

# What is it like to be an AFFOL?

by Regina Mateos Rodilla



When my great friend Lluís offered me the opportunity to write for this issue of HispaBrick Magazine®, I felt a profound sense of gratefulness and responsibility. I was full of excitement, but at the same time I was filled with a dose of guilt. How could I silence the voice inside me that screamed “there are more deserving AFFOLs than you”?

Like prince Hamlet holding a skull with both hands, I have spent many hours turning over pieces between my fingers and thinking of what it means to be or not to be a good fan.

If an AFOL is someone who is active in the community, who belongs to a LUG, or who flies the flag of their hobby at every opportunity, then I am a terrible failure. I have always lived my LEGO® hobby in an abnormally independent way. But of course the word fan has almost as many meanings as there are ways to combine two two-by-four bricks.

Being a fan is occasionally putting up with people saying “what a freak”. It is explaining why you keep asking for toys for Christmas. It is suddenly talking in jargon that nobody else understands, having a lifeline in bad times, and creating a link that connects you instantly to people you hardly know.

Being a fan is having and craving knowledge and, above all, doing everything with great enthusiasm.



Reception at Åstvej (Billund)

Then I smile and think: Yes, I'm a good AFFOL!

The ultimate test, as with so many things in life, is the confirmation that comes from the outside: the feeling that the word LEGO® is part of your identity. That your friends, loved ones or coworkers call you, write you or are reminded of you each time they see the logo or read news that includes white letters over a red background.

We all know the feeling that LEGO® has marked our life and in mine it has (almost literally) been my rudder.

I am also sure you all remember the first set you ever had. I don't know specifically. What I do know is that it was my reward for not crying when I got vaccinated and that it was a Fabuland set that came off one of the shelves of a bookshop called Independencia in the city of León (Spain).

That name turned out to be an omen, because the independence I lacked up to then would be rewarded many years later with a plane ticket to Billund.



*Loose parts and memorabilia at home*

I am a collector – and one of the type that keeps their boxes in perfect condition and avoids mixing parts in an almost obsessive-compulsive way. The kind that knows all the reference numbers by heart and has three backup copies of an Excel inventory they cherish. The kind that didn't have a dark age and had the tremendous fortune to get a place on the 2007 Inside Tour del 2007 as a gift to myself when I graduated. Of course, back then enlisting was a matter of a simple email and not the famed online race against the clock it became later; and that has been the source of so many anecdotes and conversations among those who have participated in later editions. When registration opened in 2015, the first one hundred and forty registered in less than four minutes!

Participating in the Inside Tour was a turning point. There wasn't a single moment in those three days that I wasn't profoundly happy. Camilla Torpe, the Event Manager, creator, and organiser responsible for that tour (and for all the tours before the LEGO® House opened) received me at the LEGOLAND hotel and we had breakfast together. That was an honour not bestowed on all participants, and I think she was touched by the fact that I had set aside two days to explore a village with two streets. From the moment we had coffee I knew our relationship would be special.

The tour was full of surprises. With all the online testimonials from other fans who have attended a tour, there may be little you won't already know. Otherwise, don't hesitate to

take a look at the great reviews by Fuddruckus[1], Huw[2] or MeganL[3] on Brickset, the one by drdavewatford on gimmeLEGO@[4], or the one on the Tia blog[5].



*LEGO® Inside Tour 2007 Group Photo*

I passed through the innermost parts of the colourful offices at Havremarken with the same enthusiasm, breathing a dream: a model workplace, an exemplary nordic idiosyncrasy and hundreds of corners that would be the delight of any fan.



*Åstvej (Billund)*

And what to say of the factory on Kornmarken or the assembly line at Åstvej! These were very intense days. We discovered the history of LEGO® while weaving our way through the intricate architecture of the Idea House (which you can visit in HBM006). We saw the Vault which holds a copy of every retail set ever made. We bought more than we should, strolled through LEGOLAND® (which you saw in HBM007) and we shared some great moments and anecdotes with other participants in the group and with designers from different projects, who answered our innumerable questions and explained how the sets that make it to our hands are made.

Back in Spain, my only goal was going back. I managed to do so thanks to a scholarship from the Leonardo da Vinci program which offers the possibility of an internship in European companies that take in postgraduate students. Thanks to Camilla, Jette Orduna and Helle Winding (in charge of the Idea House and the press and events department respectively) I went back to Billund to live a dream.





LIT Team (LEGO® Inside Tour)

PR & Events was a box of surprises that offered Kirsten (my Danish fellow intern) and me a new experience each day. Our first 'uniformed' event was the final of the First LEGO® League in Scandinavia. I still remember Camilla, microphone in hand, urging me to congratulate the winners in Danish. I barely knew how to give my address in Danish. I must have gone redder than the Dannebrog itself!

