

# LEGO® Friends and Gendered Play

LEGO® Friends stands as one of the LEGO Group's most successful themes to date. The construction toys theme was designed primarily for girls and introduced in 2012.

Today it includes more than 250 sets, a range of books, an animated series, and even a video game.

But more than a decade before the theme was launched, the LEGO Group created a different sort of LEGO Friends.

The 1999 LEGO Friends computer game was created as a sort of experiment, the byproduct of research conducted by Elena Catón in 1997 for the LEGO Group into some concerns the company had about the demographics of its toys.

Catón said the goal of her research was twofold.

"First, it was to bridge the gap with the girls' market because research shows that whereas the LEGO brand was very much used by boys and girls up to the age of eight, from eight onwards boys continued to be involved with the LEGO brand, whereas girls dropped off completely and disassociated from it," she said in a recent episode of LEGO podcast Bits N' Bricks. "The second aspect was that the LEGO Group was conscious that in the mid to late '90s the computer games market was widening and taking up a lot of playtime that was not being used in with LEGO bricks."

So, Catón looked into how girls over the age of eight related to software and video games and then used that research to help produce a game that focused on things like creative collaboration and communication, she said.

Another catalyst for the game was the existence of the Scala theme that had been relaunched in 1997 and targeted young girls by introducing jewelry and a set of non LEGO brick dolls.

The result was a computer game that used hand animation – created by Danish animation studio Tiny Film – to deliver a story built around the concept of a group of girl friends forming a band to perform. The game has children creating their own songs by dragging and dropping sounds and notes from different instruments, choreographing dances by combining a collection of moves, and even creating a stage light show.

While the game wasn't the biggest hit released by the LEGO Group, it did contribute to the LEGO Group's evolving examination of gender and play.



The 2012 release of the LEGO Friends theme sparked an international debate around the topic because some felt that LEGO sets shouldn't be gendered. The result was the LEGO Group creating internal gender marketing guidelines and pushing to be more inclusive in all of its sets.

"I think in terms of the kind of play that the LEGO Group promotes," Catón said, "it's genderless. I think we are victims of marketing, really, and commercial moves from the toy industry from the '80s onward where toys were marketed to boys and girls differently."

Licensed properties, too, she said, added to a sense of gendered themes or sets.

"I think from that point of view, yes, LEGO Friends is quite a gendered product. I don't think it's per se bad to devote spaces for girls and to create products for girls specifically. I think what is wrong is to assign, you know, specific colors and specific modes of play based on gender."

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In order of appearance

[LEGO Friends for Windows](#) (1999) – MobyGames

[LEGO Friends play-through video](#) – YouTube

[LEGO Friends](#) – Wikipedia

[LEGO Friends 2013 video game](#) – Wikipedia

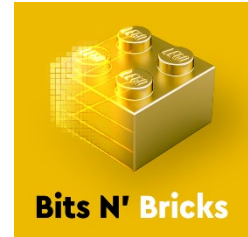
[How LEGO earned the wrath of the 'gender-neutral toys' crowd](#) (2014) – Los Angeles Times

[Discussing the Gender Politics of...](#) (2016) – The Atlantic

# Transcript

Bits N' Bricks Season 1 Episode 7: LEGO® Friends: A Conversation

January 20, 2021 · 36:47



## Bits N' Bricks: Introduction – 00:00

**Ethan Vincent**

Welcome to Bits N' Bricks a podcast about all things LEGO games. I'm Ethan Vincent-

**Brian Crecente**

-and I'm Brian Crecente. Together we look back at the rich 25-year history of LEGO games, chat with early developers, as well as seasoned studios who have all tackled the creation of video games for one of the most popular and respected toy companies in the world - the LEGO Group.

(Music)

## Chapter 1: LEGO Scala and LEGO Friends – 00:32

**Ethan Vincent**

So Brian, I know we spend a lot of time discussing LEGO video games, you know, the big ones, the popular ones, but how much do you know about some of the LEGO Group's less well-known physical toys?

