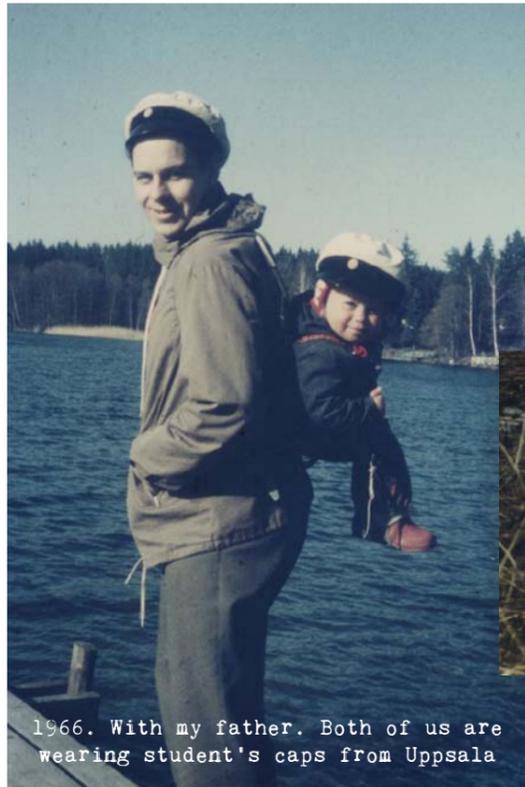


“The first book I wrote and illustrated, ‘Little Love Story,’ is about who I am, or who I was: a girl sitting on a wooden pole, looking across the bay, feeling fine, who discovers something that pulls her out of her shell.”

Illustrator and writer Marit Törnqvist talks about her past, present, and future.



1966. With my father. Both of us are wearing student's caps from Uppsala



Always ambitious, sometimes too much so...



In my memory I spent half of my childhood in this pair of wet weather pants

Uppsala 1965. My brother and I went to an outdoor crèche. When the temperature was below minus 10°C it was called off



My debut as a writer, in an exchange of letters with my mother



Here I am, three and ready for a big adventure



Ultimately I married a man who was just as old as my uncle



My first Saint Lucia celebration, with my own mother as Lucia and my father as the only person in the audience



Skiing to school

# Past

"I was rebellious, yet something in me still wanted to belong. I didn't have such an independent spirit that I could totally ignore the behavior of the group"

"I must have been about three, sitting on the windowsill. Outside was a thick layer of snow. Suddenly there was panic in the street. Someone had fallen and an ambulance arrived. My mother came to the window and said, 'Gosh, that girl has probably broken her leg.' I'll never forget how shocked I was by those words. I looked around in the snow to find the broken leg. To see if there was any blood. It was the worst thing I had ever heard, and I can still feel the fear that child of three felt.

"We lived in Uppsala, in Sweden, in the house where my father and his father had lived, filled with stately old furniture. Beautiful antique sofas, oval tables on wooden legs and marble windowsills. In my memory I always seemed to be on the windowsill. Isn't it remarkable, how memories work? During my honeymoon, I went back there. I'd told my husband about the huge window and the 'meter-wide' staircase. In my mind it was all so big, but in actual fact it was tiny – I think that windowsill was perhaps six inches wide.

"My father is Swedish, my mother Dutch. In her early twenties, she literally fled to Sweden. She was about to get married to the boy she was already engaged to. She knew Sweden. She'd been there, right after the war, as a twelve year old and had a euphoric time staying with a Swedish girlfriend. In the Netherlands, she studied Swedish. She went to Uppsala and began translating, including books by Astrid Lindgren. Later she became a writer. She met my father, she rented a room from him. They got married. Maybe they hadn't wanted to leave, but my father was offered a job in the Netherlands. In Sweden he was a teacher, but here he was professor of Scandinavian languages and literature at the University of Amsterdam.

"I was five when we moved to the Netherlands. When I think of my childhood in Sweden, I see above all the farm tenant's cottage that I lived in from May to September, with my mother and eighteen-month older brother; my sister hadn't been born yet. A small red cottage in a valley, with two rooms and a kitchen. We washed ourselves in the lake and went to the bathroom in an outdoor hut through a hole in a wooden plank. The deer's toilet, we called it. Weekends, my father drove up in his black VW Beetle. We'd spend all day outside, running around and playing, growing our veggies and swimming in the lake. My mother was often hard at work.

