

# Like Legos, we are better together

Snapping bricks are a model to connect and cooperate

By SCOTT WALTERS

In 1997, nearly 5 million Lego pieces were accidentally dumped into the ocean. A wave struck a container ship off the coast of Cornwall, England, causing the ship to tilt sharply. In all, 62 shipping containers tumbled into the sea, including one packed with Legos bound for the U.S. In a curious twist, many of the pieces were nautical-themed — octopuses, flippers and scuba gear. Decades later, they are still washing up on English beaches, attracting locals and tourists eager to find as many as possible.

A local resident started a Facebook page where lucky beachcombers share stories about their finds. Flippers seem to be the most common discovery, while dragons and octopuses are rarer. Yellow life jackets and rafts, ironically, are the rarest finds of all.

Because of ocean currents, the tiny pieces are slowly drifting all over the world. In 2015, a piece finally washed up on a U.S. beach, remarkably on Galveston Island. An oceanographer speculated the piece, a tiny octopus, must have become tangled in sargassum seaweed, allowing it to float across the Atlantic for many years.

Originally made of wood, Legos have become one of the most popular toys on the planet. On average, each person on Earth owns 86 Lego bricks, and there are more Lego minifigures on Earth than humans. In fact, if all the Lego bricks in the world were stacked on top of each other, they would reach the moon 10 times. Legos have inspired movies,



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books and theme parks. The durability of the plastic means they can be used and reused for generations.

Over the years, Legos have inspired some of the most elaborate products imaginable. Enthusiasts have built replicas of landmarks like the Taj Mahal and Eiffel Tower, and functioning machines like clocks, robots and musical instruments. On its own, a single brick is not that useful. But in combination, the bricks can solve elaborate problems. One ambitious project involved building a full-sized house, including

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plumbing and furniture, entirely from Legos.

Legos show the power of cooperation. In fact, the name "Lego" is derived from two Danish words that mean "play well," a philosophy that is central to the brand's identity. This spirit is celebrated each year in the international FIRST LEGO League, where children tackle real-world problems using Legos. Last year, almost 700,000 children in 110 countries participated in this event that fosters friendly competition and mutual gain. One of their core values

is teamwork: We are stronger when we work together.

In his book *Sapiens*, author Yuval Harari argues that what has made humans so successful is our ability to cooperate in large numbers through the use of stories. The stories that Christians share about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, for instance, or Americans believe about democracy as a force for good are what allow strangers to trust each other, despite never having met. Stories provide a shared framework that connects people across cultures and generations.

Unfortunately, our social media, news and information silos have made us mistrustful of shared stories. Collaboration gets harder as trust dwindles. This erosion of trust is happening worldwide, but it is particularly evident in the U.S., where confidence in institutions like churches, schools and the medical system has declined sharply over the past 20 years. One way to rebuild trust is through shared activities and play.

Legos remind us of our human connection. We are interlocking pieces, designed to snap together. If you've set a New Year's resolution, make a point to involve other people. Start a book club. Exercise with a friend. Host a potluck. Volunteer as part of a group. Resolutions that involve a community are more likely to stick.

Or grab a handful of Legos and build something with a friend. After all, isn't the state motto of Texas "friendship"? If kids can do it, then we can too. You may end up with a creation that's half sea monster, half spaceship, but the pieces will fit together beautifully. My hope for this year is that we'll embrace the lesson we teach our children: Play well.

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