**Brian Crecente**

Well, I'm a big fan of the bricks. You know, I've built a lot of the sets. I spent the holidays building sets and I do know that they started out as wood. Is that what you're talking?

**Ethan Vincent**

No, no, no, no, no. I'm talking about the LEGO Group's Scala line, specifically the 1998 run of Scala figures.

(LEGO Scala commercial)

**Brian Crecente**

Oh yes - the LEGO dolls. Such a weird product. They weren't really compatible with the traditional brick either.

**Ethan Vincent**

No, they even had, you know, clothes and accessories. It was very unique and different than the minifig, for sure.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, it was an era for the LEGO Group, and one that came about around the same time that the person we're speaking with today, was brought on to do a bit of research surrounding how girls interact with the LEGO brick and software and video games.

**Ethan Vincent**

That's right. And we're talking to Elena Catón, she was brought on to do research into this issue, in particular, and kind of kicking off her career at the LEGO Group that would include work on a number of things. She worked on SPU Darwin, the Darwin Group, worked on toy-enabled games and on our topic today - she worked on the original 1999 LEGO Friends PC game.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, for those of you not familiar, LEGO Friends was this wonderful, sometimes overlooked, LEGO game gem designed to inspire girls to explore their creativity. But before work on the game was able to get started Catón, who today is head of digital products and innovation at this London-based group are - now get ready for this, Ethan, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. That's where she works today, but at the time obviously was doing work for the LEGO Group and she had to conduct research into the type of experiences that would make sense for a game that they wanted to create for girls.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, and maybe as a sidenote here Brian, this is a special listener-requested episode. Something we hope to do more of as we continue throughout the season, but we had several people ask to hear more about LEGO Friends, so of course we called up Elena Catón and this is our conversation that we had with her about that original CD-ROM game, LEGO Friends.

(Music)

## **Chapter 2: Conversation with Elena Catón – 03:25**

**Elena Catón**

I had completed my MA in interactive design for Interactive Media. And I had been working at Harper Collins on CD-ROMs for children, educational CD-ROMs. And I had been working very closely with Adriana Eyzaguirre who was then a producer at the LEGO Group, brought

me into look at the electronic games and video games' market for girls. This was 1997. And I think the remit was to...well I think it was twofold; first, it was to bridge the gap with the girls' market because research shows that, whereas the LEGO brand was very much used by boys and girls up to the age eight, from eight onwards boys continued to be involved with the LEGO brand, whereas girls dropped off completely and disassociated from it. So that was one aspect of it. And the second aspect was that the LEGO Group was conscious that in the mid to late nineties, the computer games' market was widening and taking up a lot of play time that was not being used in with LEGO bricks.

**Brian Crecente**

So it's interesting, those are two obviously very important topics, and when we're talking about the mid to late nineties, that's sort of when video gaming and gaming on PCs began to flourish. I know in '98, roughly according to some studies, about a third of people who played games a lot were female, or girls, or women. And in the next year, that jumped up to more than 40%. So there was this sort of increase. So when you were looking at these topics, did you sort of separate them into physical and digital player or were you sort of examining both together?

**Elena Catón**

I was mostly based on the digital play and looking at computer games, but also use of software. How do girls mostly relate to software? Because, I mean, I can't remember the exact details 'cause this was almost 20 years ago, but I think one of the areas that I thought chimed with the LEGO brand was that girls tend to use software, you know, younger girls from the ages of eight onwards, as a creative collaboration and communication tool, and that chimed the creative play values of the LEGO Group.

**Brian Crecente**

So when you were looking at this, was there an idea that it was going to lead to the creation of a game, or what was the hopeful output of this research you were doing?

