

Dragons, Magic and Truth – Telling Queer Stories

>> (Titelbild)

1

When I first met Joke Guns, in Berlin, I loved everything she had to say about this conference – and so I instantly said YES when she invited me for this year's event and asked me to talk about my books and courage and vulnerability. Usually, I don't do that, saying yes without thinking about an invitation, especially one to give a lecture. A LECTURE! As soon as realization set in – the very familiar voice of doubt became loud: you haven't even studied, what business do you have giving a lecture?!? Surely, your invitation was a mistake! What do you even have to say?

The stories we tell – to ourselves and to one another – shape our perception of the world. Luckily, I have friends, some writers, some not, who remind me of that when I am telling myself doubt-stories. So I set aside this voice of doubt, telling it very gently that we would have a serious talk later, but for now I had a lecture to write. A story to tell. So let me tell you a story.

As a kid, I knew the stories living within me to be true. Dragons existed, and of course there was magic and far-away lands with all sorts of peoples and wonders.

Knowing something within you to be true even if you can't see it in the world around you is a common queer experience. We often know that we are different from those around us without knowing how/what we are. It is a very useful experience if you want to be a writer (and no, I don't mean the „you have to suffer to become a good artist“ trope).

The stories we tell shape our perception of the world. Not only of the world outside ourselves but also the world in our heads, our perception of ourselves.

The first time I realized I was different was when I started school. Suddenly, there were things a girl didn't do, as well as things boys didn't do, suddenly we were made different only because of our gender. It was a concept completely foreign to me. In my kindergarten no one was treated differently because of gender or expected to behave in a certain way or to play or not play with dolls, cars, balls, building blocks, pets, like/dislike reading, running, jumping, climbing trees, going on adventures, day-dreaming, crying, laughing, being loud or quiet or wild ... because of one's gender. We were encouraged to explore every aspect of us, all of us.

I want to take you on a journey with me on how growing up in a progressive, left bubble, reading and writing about dragons and other truths led me to become the writer I am today. There will be some uncomfortable, hard stories in there but they were part of the journey and it just wouldn't do to not talk about them at a conference about courage and vulnerability. So beware: Here be dragons.

As I said, school was a shock, a confrontation with a whole different world, a world whose rules I didn't know – and when told didn't like much. Sure, learning stuff like reading and writing was

fascinating, great even, but I never learned how to behave "right", "like a girl". But I was a girl. Of that, I had no doubt. Just a different girl, apparently. But having had the experience of belonging just the way I was – before school – gave me the certainty that I was right the way I was and the expectations put upon me were wrong. I couldn't have said it like that as a kid, of course, but it was the way I felt. Strongly. I insisted that my world was right and the one I was thrown into – school – was wrong. It didn't make school easy (and had its own set of consequences).

And I wanted back into my world, badly. Where did it go? Sure, it still existed at home – but that seemed such a small space all of a sudden compared to the outside world. So I started dreaming = telling myself stories; writing. Dreaming/writing was safe. A space where I could be who I was without fighting for it. A place where I could still belong. Where I didn't have to explain myself. Or defend myself. Where I could find dragons and believe in them.

Sure, the stories I wrote back then weren't great. But they weren't meant for others anyway. They were my get-away, the place I could escape to – and mostly they stayed in my head and did not find their way onto paper. I mean, I was still young and writing was hard. But in my head, there were universes full of stories. Human beings were rare in those universes, they seemed too strange to me at the time, having all those ideas about gender and roles and stuff. I just wished, I could be one of the magical creatures in my stories – or in the stories I read, like "Das Getüm" (Dietlind Neven-du Mont, a German writer), a little green creature, very friendly, living on book shelves, creating chaos to help children; always carrying a red satchel with white dots on it. The name Getüm derived from *Ungetüm* = monster, and since it was a friendly creature, the writer did away with the first two letters and so came up with the name *Getüm*. And the Getüm didn't care about the girls do this and boys do that stuff. I loved it. Just like other stories about outsiders, like Ottfried Preusslers Little Witch who wanted to belong with the other witches so badly but didn't have the same concept of a witch as them and got punished for it (but she also got her revenge).

So, I did not fit in, but I had those corners in the world where I could be me, even if they were on paper only – or just in my head.

2

Why do I write?