"My granddad found a house for us in Bussum, but first we lived in Baarn and Soest (two villages in an up market area). What I remember about those places was being bullied in kindergarten. Those posh kids pinched my legs under the table until they drew blood with their nails. And the one time the teacher found out, she lifted me up and was very angry at the class, while I cried in her arms. In Bussum, I went to the Gooiland School. I think now sometimes: if you're going to send your kids to a posh school, then do it properly. Whereas everyone else wore the same 'uniform' of knee socks, Shetland wool sweaters, long English coats with Burberry check lining and Penny Loafers, my mother dressed us in embroidered, lovely Indian blouses, and woven skirts in all colors from a Dutch store called Hema.

"My mother came from Bloemendaal (another posh village), but she'd had enough of that lifestyle. Besides, I was someone with strong views and probably never hinted that I'd actually like to wear a real Shetland

sweater and knee socks and Penny Loafers. I was rebellious, but something in me still wanted to belong. I didn't have such an independent spirit that I could totally ignore the behavior of the group. The other children picked up on that. I had short hair – still do – and a jaw set slightly forward and a big mouth so they called me Monkey. Sometimes, at playtime, they drew a square in the sand and said, 'Monkey, you have to stay in your cage the whole playtime.' So I stayed. And said nothing about it at home.

"Meanwhile, I discovered something: the kids loved that I could draw well. They stood about my table and were really impressed. It made them nicer to me. When I was eight, my parents bought a farm in Sweden and we went there for three months a year. In Sweden, I did everything I liked. I built dolls' houses with my sister, made landscapes full of homemade trolls, or helped out on the neighbors' farm. I knew all the cows by name and went singing with the farmer's wife to fetch them from the forest. Everything was fine. I was in high school, thirteen, and so glad I was still flat-chested that sometimes, when it was hot, I took off my T-shirt for sports. But the girls around me were giggly and flamboyant and talked about boys. When I first went to a disco, within fifteen minutes I was the only wallflower. My girlfriend was kissing a boy. A horrible boy too, covered in pimples. I felt torn inside, I certainly didn't want that. But I still wanted to belong. That feeling stayed with me a long time. Sweden became a refuge, a place to be left in peace and not have to think about these sorts of things." ➡➡

# Present

“I was a goody-goody who wanted to learn how to draw and paint, but I arrived at the Rietveld Academy in the middle of the squatters and punk era”

When I was seventeen, I went to an international camp in northern Lapland. Fourteen days, a group of young people trekking through the mountains to the coast of Norway, with a backpack of food and a tent. I boarded a train in southern Sweden and sat in it for twenty-five hours. The last six hours I was alone in that train. I looked out the window and saw nothing but forest, swamp, forest, mountains, forest, and the occasional reindeer. When I got out, I heard the loud clatter of a waterfall. The trip was incredible; I was totally rejuvenated. Every day I walked out in front, with a heavy backpack in which I piled stuff from others who couldn't bear the weight. In the evenings I went swimming between the ice floes. It was the time of the midnight sun and I barely slept. I was so happy. There, in that primeval nature, far away from everything, with other people who had chosen to be there. And I fell in love.

“I was pretty tough. Not like a boy, but because of who I was. When I came back I was a different person. Me, who'd always thought: I'm ugly, I'm small, I'm this, I'm that. Now I was getting letters from all sorts of European countries, including my new friends in Lapland, including boys. Lapland was a turning point, but it's not as if it all became easier from that moment on.

The year after, my parents divorced. Their marriage had been shaky for a while – when I was sixteen they had a major crisis – but then things seemed to be getting better and I'd thought they gotten over it. That summer I went to Lapland again and came back euphoric, but the euphoria disappeared quickly when things between my parents finally went wrong. My father had fallen in love with another woman.