**Elena Catón**

So I've been looking through my files to see if I could sort of disinter my report, but I think I responded to senior management at the LEGO Group with a series of concepts that could be taken up and I don't remember exactly what they were, but they were to do with customization, creation, communication. It was a series of creative activities that could be undertaken as a sort of creative construction play online. And I think that was the basis for LEGO Friends and that continued exploration. But I have to say that the catalyst for LEGO Friends was the fact that, at the time, the LEGO Group was really pushing their Scala sub brand. So LEGO Scala was a brand that had, dolls essentially, and these dolls were a bit like Barbies, they were Barbie-like - they had hair, they had clothes, they were not like minifigs at all. And the whole setting was very different from that of the traditional LEGO brand.

And in fact, I mean I don't know, I think it did quite well in Germany, but on the whole Scala was not a successful brand. And it had just a few years lifespan.

**Brian Crecente**

And I'm assuming on top of this, we're talking about an era for the LEGO Group where there have only been maybe a half dozen games that had come out. So, LEGO Fun to Build of course was sort of an outlier, but you had Island, Loco, Chess and Creator, and that was it.

**Elena Catón**

Yeah, that's right.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah. Was that a challenge for you in terms of gaming? Was it a challenge for you to come to them and say, not only should we create something that is more focused on girls, but also, we want to make a game.

**Elena Catón**

I think when I was called in, the necessary strategy conversations had happened at the LEGO Group and the direction had been taken. And I was brought in as an individual. I mean, at the time I had set up a limited company, it was me and my business partner, but they called me to kind of develop this proposition further, but the positioning for the product and the space that it wanted to occupy strategically was predetermined. I was responding to a brief in that respect.

**Ethan Vincent**

How did you feel was the environment at the LEGO Group, now obviously you're in London like you said, but LEGO Island had been kind of the first video game breakthrough for the LEGO Group. And do you feel like on the heels of that there was, you know, this excitement to continue video games, and as you feel that that's kind of the reason, it, you know, the LEGO Group approached you about making this game?

**Elena Catón**

Oh, yes. I think that was definitely an impetus for getting into the video games' market. We were a little bit the outsiders, because if you look at, you know, Riders, LEGO Island, they were 3D games. They were very construction-based. And usually they were undertaken by American companies. So I don't know in terms of budget, but something tells me that we probably had a smaller budget, and it was decided to keep it very local. So, you know, the developer is a Danish company, Ivanoff, which were great. The animation was done in a small Copenhagen studio. My company in London was two people. We had a freelance writer and then we had Adriana Eyzaguirre the LEGO producer, who was really the only LEGO employee directly involved in the project and holding it all together and doing a

fantastic job of it. So it was definitely an exciting time, but I wonder whether we were slightly siloed in the kind of Scala girl's world, if you want.

**Brian Crecente**

So were you looking at the Scala line when you were designing LEGO Friends in 1999?

**Elena Catón**

It was loosely based on Scala because the LEGO Group had not resolved the brand issues with girls. The problem for girls, after eight years old, was that there was not a clear aesthetic and a clear play mode that had been articulated, and it was being explored really. And what this game was supposed to do is further that exploration into the digital domain. So as a starting point what we took is, what does Scala bring to the original LEGO brand? And then what is it that girls want to do when they're online, when they're playing, and when they relate to each other. And based on that, we develop the main components of the game, which are the interactive narrative, the creative activities, and the kind of creation aspect around it.

(Music)

**Ethan Vincent**

Okay, Brian, let's take a little break here and maybe travel back in time to 1999. Let's listen to some of

(Excerpt from LEGO Friends: the PC game)

**Ethan Vincent**

So yeah, tons of stuff going on in this game. There's a storyline, I guess, there's different things happening. Tell me a little bit about this game, explain it to me.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, so there are these sorts of elements, these things that you could do in the game while you're playing, but it is all tied together with this wonderful storyline featuring these four central...well five central girls. And it has this really great art style. I love it. It looks sort of like it was done by this small animation group that hand drew everything. Kind of looks a little bit mixed between Scooby Doo and the Magic Bus.

**Ethan Vincent**

I mean, I would say it's digitally traced maybe, too. I mean, it has that 2D style, like it's definitely not 3D, CGI kind of graphic stuff, but it's, yeah, it's very organic in how it presents itself and it's very cartoon-like, you know?