A colleague (meaning well) once asked me: You're a good writer, why do you make it so hard for yourself, always writing these „niche-stories“? Meaning: queer not mainstream straight stories.

Probably following one of my rants about not selling enough books and/or publishers praising my writing but still allotting no marketing budget to my books, so that no one knew they were even out there. I mean, being published in big publishing houses writing queer stories is great – but you also want people to find your stories, to know that they are out there. Right?

Why those stories, she wanted to know. Because they are the stories I want to tell, I said. Meaning, as I realized later, because I want to tell true stories (do not confuse true with realistic here). Stories that feel true to myself. I want to write about girls who do whatever they please – and how! - and

are not punished for it (most of the time). Because I want places for them where they can be themselves, are encouraged even to be themselves. The world out here is hard enough.

Why do you write? Or draw? Or do both?

(Take a minute to think about it. Right now. Write down your thoughts. Every answer is allowed. None has to be shared. Go on, I'll wait.)

>> (Bild 2: Cover von Fundbüro & halber Sommer).

For me it is simple: I write because I want to tell different stories. More precisely: the stories that come to my mind. They are not conscious decisions. I truly don't know where they come from – and in the end, I don't care about their origin, I just marvel at them being there. They are like magic, inexplicable; like dragons, very necessary. Just there.

Or so it seems in the beginning. After that it gets complicated with all these things like plot and character development, questions of voice and tone and time and tempo, to name just a few. But those are for later, for the conscious part of writing.

First, there is that certainty, the knowledge that is absolute: I have to tell this story. Exactly this one. What follows is what I call dreaming: that state of mind where I let the story come to me. Sometimes in pictures in my mind, sometimes in blocks of text, sometimes as a whole landscape of feelings. And always, there is this one character sauntering into my mind, looking at me, going: Well, here I am, now you tell my story. They don't do the work! Oh, no. They simply show up and expect me to know everything – or at least, to explore everything and find the story, their story.

>> (Bild 3: Finja und Kapitän Bruno ohne Text)

Sometimes, it is not only one but two characters. Like it happened with Finja, a young girl, and Captain Bruno, an old sailor, not sailing anymore. They were just there one day, sitting on a bench, high atop a cliff, looking out at sea (well, looking in Finja's case, knowing in Bruno's whose eyesight is nearly completely gone). They were good friends, those two, I could tell immediately. The captain was weathered and dark skinned, his hair grey and wiry. Finja small, a white skinned girl with short, dark curls. But that was all. They did not talk. Because they didn't need to, being close friends and all. So I just sat with them, looked out at the sea, waited. Stories are fickle things, they only come to you in their own time.

3

"It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to." (J.R.R. Tolkien, Lord of the Rings)

>> (Bild 4: Zitat + desktop-dragon)

The same could be said about writing – it is a dangerous business following an idea. You put words on paper, and there's no knowing where you might be swept off to. But, like a true adventure, isn't

that the purpose of writing? To go on this dangerous journey, to dream and let your mind drift and take you to the unknown.

Here be dragons.

When I first encountered that phrase, in school, with old maps, I was fascinated. Did people of old believe in dragons? My teachers laughed at that idea. Dragons were just a symbol for the unknown, they explained, no one thought there really would be dragons, the contrary was true, they chose dragons because they did not exist and where as unknowable as places people like them had never been to before. I hated that explanation with all my heart. I wanted to believe that there at least had been others who believed in dragons. Why would we have so many stories, legends, fairy tales about them otherwise?

>> (Bild 5: Zitat + dragon & reading girl)

"For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom."

As Ursula K. LeGuin writes in: Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?

Not that I liked most of the stories about dragons depicting them as monsters to be slaughtered by a so-called hero to rescue some damsel in distress (and I don't think that LeGuin is talking about those stories either). Nope, not for me. Dragons were different. I just knew. And of course, I loved Fuchur from Michael Endes Never-ending Story (the book version, not the movie dragon who looks like a poodle). And so I dreamed of my dragons. They were wise and kind and adventurous. Reckless. Witty. Sometimes a bit arrogant (but, I mean, if you could fly and live for hundreds of years, wouldn't you be too?). They were strong and loyal to those they chose as family. With them by my side I could go out my door and step onto the road – not knowing where I might be swept off to.

