



**Anna Bengtsson**  
*Sweden*

Nominated for HC Andersen Award 2022  
*Illustrator Category*

# Biography



Photo: Jan-Åke Eriksson

Anna Bengtsson was born in 1951 and grew up in the mid Swedish countryside, near Linköping. After a general preparation art class, she started the four year-long education in graphic design and illustration at Konstfack (University of Arts, Crafts, and Design) in Stockholm. Over the years, she has been involved in union work, as well as functioned as an educator and lecturer for colleagues, librarians, and pre-school teachers.

Anna Bengtsson knew early on in life that she wanted to pursue a career in illustration and imagery. Immediately after graduating from Konstfack, she

decided that her focus would be picture-books as this would enable her to steer her own working processes and be her own boss.

Nine year after her debut, Anna Bengtsson won the major Swedish illustrator's prize, the Elsa Beskow-plaketten, in 1994 for two of her books: *Fredrik Matsson flyttar* ("Fredrik Matsson Is Moving") (1992), in collaboration with author George Johansson, and *Banvaktsbarn* ("Children At the Railway") (1993), which she produced together with her mother, the teacher and writer Margareta Bengtsson.

Anna Bengtsson has been quite sought after as a lecturer for various courses for other illustrators, both to teach her methods and to offer advice in professional contexts in relation to agreements, finances, and market conditions. In addition, she has been called upon for study days for teachers and librarians, and she has given workshops for children and adults alike. This is especially true when her picturebooks have been purchased for entire year groups of pre-school and elementary school children as a gift. To this end, she has participated in further education and workshops in relation to the topics of her books.

This extended pedagogical activity has included her many historical picture-books, for example. These books include the above-mentioned *Banvaktsbarn* and a further three books produced by Anna Bengtsson together with Margareta Bengtsson, and the own book *Farfars mammas soffå* (Granddad's Mother's Sofa) (2014), all of them depicting the poverty endured in the Sweden of the past.

In recognition of the high standard of her production, she has received a number of scholarships over the years, and in recent years she has received the Swedish Authors' Fund's special author allowance (2011-2020).

Anna Bengtsson is still very active in the picturebook world and, as of 2021, she has produced more than 40 books, more than 20 of which feature her own text.



*Födelsedagspresenten*, 2001

# A statement on the candidate's contribution to literature for young people

*Written by Ulla Rhedin, Ph.D.*

*in translation by Richard Green*

*She connects the world in a way that no other picturebook illustrator can, depicting the passage of time and our own rather short role in it.*

Lotta Olsson, *Dagens Nyheter*, 27 December 2014

Anna Bengtsson debuted as an illustrator in 1983 with black and white illustrations for a text about a cat by Britta Thomaner, which she made using a powerful scratchboard technique. Her debut as a picturebook creator in her own right came a few years later in the form of two full-size original picturebooks in different kinds of crayon: *Har tomten fått fnatt* ("What Santa Claus Delivered") (1986) and *Kan man äta hattar?* ("Eating Hats?") (1988). Since then, in book after book Bengtsson has explored a raft of artistic media – ink wash, egg tempera, watercolor, acrylic, gouache – as well as the material properties of picturebooks such as their design and shape, layout, format, typography, and paper quality.

But how does she know which style and storytelling technique best suits a particular story? Anna Bengtsson once explained the answer as follows: "As an illustrator, you have to let the words govern the images you create. What are the colors and shapes of the text?" In addition, she now adds, she enjoys varying and learning new techniques and



*Ur katten Morris dagböcker, 1983*

expressions for the different stories she illustrates.

In 2008, she began methodically experimenting with digital techniques such as Photoshop. Since then, she has developed her own methods where she now alternates between analogue and digital elements in her work, often producing

sketches using a computer and then developing them at the light table before scanning them in various rounds to ultimately produce handmade originals. Two of her books have been produced using entirely digital techniques. The first, *En natt på jorden* ("One Night on Earth") (2008), with text by Stefan Casta, takes place underground and is about the lives of worms. The second is a picturebook for young children, *Kaffekanna åker bort* ("Coffee Pot Out and About") (2013). She describes her method for making digital originals for the latter:

"I made four originals with different tones, with the idea that they could be used as backgrounds, as well as a few smaller pieces in crayon colors like blue (for the bus), red (for the coffee pot and tomatoes), and green (for the cucumber). I used Photoshop's stamp tool and utilized the surfaces of the colored elements for the shapes of the bus and the coffee pot, for example. The back-



*En natt på jorden, 2008*

grounds are inserted in the first layer and the colors are processed further. Loose shapes, such as the tomatoes, the coffee pot, and the bus with its passengers, are made in one layer on the top and then finished with a pencil outline. The shadows are produced in the background by circling a shape and clicking on "darker". Dotted around the handmade structure of the colored surfaces, I've photoshopped in flat colors – in the final spread, all the coffee cups and the cake on the table are made that way, although you may not realize it in the middle of all the handmade elements."