### **Brian Crecente**

Yeah. And to correct myself, I did mean The Magic School Bus, not the Magic Bus - that wonderful Who song. But yeah, it's really cool. You like, basically, you go into these different areas, these buildings that are presented to you in a map, you're kind of looking down at the town of Sunnyvale and you're able to go to the auditorium, or you can go to this friend's basement, or you can go to a little soda shop. And when you go to these different places with your friends, they each sort of unlock different options. So for instance, you can create your own song, and the way you do this is each of your friends plays an instrument. And you have these little rectangles that you can drag and drop down to fill, I guess what would be maybe the beats of the song, and so for instance, you could go in and say on the first beat, I'm going to have the guitar, the piano, the bass, the drums, and the singer, all doing something. Or you can kind of mix and match it. And then each of those people have different sort of notes or sounds that they make.

### **Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, and it's very reminiscent of something like garage band, these audio samples that you kind of drag onto, I guess, these squares, right, Brian?

### **Brian Crecente**

Yeah, and it allows you to create what I think is a pretty good song! Like the results are pretty neat and then...so they have this music option, but to make things even, I think, cooler, they also have the ability for you to choreograph a dance and so, same sort of idea, you go in and you choreograph your dance by dragging icons down and filling out how you want the dance to go. And then you can kind of watch the performance in a practice session. So you can watch all your friends and yourself performing this song while the singer dances to the dance you've created.

### **Ethan Vincent**

Yeah. And so what are they preparing for, Brian? I guess that's the big setup question, question mark, right?

### **Brian Crecente**

Yeah, it's the big dance, of course, in the auditorium. This also introduces another thing, which you don't see a lot of, you see a lot of dancing games and a lot of music games, what you don't see are games based on stage design, which I think is again, another really cool thing. So you go in and you literally create the stage design for your performance in the auditorium, and then you can, same thing, you're doing a lot of dragging and dropping. But between those three elements that have so many different ways to express yourself, you can really create your own very unique thing.

### **Ethan Vincent**

Yes. And girl bands in 1999 was a thing. What's the name of this girl band?



**Brian Crecente**

Tough Stuff. Not to be confused with the Spice Girls.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yes, exactly. Yeah. Cool. So quite an interesting game and a storyline and everything. And obviously we get back into our conversation talking about, maybe the innovation, of this game and the fact that this was really offering maybe some new things for a targeted girl PC game.

(Music)

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah, it's really interesting. I'm assuming that while there's a pretty big fan base for this game, even though it came out in '99, there are a lot of people I think who've grown up and have fond memories of it. How did you come up with these ideas? They're really ahead of their time in many ways.

**Elena Catón**

Well, I think we were, and in fact, you know, when you look at the current apps market, in particular, and online gaming, a lot of the features that we developed quite early on, have picked up and become products in their own right. So I was looking through my notes that I found in a box in my carriage. And I realized looking through the original concept documents, that we had a lot of activities. To begin with, a lot of which did not make it into the game, 'cause it would have been incredibly bloated. So we had a magazine making, we had a makeover style game, and we had a dog training activity with the dog Botcher, and it became clear that the product was ballooning, and we sort of brought it down to the music activities and creating the big performance. At this time, girl bands were very big, you know, the Spice Girls were incredibly popular. So it was, it was part of the zeitgeist. And I think what was really, really important is that we wanted to create relatable characters, and we wanted to root the gameplay in narratives. Looking at the product now I think, despite all those, I think it was still a bit inflated in terms of functionality. I think the dance and the music activity in their own right carry the game as do the interactive narratives. And the idea was that you could explore the different locations. You would go into a location and trigger a narrative randomly from a bank and different sort of mini episodes. And then that narrative would lead you to have to complete an activity which would be music, dance, or a stage setting. And then when you came out of that activity, the kind of the end of that narrative would play and either lead on to another activity or onto another narrative. And we built in some sort of interaction triggers via the phone. This was before mobile phones were pervasive. And so it was really cool that there was a phone that would call you as you were playing in the game and interrupt you and kind of give you play prompts.