“In September I started at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. At first I lived at home, but I couldn't keep that up. My mother had a new friend who was a chain smoker and my father, well, he lost the plot completely. After Christmas I moved into rooms. The first year was very tough. I was a goody-goody who wanted to learn how to draw and paint, but I arrived at the Rietveld in the middle of the squatters and punk era. In my view everyone was on the rampage, messing about with drugs and fighting the cops.

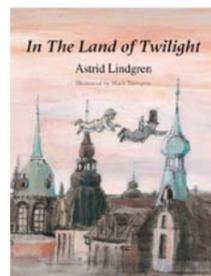
“It was a lonely time; I often escaped into a dream world, in memories of Lapland and in correspondence with friends in Sweden. But especially in drawing. I lived in the Bachstraat (in the music quarter of Amsterdam) and several nights a week I sat with my drawing pad in the hall of the former conservatory, sketching musicians. The second year went better. There was a nice girl in my class, Willemien Min, and we often met in Café Americain, to sketch people. We'd order one cup of tea for the two of us because we didn't have much money, and talked the whole evening through. In her I found a kindred spirit. I started taking extra evening classes and got stuck in, doing almost nothing else but drawing, drawing, and drawing.

“When I came out of the Rietveld, everything to do with work went far easier than I'd expected. Straight off I received lots of commissions. My first assignment was to illustrate a picture book for Astrid Lindgren. Following several other picture books, this led to the commission to create the design for Junibacken, a three-dimensional journey through Astrid Lindgren's most beautiful books in a children's museum in Stockholm.

“I was thirty, heading a million-kroner

project with seventy set designers working under me, who all listened to me. Together we created a space of one thousand square meters, seven meters high. I worked on it day and night for two years and eventually it attracted 400,000 visitors a year to Stockholm... Just before I left for Stockholm I met Ad. Maybe it was because he was seventeen years older than me, but in any case it didn't occur to me that I might be in love with him. I liked him lots. He wasn't at all like the other men I had been with.

“I don't have a driver's license, and when my mother couldn't drive me to Sweden because of a jaw infection, I asked Ad. We left for Sweden that afternoon. On the way we slept in the car and then went first to my parents' farm. Ad chopped wood and did the cooking. I would stay there a month and draw. Just before Ad was about to go home, he said he'd fallen in love with me. I was on the brink of that huge project. It was not the right time. When he got home, we started writing letters, very many letters, and he came to Sweden a few times. By New Year's Eve I was back in Amsterdam and asked him, shall we get married? After our wedding I stayed another year in Stockholm. After my return, I moved into his house and soon after became pregnant with Jasmine. A few years later, Rosalie was born.” ➔➔

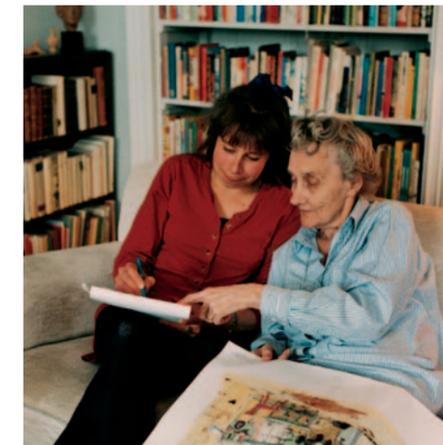


With 30 kg on my back, Lapland at my feet, and oh so happy!



1996. Working night and day on the décor of Junibacken where I still know every detail

Marrying Ad is the best decision I've ever made



Collaboration and friendship with the 89-year-old Astrid Lindgren



“You are the sweetest,” where I wrote Jasmine's teeny-tiny life in the big city



Our darling daughters in Sweden, wearing three pairs of gloves in minus 20°C



On a trip to Burundi with Doctors without Borders. I wrote and drew every day



A very important moment





INTERVIEW CLEMENTINE VAN WIJNGAARDEN PHOTOGRAPHY ERNIE ENKELAAR STYLING ANNEMIEKE PAARBERG MAKE UP CARMEN VOOR VISIGN CHI

# Future

“It is sometimes said that a writer always tells the same story.

