

A Single Drop of Water
by Robert Freeman



A story of how a high school
teacher and his students
set out to change the world,
with a dollar

“Even the greatest waterfall starts
with a single drop of water.”

~ African Bantu Saying

Chapter Eight—Student Heroes

Elizabeth Bishop



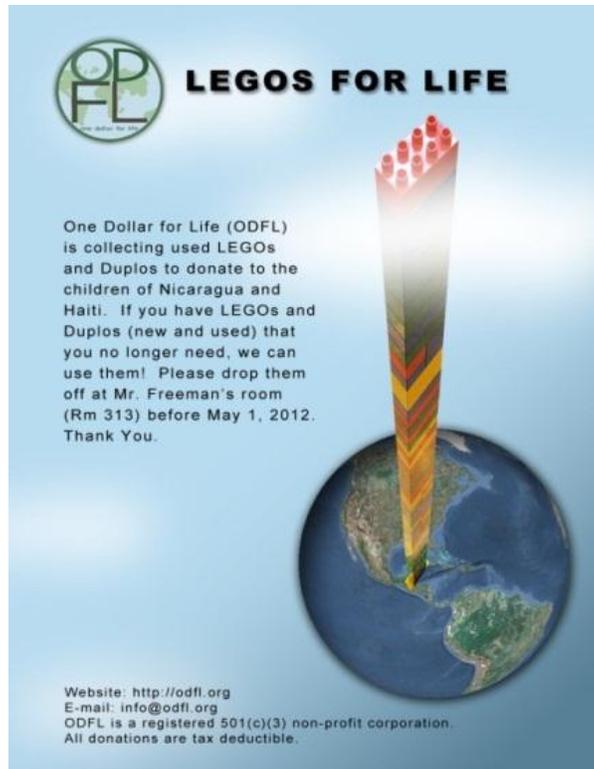
Elizabeth Bishop is a freshman at Tufts University in Boston. She conceived and organized ODFL's 2012 LEGOs For Life drive which collected enough LEGOs to send to schools in five countries. In 2011, she travelled to Nicaragua with ODFL to help build the two-room classroom in Montegrande. She returned to Nicaragua the next summer to work on a new school, in Tepayac. Elizabeth collected Pokemons when she was younger, but now runs cross country. In her free time, she volunteers and works at a local toy store.

In the summer between my freshman and sophomore year of high school, I travelled with ODFL to Nicaragua, expecting to do some community service by helping to build a classroom in the tiny village of Montegrande. I ended up doing nothing of the sort. I did show up to the construction site every morning and put in hours and hours of hard work, but in comparison to the dozens of hours of skilled labor that were put in by the local workers, I was less than useless. Despite my best efforts to do my job well, I saw the foreman of the project re-laying some of the bricks I had set on the classroom wall. I wondered to myself, “If I didn’t come to Nicaragua to help, then what did I come to do?” At that point, I wasn’t sure.

It wasn’t until I returned home that I realized what an enormous change had come over me. During those two weeks in Nicaragua, my world view was completely transformed. I learned about the Cold War for the first time, and was made aware of America’s role in the war and Nicaragua’s unfortunate past.

I observed poverty and injustice first hand and met incredible individuals who dedicated themselves to improving the lives of the Nicaraguan people. I lived among the sweetest children, the closest families, and the most involved community. Though many of the people were living in extreme poverty, they were determined to have a new classroom and build better lives for their children. They were also some of the happiest people I have ever met.

In Nicaragua, everything means so much more. Gifts are more treasured, schools are more valued, and help is more appreciated. When I returned home, I missed the feeling of being “special,” of being wanted, and having a place. While I was there, I was an impressive foreigner, and helpful. I was unique. Of course, I missed the schoolchildren and their smiling faces, but some selfish part of me also coveted that feeling of belonging to a close, tight-knit community that they experienced but that I had never known before.



The poster Elizabeth made to promote the LEGO drive

Luckily, I was able to achieve this again, but in a different way and from far away. With the help of Mr. Freeman, I began a LEGO drive to benefit the students and community I had come to love. My history class and I built an enormous tower of Duplos in Mr. Freeman’s classroom. You can see it in Chapter Six, above. It would grow taller each day, courtesy of small donations by students and teachers from three schools and from our community.

As the tower grew, so did people’s desire to contribute. I hadn’t expected such enormous support, and the fact that others cared about what I was trying to do — and wanted to help — was awesome. I’d never known anything like it in my life. As the drive came to a close with the end of the school year, the tower hit the ceiling—more than 13 feet high!



South African girl playing with Elizabeth's Duplos

The LEGO drive was my first true achievement. It wasn't another sloppy school project, done because I was told to and solely for a grade. It was completely voluntary, and the time I spent planning for it, pitching it to other students and schools, and asking for donations was spent because I genuinely wanted to see it succeed. I genuinely wanted to be able to help those children who had so touched my heart the summer before.

By the time the drive was over, I had collected over five hundred pounds of LEGOs and Duplos, more than enough for the classroom in Nicaragua. We sent big duffle bags full of them to five ODFL-sponsored schools, in Nicaragua, Haiti, Malawi, South Africa, and Mexico. I've seen pictures of students playing with them and I know that they are inspiring creativity and enjoyment in the students around the world. The drive itself certainly inspired me.

All of this gave me a purpose. Though I wasn't so effective as a construction worker, I gained a much more real awareness of the world and connected with the Nicaraguan people. These connections will always stay with me, not only through my memories and the cards on my desk, but also because I can always be sure that somewhere, someone is enjoying my LEGOs.

ODFL isn't just about building schools. It's about bringing American students closer to students from around the world and helping them realize that they have real power to create change. Even the smallest effort, even a single dollar or a single person or a single LEGO, can make a real difference in the world. If you are reading this, I encourage you to help. You will never be the same.