Daring to dream a story means listening closely to yourself. You might not always like what you come up with, what bubbles to the surface from these unknown depths (here be dragons!) - but remember at this stage it is only you seeing those things (well, you and all those creatures peopling your mind). This is a safe space. There even might be dragons guarding you, and they are fierce.

I knew that. But still, I had to function in the outside world, had to deal with all the expectations and demands – and I tried. For example, I tried to be interested in all the school subjects. I just wasn't. I would have loved to learn a thousand languages, discover history from all over the world – but, mathematics? Science? Leave me alone. And suddenly, there was something where I was "like a girl" as the outside world expected me to be. Not that I thought I'm bad at science because I am a girl (my best friend – Anja, a girl herself – excelled at all those subjects) but it was an easy way out. And I wanted to get out of school. Quickly. Sitting still, doing what others told me to do? Not really my thing.

As a teenager, I flunked school a lot, every chance I got. Somehow, I got away with it. It didn't help my grades, or my school "career" overall, but it helped with creating time for dreaming spaces. And I

needed those. The outside world had expanded beyond school and seemed to go mad. There was a nuclear arms race going on, nuclear power plants were build, forests were dying, water polluted, there were wars, hunger, ecocide, Tschernobyl, right wing extremists, neonazis growing in numbers, equality for women and other marginalized people was far from achieved and much, much more. So many fights to have, protest marches to go to, etc. Compared to that school seemed so – unimportant. Not too different from today if you think about it.

And – at a smaller scale, but no less important to me – there was trouble in my world at home. My parents were divorced for a long time by then (their divorce happened shortly before I started school), I lived alone with my mom and saw my dad only on rare occasions. As kids do, I was afraid it had something to do with me, my behavior, me being me – even if my mom told me again and again that this was an adult thing and had nothing to do with me. You did nothing wrong. It's okay to be angry at your dad. But I didn't believe that. And he kept canceling when we were supposed to meet and I felt that my mom was angry and thought I had to be nice and understanding because who knows if I was angry and shouting at him too – maybe he would never come back. Child's logic. Completely wrong. But there.

>> (Bild 6: Finja & Captain Bruno + engl. Text)

And I saw that in Finja sitting there on the bench next to Captain Bruno. It was a sunny day, early morning, and both of them looked kind of sad, kind of longing. And Finja, I suddenly felt sure, was longing for her father – whom she had been supposed to go visit over the just started summer holidays. But he had called the night before and said she couldn't come. He wouldn't have time because of his work. And that wasn't the first time either.

4

I grew up different and I grew to be different. Now, different isn't the word I would have chosen for myself – but in relation to the majority of the society we live in, it is describing a fact of me in relation to that majority. Most people thought becoming a writer was a hilarious idea, completely unrealistic, a laughable dream – when I, at sixteen years old, declared that this was what I wanted to do in life. Writing. Telling stories. It was the only place I could see for myself.

By then, I was already used to the notion that I was different from most people – and maybe, me becoming/being a writer was the reason for that, I thought. Maybe, writers just were different. A different folk. Dreamers. Daring to dream in a world that laughed at them for it, and only seemed to value them if they became a success (= widely published and read). It didn't feel like daring though, it felt like a necessity. The daring part was saying it out loud, insisting that, yes, I would become a writer. And by saying it out loud hoping it would attract others like me, others of this different folk, like magic. It didn't, at the time.

So, I didn't get to know other writers back then, but I had some friends who liked my stories and encouraged me in their ways. I still remember my best friend from school, Anja, (the girl excelling in science and mathematics) who always said: I'm waiting to see your first published book. Someday, I know, you'll get there. Anja had no idea about writing or the publishing world or anything. But she had that absolute trust in me. And I remember how incredibly proud and humbled I was when –

finally – I could give it to her, that first published book, years and years later. I remember her smile and her: I knew it! And finally I could tell her how her certainty had always encouraged me. Especially in times of doubt. To this day I remember this moment every time a new book comes out, and I see her smile, hear her words. We live very different lives today but what we shared still exists. What we shared still exists. In my memory, and in hers. And in the stories.

And some of what we shared brings me to one of the harsh truths of being a woman in this world. That one experience I never wanted to write about for the longest time.