### **Brian Crecente**

Did you, when you were looking at doing things like this sort of plug and play music creation, were there any games out there or experiences out there that you looked to? Or were these things that you just conceived of completely on your own?

### **Elena Catón**

So these were collaboratively created. My focus was on the interaction design and in the character development and kind of the game bible. The technical aspects of the music creation activity were very much led by Ivanoff studio. And I, you know, I think what they created really is a cutdown version of a sim for children where you could actually create really cool tunes. You sang samples. So I don't know if you had a chance to play with the game or look at videos of it, but what you've got is a mixing desk and you can set the key on the harmony and then you can drag the pieces that actually look like Scala pieces, they've got Scala symbols on them to fill in that bar. And you can change key and you can change tempo. So it was actually quite, you could compose quite cool tunes. And we, I think, vocals were recorded with a professional singer, professional musician, so you know, it was why the music that you created was pretty high quality. And then you had the ability to take the track that you had produced and synchronize it with dance moves. And the clever thing was that everything was timed to go inside in the bar. So if you drag and drop a dance move for your choreography, it would be in time with the music track that you had just composed and you could then take it to the auditorium and make the light show, this light show in the stage to be in time with the music and the dance. So really you were deciding a show.

### **Brian Crecente**

It's amazing. I didn't get a chance to play it, but I was watching some videos and it really is impressive how you all were able to create this sort of drag and drop system that results in these pretty complex songs and dances. And the animation, I like the animation style. What made you guys decide to use that form of animation?

### **Elena Catón**

I mean, it is quite interesting. To be honest, I do not know how it ended up being so analog. I mean, and when I say analog, I mean, a hundred percent analog. The animation was done using a Danish animation studio called Tiny Film, which do, to this day, cell animation pretty much, well, definitely the nineties, it was on paper. So every animation sequence was actually drawn - pencil and paper and then colored - and edited digitally. And I think that was because Scala was breaking with the traditional LEGO brand sort of look and feel of polished plastic and, you know, minifigs with no joints. Like I said it, you know, it is aesthetic that I think has been abandoned now by the LEGO Group, because not even the LEGO Friends toys continue with that setting, but it was dolls with hair that wore clothes that were quite soft. I've just been looking through my samples and, you know, and

the backgrounds and the textures are watercolors that were inspired on the Scala catalog. So I think that was the reason.

### **Brian Crecente**

Yeah, it's impressive. I mean, the end result is something that almost feels like a Saturday morning cartoon when you're watching the results of them dancing and even the cut scenes, I think, the voice acting really does sound like kids talking as opposed to some of the modern stuff you get, where it sounds like adults putting on a kid's voice.

### **Elena Catón**

Yes, I think that one of the things that really worked with LEGO Friends was the interactive narratives and the way of interactive narratives that led onto them supported the activities. And these, the credit has to go to Maureen Hasselhurst, which is a British author, who actually wrote the narratives. And we had, you know, lengthy brainstorming sessions in Denmark at the Tiny Film studio in Copenhagen, where we actually came up with a character bible, and identified, you know, the different characters that we were going to give the girls and things like, you know, we came up with ideas like the type of village it had to be. Obviously, the LEGO Group had a lot of input in terms of the audience that they wanted to target, hence the, you know, this American style town where they live - Sunnyvale. And, you know, the environments that we created were all based on the spaces that attract girls of that age. So for example, there's, you know, there's an episode that is based around a sleepover, there is a cafe where they get together. There is, in the periphery, because at this age it's really not that relevant, but there is in the periphery the boys, and there's, you know, a certain...not frisson, but sort of competition with the boys. And there is conflict resolution. There is working together as a team and all that stuff, which I think is what, you know, I don't know the genesis of the actual LEGO Friends brand, you know, that that has been recently launched and that it's quite famous. But I think if there's anything that they probably picked up on is the sort of the universe of the girls and the character bible, because it was very much limited on the things that interests girls at that age.