*Kaffekanna åker bort, 2013*



Kanske till grönsakslandet?

In the early 1990s, Anna Bengtsson made her big breakthrough with colorful picturebooks about the wayward and strong-willed boy Fredrik Matsson (text by George Johansson), painted in tempera and acrylic, as well as the large-format *Bollongexpeditionen* (“The Bolloon Expedition”) (1994), painted in tempera with more muted colors and free brush strokes. It became the first in a trilogy about an ant community’s scientific discoveries, experiments, and excursions. This particular excursion is an exciting journey in an air balloon inspired by a historic Swedish expedition by hot-air balloon in the Arctic (albeit with a fatal outcome), which provides an extra dimension for educated adult readers. The book is the first of many that Bengtsson has produced with travel and excursions as the primary motif.

The ants are comically accurate scientific researchers who believe they’re inventing the air balloon, the submarine, and the telephone, happily unaware that these all already exist in the human world. The ants give their inventions fun names that are almost correct, like “bolloon”, “underwater boat”, and “tellophone”, and perform countless tests



*Bollongexpeditionen*, 1994

Om regnvattnet rann i rännstenen struntade Fredrik Matsson i att komma när hans mamma ropade. Han fortsatte att lägga pinnar i rännstenens vattenflöde. Och när han gjorde det slutade pinnarna att vara pinnar, rännstenen att vara rännsten. Pinnarna blev fartyg på floder — genom oväder och stormar, förbi skär och forsar. Kapten på fartyget var Fredrik Matsson, som älskade att vara ute i galonbyxor i skymningen dagar som dessa, när regn rullade genom rymden och stormar slet i trädens kronor.



*Fredrik Matsson flyttar*, 1992

and trials that, in a humorous way, reflect the seriousness of science.

In our eyes, the “limited” ant perspective gives the author access to a number of humorous perspectives, such as a sort of pars pro toto trick, which the reader can see through thanks to the illustrations. The fact that the reader gets to know more than the ants is a successful example of Aristotle’s dramatic irony.

The author reveals one unexpected point in this story a little way into the process. Since working ants are exclusively female, this rather male-coded story of adventure and ingenuity has an almost secret feminist point in that all the inventors and adventurers are women.

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Anna Bengtsson stands out in the realm of Swedish picturebooks as arguably the foremost colorist in the tradition of painted picturebooks. In her generation of illustrators, she is quite unique in being more of a painter than an illustrator. This comes to the fore in her way of working with contours: she is not looking primarily for the line; rather she uses contours to achieve the right light and shadow effects. This makes the trees

glow slightly even at night, and all the elements in the picture connect organically, as in *Brum – skogens djur i ord och bild* ("Animals In The Woods") (2010), with text by Åsa Lind.

This is probably where Anna Bengtsson will encounter her Swedish readers when they are at their most sensitive.

The Swedes are, in various contexts, considered to be one of the world's most secularized peoples, but at the same time they are claimed to be perhaps one of the most spiritual. It is said that almost every Swede claims to feel a special connection with nature. Many have a deep affinity with a special tree, a cliff, a sea, or a lake, or have associated themselves with a particular animal or flower from a young age.