For the longest time, I said, yes, that happened to me, but I will never write about it. And when I finally did, it was decades after the fact, in a short story in a collection with the title "Rage" (Wut). By then, I had talked about it a lot, worked through the trauma of it – more or less – and most of the people in my life knew it had happened to me. So I finally dared to write about rape. About the anger and fear and disappointment and mistrust and the fear and the rage it left in me. And it was good to write the story. The most important part of it being about the friends who stood by my side while I went through the aftermath. The ones I could call in the middle of the night; the ones who would just sit beside me silently, being there, so that I wouldn't have to be alone. Who listened and raged with me. Held me. Cried with me. Let me talk. Took me for long walks and didn't expect me to "function" when that was impossible.

Trauma is a strange beast. It can be held inside, ignored even, a dark corner within yourself that you never look at. And then, one day, a bright light turns on and there it is – a memory so clear and fucked up and visceral as if it would happen to you right now and right here. And all hell breaks loose. Sleep became nearly impossible. I lay awake at night, listening to everything, hearing footsteps, breathing that weren't there but I was sure were soon to come, to get me. I couldn't move, I couldn't sleep, most nights, I just lay there, staring into the dark, hoping night would pass, so that I could catch some hours of sleep when the sun came up. A vampire life. Only, I left the curtains open to notice the light even with my eyes closed. Somehow, that felt safer.

It took a lot to find my way through. A lot of growing up. Some of you will know, probably. And it was something that made me not different but very much like a lot of women and girls. My otherness did not protect me from that experience.

So, there were no dragons to save me from that. No magic to make it all go away. So maybe dragons were just that: stories. Fantasy. Not true.

Here be dragons. Just a phrase for unknown territory.

But writing was insistent. It was an anchor. A place where I could go and explore the world on the safety of the pages of notebooks – yes, it was pen and paper back then. The tip of the pen scratching over the paper, the ink sinking into it, making the words more real than my surroundings, than the horrors of my nights. Later, the clicking of the typewriter. Each letter a satisfying hit/thump on the paper, slowly scrolling up and up and up – the short pause when I had to put in a new, blank paper, turn the knob at the side, the sound of that, close to tearing up paper, rough, and then the clicking again when I continued writing, hammering out each letter.

I didn't write about dragons though. I wrote about more *realistic* things.

I even wrote the first stories about women loving women back then. I had discovered the concept and liked it – as an abstract idea, remembering a book my mother gave me when I was maybe twelve years old "Rubyfruit Jungle" by Rita Mae Brown, an autobiographical coming-of-age story of an emerging lesbian writer. (Remember, I grew up in a politically left, very progressive bubble. So for my mom it was very normal to give a book like that to her daughter. Even though she thought being a writer was a wild, very unrealistic dream.) Writing about lesbians (dreadful, tragic stories that luckily never got printed), I felt so proud of myself, so open and accepting, full of empathy, imagining how it would be, could be – even if it had nothing to do with my life (I already was different enough, didn't need that on top of everything, thank you very much). That was just writing, right? Putting myself in someone else shoes, going on a paper adventure.

It took me some time and a journey to a small town in the south of Germany to realize just how much that had to do with me. I had traveled with some (straight) friends (I was nineteen or twenty perhaps) to a women/lesbian festival, something about art and resistance, with workshops and talks and parties. There was a writing workshop I planned to attend. But the night we arrived, there was a party.

Coming out as a writer was hard.

Coming out as a lesbian seemed trivial by comparison. It was still a different time from today, sure, it was the end of the eighties. And my first time entering a room full of lesbians – not knowing what I was walking into when I opened that door. It was a party, and the party was in full swing when I and my friends arrived. I opened the door and just stood there looking, seeing, staring at all these women dancing with each other, holding each other, kissing, laughing, having a damn good time and looking just so, so beautiful. Suddenly, the paper adventure became a reality. And I knew, just as I had known as a kid, with absolute certainty: this is what I want, this is me. And finally the last pieces of the puzzle clicked into place, this puzzle of why am I different. Here. This. This is another beautiful part of why. I am a lesbian.

I am not telling different stories because I am different. I am telling different stories because they exist. Like lesbians. Like queer people. Like dragons. It suddenly seemed a possibility again, this existence of dragons. At least, as an idea, on paper.

Why do you write? (Want to take another minute to think on it? I'll wait.)