I think that applies to me, too”

“While I was designing Junibacken, I saw Astrid Lindgren a lot. In the final stage I often went to see her. She was 89 and very fragile, but powerful too. We talked a lot about the past and present. Astrid Lindgren was eighteen when she became pregnant. That was a great drama, she had to leave Sweden and the child had to be kept a secret. Through that experience, she was always extremely nostalgic about her childhood; it had been cut off so quickly. Mine too. I was ripped from my childhood too quickly by my parents’ divorce and that jump into the Rietveld and the pressure I felt to take part in adult life... At the time I was not ready and it gave me many years of trouble.

“Because all my life I’ve projected an extremely positive and decisive air, no one realized how badly I felt. Even my mother, with whom I’m very close and have worked with, could not guess how I really felt. I had terrible nightmares, sometimes several a night. Ultimately, a psychologist helped me get over it, and I’m often grateful to him for that. As a parent it’s hard to get a hold on everything, I can see that now that I’m a mother myself. My father was often in his own world.

“As a child, I always said, ‘He was born with a book in his hands.’ I lost touch with my father, around my thirties. I had to get away from the things that had happened, to gain a better understanding. But eventually, he sought me out and we found each other again. He is 80 now and his world is still one of books and literature. After all these storms I now have a sweet, precious relationship with him. I sometimes think that if my parents had not left Sweden they might still be together. They had it good together for a long time. It’s very strange, but sometimes

even now I still hope that they will get back together. Maybe all children of divorced parents have these you-know-better dreams.

“Now I’ve been illustrating and writing for almost 25 years. It is sometimes said that a writer always tells the same story. I think that applies to me too. The first book I wrote and illustrated, *Klein Verhaal Over Liefde* (*Little Love Story*), is about who I am, or who I was: a girl sitting on a wooden pole, looking across the bay, feeling fine, who discovers something that pulls her out of her shell. I wrote this book before I was thirty and you might say that just like that little girl, I took off in search of happiness.

“Since my thirtieth year, it’s all been on the up. I’m closer to my childhood than I ever was when I was actually in it. In my work I often look at the world through children’s eyes. That’s really nice because I allowed to, indeed, I must, otherwise I couldn’t do my job. I feel that I can be who I am and do what I want. I don’t feel that extreme longing for my childhood that Astrid Lindgren always felt. Seldom have I been able to pick and choose projects the way I have in the past few years. Because I can work on a book for eighteen months or so, I must think carefully before I say yes to a manuscript. I’m just starting on a new book, by a young Flemish writer, Jef Aerts. I’d been getting manuscripts offered for months, but nothing seemed to spark off my fancy. It was as if nothing could touch me anymore. Then suddenly I came across this story and it turned out to be the opposite, it moved me very deeply. Now the publisher is letting me work on it until it is done. No one puts me under pressure and that is a great privilege.

“For me the future is always wide open, I never plan the years ahead. I especially want

to have time for living. At times life just slurps me up and I can’t get down to work – I find myself really involved in the fate of the people around me, far more than before. Just part of being my age, I suppose. I need to free space and time for that, and if something needs attention, I have to be able to put my work aside. Of course, there also has to be space for adventure, even if only in my head. And for the unexpected. The unexpected is the best there is. And the distant future? Just like before we have a farm in Sweden. Nearby, between the fields and woods lives a very old woman who gathers wood for her stove, walking with her Zimmer frame. Who knows, later on I’ll be like her...” ●

**NAME:** Marit Törnqvist.

**BORN:** Uppsala, Sweden, 1964.

**PROFESSION:** Illustrator  
 Studied illustration at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. Since then she has worked as a children’s book illustrator for such authors as Astrid Lindgren, Hans and Monique Hagen and her mother, Rita Verschuur. She also writes books, including “Klein Verhaal Over Liefde” (“Little Love Story”) which on its debut in 1995 won a Zilveren Griffel, a major literary award for children’s literature in the Netherlands. She was the art director for the interior design of the museum Junibacken in Stockholm which takes children on a three-dimensional journey through the work of Astrid Lindgren. Marit Törnqvist is married, has two daughters, and lives and works in Amsterdam.