(Excerpt from LEGO Friends game)

### **Brian Crecente**

So you obviously were developing this game but did so on the back of all this research you did. How much of that early research do you think impacted the design elements of the game?

### **Elena Catón**

At the time, and obviously explained a lot since then, but at the time, what emerged as the key activities that girls enjoyed in games and software, not just gaming per se, was a creation, customization, and collaboration. So those themes, I think, really come alive in this

game through, you know, composing the music, through the interactive narratives, through building up to this gig at the school, which is the kind of the aim of the game.

**Brian Crecente**

It's interesting. I'd like to talk a little bit more about sort of the impact, but I'm curious from your perspective and the perspective of your team, what was it you were hoping to achieve with the game? What were you hoping would happen with this game?

**Elena Catón**

Well, we obviously wanted to become a household name and potentially start a series because there was a lot of creative activity concepts that were not, did not make it to this version. So, you know, serialization was definitely something that was discussed. But like everything, when you step into a new territory, you kind of wait a second and see, I think we were all keen to see what reception this had and whether it really impacted on the girls' games market in the way that for example, the Barbie products were doing or, you know, or the Mattel properties. But it was not followed on. And I think, you know, it came in '99 and it was the start of a period of crisis for the LEGO Group. So I reckon priorities shifted at that time. And I think a lot of effort was put into licensing, and it may have been why this was abandoned. But you know, I would really like to know what the genesis was of the new LEGO Friends. And to what extent it is rooted in the original research that we did.

**Brian Crecente**

Well, it's interesting, I mean, not only was there obviously a lot going on with the LEGO Group at the time, and it was, as you pointed out sort of the beginning of this really difficult period for the company, but in the game industry, it was a very different industry than it is now. Dreamcast was out, PlayStation 2, I think had just been announced. It was definitely much more focused on hardcore gamers. There were more boys playing games than girls. So you were coming into a field that wasn't really making games like this. Did you hear anything anecdotally from people who were like happy that there was a game out there that was sort of marketed and geared towards girls?

**Elena Catón**

To be perfectly honest, Brian, I really don't remember 'cause this was quite a long time ago. What I...I'm so sorry, but what I can say is that I think that at the time the LEGO Group had not resolved the brand issues with girls. And from that point of view, this was probably an experiment.

**Brian Crecente**

So, you know, looking past the launch of LEGO Friends, it wasn't until 2012 that I think the modern Friends, the new LEGO Friends theme was released. I know that looking through some of the issues the LEGO Group was facing during that time period, I came across this

really startling figure, that in 2011, the LEGO Group was saying that 90% of consumers of LEGO toys was boys, which is obviously a problem. 2012 is when the modern LEGO Friends theme comes out and it sparks this huge conversation and a lot of pushback because of this whole discussion, which I think needed to happen, which was this whole thing about the gender gap within LEGO toys and how you construct toys for boys and girls. I guess if you boil it down, it would be why are pink toys for girls and blue toys for boys. So I'm just curious, you obviously did a lot of research on this in the nineties. What are your thoughts about sort of the lasting impact and just how that era came about and what came out of it?

**Elena Catón**

I think in terms of the kind of play that the LEGO Group promotes, it's genderless. Whether you're a boy or a girl, it's the kind of constructive creative play that it's not gender specific. I think we are probably victims of marketing really. And commercial moves from the toy industry from the eighties onwards, where toys were marketed to boys and girls differently. But if you look at seventies' advertisements, or for example, you have both boys and girls equally playing with big boxes of LEGO bricks. I think licensing probably has also had a bearing on it. There are licenses that are very clearly appealing to boys. And I think from that point of view, yes, LEGO Friends is quite the gendered product. I don't think it's per se bad to devote spaces for girls and to create products for girls specifically. I think what is wrong is to assign, you know, specific colors and specific modes of play based on gender.

