



Photo by Laura Knowles

Lititz author Patti Cornelius' title character in "Archie's Dragon" battles the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for today's youngsters.

Cornelius pens 'Archie's Dragon'

By Laura Knowles

It all began with a wooly, fuzzy dragon in watercolor shades of turquoise and aquamarine with a bright red dragon tongue.

The dragon was the creation of Patti Cornelius, who created her whimsical beast using the technique of wool needle felting. That dragon turned out to be the title character in a book about "Archie's Dragon," as he battled the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for today's youngsters.

"I knew nothing about dragons, but I decided to give it a try," said Cornelius, a Lititz writer, craftsperson, and artist who had

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Cornelius

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taken an online wool felting class with renowned wool artist Sarah Renzulli on the topic of dragons.

When she was finished, Cornelius had made a stunning dragon with magical wings, tiny dragon claws, curved horns, and bits of fairytale sparkle. She was enchanted.

"Everyone in the class was making traditional scary dragons, but I knew I wanted to make a friendly dragon. I started thinking that my dragon might be the hero of a children's book," said Cornelius. "When I finished, I realized the only thing missing was a little boy to ride on its back."

At that moment, Archie was born. The dragon had a little boy to set off on fantastic adventures. Cornelius quickly got to work, creating the bespectacled little Archie with fuzzy brown hair and a red tee-shirt. Soon after, a menagerie

of woodland creatures, such as a lion, owl, and raccoon, were created.

"Archie needed a little sister," said Cornelius, who added sweet sister June with her soft blue dress and blue hair ribbon in her golden curls.

As Cornelius created her wool felted characters, there was one that held an extra special place in her heart. It was Archie's grandma, known as Oma, the German word for grandmother. As it happens, Cornelius's own two grandchildren call her Oma.

Archie's Oma doesn't look like at all Cornelius, who is a young, vibrant 60+. Archie's Oma is frail and elderly, with wild grey hair and deep wrinkles around her deep-set dark eyes. She wears a wooly blue shawl over her green dress and sits in a wooden chair.

Like Cornelius, Archie's Oma makes wonderful wool felted creatures for her beloved grandchildren. As Cornelius felted her own wooly characters, she began to spin a

tale of a little boy who angry and frustrated that he couldn't celebrate his eighth birthday with a party.

"I was working on the book during the pandemic and I started to think I could build my story around all the challenges for children when they can't be with their friends during this time," said Cornelius.

Her story weaves Archie's sadness of no birthday party with friends together with the family's concerns about keeping the elderly Oma safe. He is miserable with homemade gifts from his grandma until he discovers the magic within her heartfelt gift of a winged dragon named Naga.

Cornelius then discovered Angel Orton of Angelhar-felting, a felt artist known for her fairytale woodland scenes. As soon as Orton saw the manuscript, she immediately envisioned the perfect setting with moss and trees and toadstools.

"I found out she lived in

Michigan and was a COVID-19 nurse. Angel inspired me to add nurse mice to the story. Her co-workers contributed to the scenes, too," said Cornelius. "This became a project that helped them through these trying times. It especially provided Angel with a distraction. It was difficult to go into work and face dying people on a regular basis."

The forest photography was done by Jessica Butts, with page design and production by Larry Albright of Albright Design Studio. "Archie's Dragon" was printed by the Standard Group. Soon after, Cornelius began reading her book online to children at the school where her daughter teaches in Florida.

"The children are mesmerized by Archie's story," said Cornelius, noting that "Archie's Dragon" is her second children's book.

It is the first that combines her love of story writing with wool felting. Cornelius first

became interested in wool needle felting in 2018, shortly after her mother passed away. She discovered Sarafina Fiber Art, a needle felting supply business in Maryland. It was Sarafina's class on dragons that inspired "Archie's Dragon."

"In 2020 we are discovering things that may have been lying dormant in our minds for years. The child inside has been given a chance to come out and play," said Cornelius, who resides in Lititz with her husband Earle, and three terriers. She is the mother of two daughters, Kelly and Hilary.

"Archie's Dragon" paperback book is available at Heavenly Soaps & Scents at 33 East Main Street, Lititz, and via Cornelius's website at archiesdragon.com.

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