



SUPER FRAUEN

Ninia LaGrande

A fashion blogger, slam poet
and person of short stature,
who shows us the meaning
of self-acceptance.

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Podcast Transcript

- [00:31] It is a warm afternoon, a mother and a daughter are walking through the city. Ninia holds her head up to the sky, her blonde hair bouncing joyfully as she walks. Her tiny fingers are in the hand of her mother, who takes very small steps as Ninia takes very big ones. After all, she has just turned three-years-old. A couple of old women walk towards the pair and when one of them notices the little girl, she calls out: "Oh, she can already walk!" She does not know that the child was born with a form of short stature and is actually much older than she looks. Ninia's mother smiles and calls back to the lady in the same tone: "Yes, soon she'll be flying!"
- [01:17] You could say that Ninia actually did learn how to fly. She is now an adult and stands at 1.40 metres tall — much like a primary school girl. But Ninia's self-confidence usually carries her a lot higher than her height. Standing amongst a crowd of people, she mostly sees elbows and stomachs all around her. She doesn't know anything else and doesn't find it all that bad — she only gets mad when someone suddenly walks past her and pats her head. Just like that. As if she were a gold lion that brings luck. Or a cute little doll. In her 36 years of life, Ninia has learned that some people tend to do odd things when they meet a person with a disability. Often they don't know what to do: look at them? Or look away? Bend down? Because of their uncertainty, sometimes they say strange things to her. If you were to ask Ninia how she would like to be handled, she will happily respond by saying: "Like a normal woman!" Above all, out of the many talents that make up her personality, none of them have anything to do with how big or small she is.
- [02:40] **Have you ever felt insecure when you met someone with a disability? What were you unsure of?**
- [02:51] In her everyday life, however, many things happen that have to do with her height. They are exhausting, but sometimes also quite funny, which she talks about in the hilarious slam poems she reads aloud on German stages. But because there are also many other topics that move Ninia, she not only writes about living with her disability, but also self-acceptance, feminism, racism and motherhood. That is Ninia's special skill: she can also make people laugh when talking about serious topics. With this dose of lightness, she even manages to make people who have no real interest in serious things listen to her.



[03:35] As a child, Ninia learned how to be funny from her mum — it is her secret superpower. She lets it out whenever people say discriminatory things without realising. For example: “Were you always this short?” — “No, I was actually 2.10 metres tall when my mum gave birth to me” Ninia then responds. Or one time when someone came up to her at a disco and said, “I should introduce you to my friend, he is also short!” she answered: “I should introduce you to my friend, he is also an idiot!” Afterwards she will show them her pearly smile and is pleased when they are left speechless. Her mother once said something important to Ninia that has helped her in many situations: “Know this, my child, there are tall people, small people, fat people, thin people, clever people and very, very many stupid people.” And that is why Ninia can never be reduced to just her size. For performances onstage, she gave herself the nickname “LaGrande” — that’s Italian for “The Great.” Ninia the Great.

[04:51] When Ninia was born in 1983 with a head that was far too large and short arms and legs, the doctors give her young mother little hope. They spoke of “special schools” and that it would be a miracle if the child could ever ride a bike. Ninia’s mother did not listen to the doctors, she listened to her instincts. She let her daughter go to a regular school. Ninia received a stool that she could use to put her feet on under the table — but that’s about it. She was treated just like the other schoolkids. She became class president and played lead roles in school plays without them being rewritten for her. Back then, during Ninia’s childhood, no one yet knew the meaning of the word “inclusion” — nevertheless, it existed at her school. Quite obviously. “At some point I was not different from the others, just smaller,” Ninia says about this time. She achieved the highest high school diploma, Abitur, and went on to study Art History and German. “And I can also ride a bike.”

[06:00] In addition to slam poetry, there is something else that Ninia is passionate about. It all began when she was six years old. On Silvester, the German celebration for New Year’s Eve, her father gave her a glittery purple hat with a pink feather on top. Wearing that hat, Ninia looked fascinatedly at herself in the mirror. This hat was chic! And it was much too nice to only wear on Silvester. On the morning of New Year’s Day, she put it back on again. And on every day that followed. It was only in May when the elastic band that held the hat onto her head became too tight that she was finally separated from it. But Ninia’s love for bold fashion and accessories remained. As a kid, she dressed like a small adult — in jumpers and leggings that were far too big and sneakers and quirky necklaces. During her youth, she followed every fashion trend: Grunge, Gothic, Hippie. Even today she still dresses with a certain original flair — she stands out with her unique style. Leopard skirts, shirts with cheeky slogans on them, bright red lipstick, large round sunglasses and a small golden nose ring. Some things she finds in stores for children’s clothes, but most of the time she shops in regular fashion stores. A tailor then alters the clothes to her size.



- [07:31] No matter where Ninia goes: people always look at her, the woman who is as tall as a girl. If they're going to be looking at her anyway, "then I can still dress colourfully and crazily," Ninia finds. And because she is so confident in front of the camera and knows so much about fashion, she moderated a fashion show for a major German TV station. Her disability? It doesn't matter. On the program she interviewed people from the fashion world and had them film her going shopping. The way she tries on jumpers, jackets and sunglasses in front of the mirror, giggles and happily sticks up her thumb. That is Ninia's message: no matter what you look like, anything is possible.
- [08:18] Even if people find fashion a superficial topic — that is not the case for Ninia: through her fashion, she makes herself visible. The vibrant hats she wears, the colourful pullovers and blouses scream: there is nothing to hide here! This body has earned the right to be dressed nicely! Ninia's outfits are a loud "yes" to her body, including its so-called "defects." A body with too much of some things and not enough of others, that is lovable all-around.
- [08:53] On Instagram she regularly uploads photos of herself in new outfits. Even in bikinis or swimsuits. "Every year I post my beach body for myself," says the caption under one of her photos. "To remind myself that my body belongs there." Why should only models and influencers with perfect proportions be allowed to show their bodies on Instagram? Ninia believes that bikini photos are there for everyone. More and more women are openly showing their imperfect bodies on the internet. That has helped Ninia a lot with accepting herself. She now calls her body a "good friend." One that you like on most days and also argue with on a few days. Which is okay, because you'll love her again afterwards.
- [09:48] **Ninia uses fashion to express a positive body image. She accepts her body and calls it a good friend. What about you? What do you like about your body? And how important is fashion to you?**
- [10:05] There is one thing that Ninia does not like at all: euphemisms. This is the name you give to not so nice things that people try to disguise as softly as possible. "Handicap" is one such word that people often use, because they don't trust themselves to say "behindert", the German word for disabled. Ninia, however, doesn't find this to be a bad word — on the contrary. Because it explains her everyday life pretty well: she is being hindered. Some stairs for example are too steep, or elevator buttons are too high. In general, she wishes that society would think more about the people outside of the norm or who experience discrimination — that's exactly what inclusion is all about.



[10:44] By the way, there was someone for whom Ninia's height was never an issue. Someone, who from the first moment has only seen a beautiful, astoundingly hilarious woman. Ninia is now married to Christoph. Before you ask: he is 1.80 metres tall. Their son Kasimir is three years old. Before you ask: he is also of an average height. However, we now know: people's real size cannot be measured in centimetres or inches. It's all about how much their thoughts move us. And Ninia has a mission for the minds of her audience: to teach them how to fly.

[11:33] The wonderful Ninia LaGrande is fully committed to inclusion. She wants society to do more for people who are not like the norm or who experience discrimination. What are your ideas for the inclusion of people with disabilities in our everyday life, in school, in sports clubs, in the city, etc.?

PODCAST EPISODE

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