I also write to find a language and context for myself. To find the language to tell queer stories. How to express identities and feelings that differ from the so-called norm? Knowing so-called "normal" people will read them and wanting them to understand, to develop empathy, for them to walk, only for a while, in our shoes. Just on paper. Just in their heads. And, simultaneously, striving to tell the story for other queer people like me, so they have stories where they can find themselves in.

As queer people, we took words intended to hurt and made them into something beautiful. At least, in our community. And that is the problem for writing, because I don't write exclusively for the queer community, I want to be read – and understood – by a broad audience. As I said, I want to create empathy in readers. Because we as human beings, all of us, need it for one another. We need to see each other, value each other as human beings, as full human beings, no matter where we come from, how we live and how we love. We need to go to these places where there are dragons.

>> (Bild 7: Zitat + Foto R. Sims Bishop)

Stories can be MIRRORS and stories can be WINDOWS, as Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop said:

"Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books."

We need to see ourselves and we need to be curious about the stories of others.

As writers we rely on common experiences, common knowledge – but how to write about stuff that aren't? How to create a language, emotions that readers without the experience and/or knowledge can understand? And then again: isn't that what we as writers always do? Take something from within ourselves and throwing it out into the world hoping to be understood?

Daring even to write about things, creatures, we do not see in the real world around us, like dragons. Finding a language to write about worlds that exist only in our imagination.

Finding language – maybe that is one of the appeals of fantasy as a genre for me. Here, I can invent words and grammars that are way more inclusive than my own native language, German. So, I invented the word *Magystri* and in my book-world it works for all genders – it has no gender on its own, it takes on the gender of the person using it for themselves. A concept that does not exist in the German language. But I needed that concept for a world where gender does not determine/restrict the roles you can take up in society. For those with the gift of magic – "Magische" as I call them in the book – there are different levels of learning with a term for each one, and each term is for every imaginable gender. It is a very small nugget in the overall story, not featuring prominently anywhere. But it is there and it is born out of the idea that there are many equally valued genders. It is a language that – along with its concept – all kids with magic, like Finja, have to learn to speak with each other. They come from all over the world, so they need a common language for outside of the magic halls where every language spoken seems to be your native one. So a German kid and a Chinese kid would each speak their respective language and hear the answers given in their own language. So within the magic halls understanding is easy. But would they meet outside of these, they wouldn't be able to communicate – thus, the idea of a common magic-folk-language.

And of course, that concept of a common language is something inspired by the queer community. There always have been "secret codes", invented words to recognize each other in an often not very open or friendly world. Words to speak about a sexuality that was conceived as different, dangerous, abhorrent even. So we needed new concepts for ourselves. And we created those. Not to fit in but to find a way to be ourselves, to find the beauty in ourselves, in a world that had no concept for what we were (or only a very degrading one).

Here be dragons. We went there and found all sorts of wonders.

Also, as queer people, we did a lot of work to redefine words that were meant as slurs, we took them, made them into something to wear as a badge of honor, with pride and in defiance, saying: you think we are different from you? Very well, we are! Or – to quote the gay actor Harvey Fierstein:

"My brothers and sisters, we are not different, we are extraordinary." (Gay Games, Amsterdam 1998)

>> (Bild 8: Zitat + LBGTIQ flag)

So, I guess, I am writing extraordinary stories.

Just like the story of Lennie and Marie, two girls, teenagers, living in Berlin, in the summer of 1961. Marie living in East-Berlin, Lennie living in West-Berlin. The border between the two parts of the city is still open when the story starts. The two girls meet and they fall in love. And this is not a story about them having a problem with that. For them, it just feels right. Not so much for the world around them. So they continuously look for places where they can be together, be themselves, without being seen/noticed. Not an easy task for teenagers still living at home and having to hide who they are even from their parents. But Berlin 1961, still very visibly damaged by the war, had many corners and wild places to hide in. But then, suddenly, on a day in August, the border dividing the city in East and West is closed, there is a wall being build between them. Suddenly, they are both very alone, searching for ways to connect again. In the end, Marie needs to decide if she dares to leave everything and everyone behind and dares an escape from East- to West-Berlin, to Lennie.

A story, completely without dragons – very extraordinary for me.

