationships.

The project emphasizes the power of design to turn everyday environments into platforms for connection. Whether through public spaces, technology, or creative interventions, the Aloha Project seeks to inspire a cultural shift toward greater connection and belonging.

Execution

This is about launching a movement, sparking imagination, making bits, building relationships, amplifying the message, and setting it free.



Mission

The Aloha Project aims to **combat loneliness** through innovative, **design-led solutions** that **foster human connection**. By leveraging design thinking and strategic partnerships, the project will create tools, training, and content to spark meaningful interactions and **reduce the stigma** around loneliness. The ultimate goal is to launch the concept within six months and **amplify through partnerships**, media campaigns, and community integration.

Method

The first step is to assemble a core team of designers, marketers, and amplifiers to define the concept, branding, and key messaging for the project. This team will develop a recognizable visual identity and logo that communicates the purpose of the project in an accessible and optimistic way. Prototypes of physical tools, such as coffee cup sleeves with conversation starters, and digital assets will be created and refined based on feedback.

The project will then focus on developing comprehensive training resources for community partners. This includes

step-by-step guides, workshops, and instructional videos. Short, engaging videos and graphics for social media will be produced to explain the initiative and inspire participation. Additionally, customizable templates will be drafted for NGOs, health organizations, and community groups to integrate the Aloha Project into their activities.

To establish a digital presence, the project will launch a website as the central hub for information, resources, and engagement. Active social media channels will be created and maintained to amplify messaging and share success stories. A content calendar will ensure consistent communication, with an emphasis on real-life stories and measurable impacts.

Building relationships will be critical to the project's success. The team will identify and engage potential collaborators, including NGOs, healthcare organizations, media outlets, and government agencies. Interviews and workshops will be scheduled to co-create materials with community partners and beneficiaries. Commercial partners, such as coffee chains and wellness brands, will be approached to act as sponsors or collaborators, increasing the project's visibility and impact.

Success will be measured through QR code scans, partner sign-ons, media coverage, website visits. Geo-tracking will generate heat maps of interaction hotspots, while feedback and self-reported data will quantify engagement through a **“Connections Sparked Per Day”** metric.

Market Entry

The execution timeline begins with assembling the core team and defining roles in the first month. Branding, key messaging, and initial designs will be finalized, and the website and social media presence will begin development. In months two and three, training materials, videos, and prototypes will be developed and finalized, and an initial social media campaign will launch to raise awareness.

Key partners will be engaged for pilot projects and feedback. During months four and five, prototypes will be tested with pilot partners, and outreach will expand to NGOs, government agencies, and potential sponsors. Workshops and interviews will be held to build engagement. In the sixth month, the project will officially launch with a media event and coordinated digital campaign, rolling out physical tools and training materials to partners while building relationships for long-term amplification and sustainability.

After the initial six months, the focus will shift to scaling the project through sponsorships, expanded partnerships, and media coverage. Fresh content and updated resources will maintain momentum, and success metrics will be evaluated to secure long-term funding and support for future phases. However, at the end of 6 months it will be a self-contained

thing that **can grow and evolve on its own** complete with detailed instructions on how to run with the idea.

The Aloha Project is an **ambitious yet achievable** initiative with the potential to create meaningful change. By addressing loneliness through **human-centered design** and rapid execution, it can inspire a **cultural shift** toward **greater connection and belonging**. The support of partners, sponsors, and the community will be instrumental in bringing this vision to life.

Building the Aloha Project as a focused, **sprint-style initiative** will generate the energy and momentum needed to bring this concept to market. This is not just product development—it's the creation of a **social enterprise designed in the AI era to scale rapidly and create meaningful impact**.

If the project gains traction, that's a win. If it sparks the next big idea, even better. But at its core, the Aloha Project is designed to ignite conversations in boardrooms, offices, and communities. If it achieves that, we will have already succeeded.

The Aloha Project needs six months to create a meaningful impact. If we get this right, it will grow and expand organically taking on a life of its own.

The Instigator

S. Brady Gilchrist

Brady Gilchrist is a strategic advisor, innovator, and humanist with over 30 years of leadership at the intersection of technology, creativity, and strategic growth. As a trusted advisor to C-Level executives, Brady has guided organizations through complex challenges, driving transformative innovation with a visionary yet pragmatic approach.

His pioneering career includes founding Entogen, revolutionizing sustainable industrial protein production through insect technology, and Gilchrist Aeronautics, where drones combat rabies and sequester carbon. As co-founder of Marshal Fenn InterMagic, Canada's first Internet advertising agency, Brady shaped the digital landscape. An early tech pioneer, he developed the first wireless email software, sold to Motorola, and created the inaugural wireless messaging app for the Apple Newton.

Beyond his professional achievements, Brady's adventurous spirit led him to join the Starship Millennium Voyage, become a pilot, author, sailor, and photographer, all driven by a passion for projects that make a difference. As a college professor and board member, he has inspired the next generation, consistently reimagining possibilities and creating lasting impact.

In 2025, Brady's focus is on humanist issues. Leading the Aloha Project, he is committed to fostering small, positive actions to combat the epidemic of loneliness, empowering teams and partners to create meaningful connections and transformative change.