**Brian Crecente**

Yeah. And I know that the LEGO Group has done a lot since then. There was a, I think a guide that they put out in 2012 because they recognize that there was this issue that they had and that they needed to be a little more cognizant. And then we had things like, the Research Institute, the LEGO Research Institute, which I think a lot of people were very happy with. These were LEGO sets that featured women minifigs that were doing things like being research scientists or archeologists, but it is interesting. Do you feel that while LEGO Friends, the one that you worked on was gendered, do you feel like that may have opened their eyes a little bit to the fact that they need to be thinking more broadly in terms of gender and toys?

**Elena Catón**

I think they were aware of it, to be honest, I think there was a commercial imperative to think about the market for girls. And like I said, this was a step towards that direction. And I think, you know, there was other concepts apart from these, and there was other concepts that were, you know, later on the noughties that I was marginally involved with for designing construction sets specifically for girls that didn't get anywhere.

**Brian Crecente**

Do you ever sort of reminisce? Or do you ever run across people who say that they have fond memories of playing LEGO Friends? I see that a lot online when the game comes up.

**Elena Catón**

I have not looked into it. Not in my immediate circle, actually, but you know, if that is the case, I really love hearing about it. And, you know, if it's made girls happy and if it's given them hours of play and they've made lots of songs and created lots of dances and sat and listened to the episodes, you know, that's great. That's what the game is for.

(Music)

## Chapter 3: Conclusions – 33:08

**Elena Catón**

I think if there's anything that the original LEGO Friends game has left us a legacy, is that idea of a universe created around girls' interests and friendship, and kind of light humor, and you know, conflict resolution through play and a common goal and friendship. And I think that's inspiring.

(Music)

**Ethan Vincent**

Well that was a nice conversation, Brian. I really like Elena and I love talking and learning more about this game and you're right, it's kind of this, you know, overlooked little gem that LEGO games has. And, the big question here being, what were you able to find out about LEGO Friends theme sets and is there any connection to the 1999 video game?

**Brian Crecente**

So I did do some asking and it sounds like there was no direct connection, according to the people at the LEGO Group that I spoke to, but I can't imagine that the game didn't have some sort of impact, even if it was just inspirational.

**Ethan Vincent**

Yeah, exactly. And, you know, while the game wasn't maybe the biggest hit that was released by the LEGO Group, it did contribute, I think, to the LEGO Group's evolving examination of gender and play, you know, the 2012 release of LEGO Friends set, sparked quite an international debate around the topic because some felt that LEGO sets shouldn't be gendered, you know? And the result was the LEGO Group creating internal gender-marketing guidelines and pushing to be more inclusive in all of its sets.

### **Brian Crecente**

Yeah. And I think that they also welcomed to some great fan driven sets like that amazing LEGO CUUSOO Research Institute, which features these women minifigures as paleontologists, an astronomer and a chemist. And today LEGO Friends is a thriving product line from the LEGO Group with more than 250 sets, a range of books an animated series, and yes, of course, even a new video game.

### **Ethan Vincent**

As we pointed out at the beginning of this episode, this format today is a little bit different than our others. It is the first in a semi-regular series of conversations with remarkable people that were involved in the rich 25 year history of LEGO games. And if you have any suggestions for topics we haven't covered, make sure to let us know.

## **Bits N' Bricks: Credits – 35:48**

### **Ethan Vincent**

Bits N' Bricks is made possible by LEGO Games. Our producer is Ronny Scherer. Your hosts are Brian Crecente and Ethan Vincent. Episode producing and editing by Ethan Vincent. Writing by Brian Crecente. Mixing and sound design by Dan Carlisle. Original music by Peter Priemer and Henrik Lindstrand from the award-winning game LEGO Builders Journey, which you can play on Apple Arcade today.

We'd like to thank our participant Elena Catón. We'd also like to acknowledge the entire LEGO Games team, as well as the great folks at the LEGO Idea House for their support. For questions or comments, write us at [bitsnbricks@LEGO.com](mailto:bitsnbricks@LEGO.com). And as always, stay tuned for more episodes of Bits N' Bricks.

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