And very different from the story that old Captain Bruno tells his young friend Finja, that morning, on this bench, looking out at the sea. The story of how he found a dragon. Or more precisely: a dragon egg. He had to rescue it, well steal it, but the man who had it, had evil plans with the dragon inside, wanted to rip out the dragons scales to grind them into magic potions. So Bruno – not a captain back then but a young sailor – had to rescue it and the dragon within. Right? And so, he stole the egg and took it with him everywhere he sailed. He kept it warm, he talked to the little creature growing inside, and he took it with him when he finally had to leave the life of sailing because his eyes began to fail him. So he made a soft and warm nest for the egg in his kitchen and continued to care for it. Decades had passed now. And this very morning, when he came into the kitchen to check on the egg, to sit with it and talk while he made his breakfast – the egg had been broken, only shards were left on the counter. And the dragon was nowhere to be found. Gone.

Finja isn't sure if she believes in the existence of dragons or not. But she promises the captain to go looking for the dragon, because that she can do, believing or not.

5

Believing in a world where we still can tell stories seems to get harder and harder the older I get. Will we solve the climate crises we put the world into in time? How can we still tell stories when we are so uncertain of tomorrow, of our own survival as a species even?

Here be dragons.

And maybe in uncertain times like ours we need stories more than ever. As a respite, a safe place sometimes. As mirrors for ourselves and as windows into others, always. And as writers to tell ourselves that there is hope still. Because as long as we write stories there will be people reading them, hearing them, telling them – right?

And I want to tell stories like the one about Finja and Captain Bruno. It is a book about a girl discovering her magic abilities, making new friends, finding a dragon – and to me it is so much more. It is a story about a world I wish for, bit of an Utopia if you want: people living together accepting each other, no matter their gender, skin color, believe, sexual orientation, abilities, expression of themselves ... oh, they still have problems to solve, adventures to go on ... it is not a perfect world. I think, it is the world I knew as a kid – before school and minus the magic. And I wanted to go back to that world and share it with others. Still do.

Still wish, I could continue this as the series I set out to write. But despite beautiful reviews and readers expressing they wanted to continue reading, wishing for the next part of the story, the publisher decided to not continue the book as a series. Because of sales numbers not meeting their expectations.

So there is that. A harsh truth about writing queer stories. And of course I know, writing, not only as a queer writer, is a precarious job. There are no certainties. For the first time in years, I am without a deadline, without a new book contract. It is scary.

And I came here feeling very down. The last book not continued as the series I had planned it as – the book of Lennie and Marie taken out of publishing just a couple of days ago. But being here, finding inspiration in coffee stains, hearing, seeing all your stories, shifted something in my mind.

It still is scary though. Especially when the world seems to be asking: What are you even doing?

Well, telling stories. About dragons, amongst others.

6 >> (Bild 9: 2 reading dragons)

One of my favorite childhood memories is with my grandfather (morfar – as I learned he would have been in Swedish): I was at his house for some school holidays with a friend, a boy I knew since kindergarten – I often spent my holidays at my grandfather's and loved it (we hadn't money for traveling but I didn't care) – at the time, we kids were both maybe nine years old. We were stretched out on some couches, heads close together, both reading a book. Suddenly, Roger starts crying. And I'm like: what's happening? And he, still sobbing: the book, it is so sad. Me: why are you reading it then? He: because the story is so beautiful. That I understood instantly. So I said: should we read it together? He nodded, wiping away his tears, and so we started over from the beginning, taking turns reading the story out loud to each other. And soon – we were both crying. My grandfather, just woken up from his midday nap, came running, full of concern: what happened? Are you alright? We nodded and said: the book, it is so sad. And him: why are you reading it then? Both of us, still sobbing: because the story is so beautiful. My grandfather nodded. That he understood. So he said: should I read it to you then? We nodded, wiping away our tears. And so he started over from the

beginning and read the whole story of "Mio min Mio" (written by Astrid Lindgren, as you all know I assume) to us ... soon crying softly himself, because he was a man who didn't hide his emotions.

And I think kids still need experiences like this. All of them.

>> (Bild 10: Finja & dragon)

Are dragons important today? Hell, yes they are!, I want to shout. Dragons themselves would probably just shrug and go about their business (like cats). They know. So why bother with a question like that?

Why do I write? To tell stories.

Thank you.



(Illustration of Finja and the dragon by Leonie Daub, from the book "Das magische Fundbüro" written by Maike Stein)