Another event that took up an important part of our time was Børnenes Drømme By. The translation and the concept coincide in urging kids to build the city of their dreams. Thousands of boxes overflowing with LEGO® elements and bare yellow tables travelled with us throughout Denmark, Mexico and Italy. Even today (under the name Build the Change) this event continues to inspire children around the world to use their imagination and creativity in a social context while respecting the environment.

In addition to supporting the PR & Events department, on other occasions we would help out the guys over at Serious Play when they facilitated a workshop, or we would organise press notes in the Idea House. I was also lucky to help the New Business Group team, a greenhouse that opened its doors to new business ideas that could be considered; it was the birthplace of LEGO® Architecture, CUUSOO (which became what we now know as LEGO® Ideas), and the collaboration between LEGO® and MUJI, creating sets that combined paper and bricks.

I fondly remember a day when Børsen, a national Danish newspaper, wanted to photograph LEGO® fans for an article about the coming digital age, and they challenged Hans Burkhard Schlömer and me to play at a children's table at the office entrance. Who would have thought Hans would soon go from fan to designer and become the author of the UCS Millennium Falcon!



Picture of Regina and Hans for Børsen newspaper

Justin Ramsden, a die-hard fan from early childhood and participant in the first Inside Tour in 2004, would also become a famed Senior Designer.

Without daring to include my name among theirs, I believe that for any of us it would be impossible to describe what it means to pass over to 'the other side'. Nor to describe the butterflies you feel the day they give you your employee card. Did you know those show different colour bricks depending on what areas you are authorised to access?

Knowing that I was touring with people who might feel just like me was almost a pipe dream. I would read the Brickset forum and answer the emails the Insiders would send us, together with Sanne my coworker and mentor, to try to make sure their experience was also unrepeatable.



First Inside Tour Regina worked on - 2008

I was a guide on ten tours with thirty-five participants in each one. Camilla and Sanne were the queens of logistics, and I was the one who would advocate the whims of the fans in an irresponsible excess of empathy. I believe we all remember the surnames of each participant and we would love to share another moment with every one of them. So many unrepeatable moments and so many anecdotes: children who fulfilled their dreams through the Make a Wish foundations, couples who celebrated their honeymoon after a LEGO® themed wedding, tears in the vault, dozens of LEGO® tattoos, and even a participant who was allergic to plastic!

The few challenges that arose – like the tour that had participants from fourteen different nationalities – solved themselves through the mere fact that we all shared the same passion, living it in different ways.

When I had to return to Spain for personal reasons, I knew I left behind a dream come true. I returned with many lessons learned, about hygge, professionalism and endearing moments. I smile when I remember dinners with Lami, Mads, Adam, Jamie and Anders; the day my blender broke down and two minutes later I had an impeccable new one made from LEGO® Technic® that could whisk egg whites at two speeds; the visits to LEGOLAND Windsor and Günzburg (seen in HBM010); the days of LEGO® World in Oslo and Copenhagen, rainy afternoons in Skærbæk or sunny mornings browsing Danish antique markets with Brian in search of wooden toys or old cars made by LEGO®; walking on the foundation of the LEGO® House, or any of the times I spent with Jette, Sanne, Ana, Julie, Jan, Tormod, Kim, Freddie, Astrid, Sinne, Peter Line, Kasper, Kirsten, Lis, Morten or Gary.



*With the CEE Team at LEGOLAND*

But someone said you should always have more projects than memories, and I tried to apply this principle to my non-LEGO® life as well. I wrote my thesis on the importance of play when learning English as a foreign language and on the LEGO® Serious Play method. I use LEGO® sets and elements every day when I teach, I drive my friends crazy creating themed displays at Christmas and even now, twelve years later, I am still in touch with the people who were on my Tour (Jean-Luc and Peter), and with many of those who participated in the

tours I coordinated (Ray, Ronny, Manohar, Rafa, Rosa, Megan, Michael, Stacy, Morten, Jennifer, Tsang, Svein and many others). Camilla is my Danish danesa and inseparable friend; and LEGO® House is the perfect plan for 2019.

I believe, in the end, being a fan is allowing the passion to have a place in your life, wherever it may lead you. If you are reading this, you know what it means. And that makes you special. Treasure those moments, defend your passion and, come what may, don't let anybody drive you away from what makes you happy.

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*Regina's minifig*

- [1] [https://brickset.com/article/36714/2018-LEGO-inside-tour-report-\(1\)](https://brickset.com/article/36714/2018-LEGO-inside-tour-report-(1))
- [2] <https://brickset.com/article/6692/review-LEGO-inside-tour-part-1>
- [3] <https://brickset.com/article/15387/LEGO-inside-tour-2015-report>
- [4] <http://gimmeLEGO.blogspot.com/2013/06/LEGO-inside-tour-2013.html>
- [5] <http://tiexp.com/my-experience-on-the-LEGO-inside-tour-a-unique-experience/>



*Regina with her mother at an AFOL event*