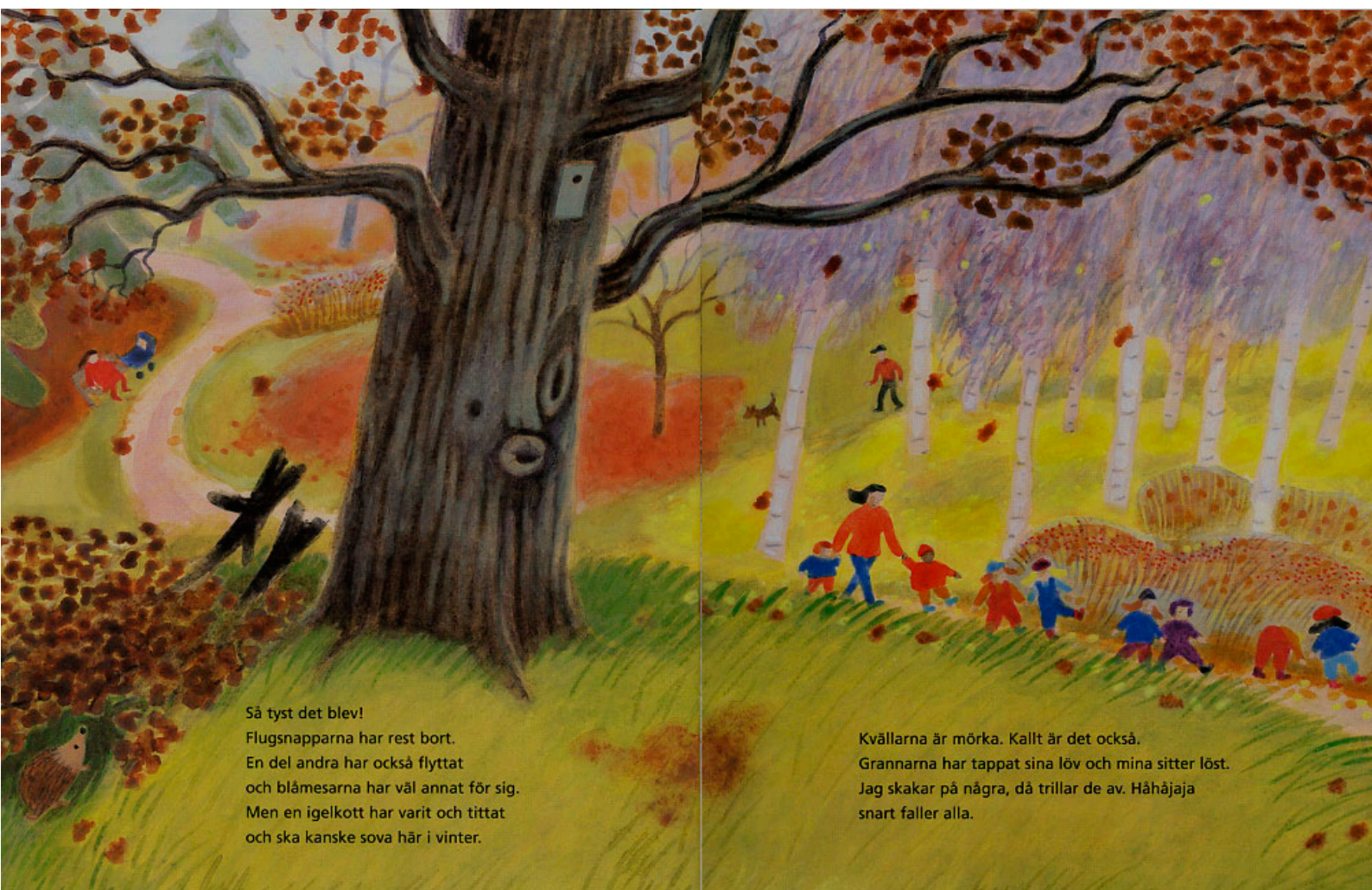


For Anna Bengtsson, nature is never scenography or stylized decoration. Nature, and the social, geographical, and historical environment of the stories, always plays the main role in her books, and she doesn't hesitate to present the facts, something which she enjoys reading about herself. Although her books are always fictional and imaginative, they always show her own curiosity and genuine desire to tell things how they are. She seems to want to keep a somewhat old-fashioned tradition in popular education alive. In this, she is reminiscent of her famous Swedish predecessor Elsa Beskow, who in the first half of the twentieth century also combined imaginative adventure stories with beautiful

and also accurately detailed portrayals of nature.

Anna Bengtsson constantly opens our eyes to the riddles and secrets of nature and entertains readers of all ages and from all walks of life with unexpected perspectives on life. Imitating H. C. Andersen, her self-narrator can be both a tree and an object. But unlike H. C. Andersen, Bengtsson plays on pure humor rather than irony.

In *Det kittlar när löven kommer* ("It Tickles When the Leaves Come") (2006), a centuries-old oak tells its life story in long timelines, while groups of children visit the forest in the present day.







Efteråt är de törstiga och läskar sig med stora istappar som de bryter på Kungsholmens bakgator. Sedan återvänder de till Vita Bergen i en blek gryning. När de har somnat pulserar luften av deras andetag och trädkronorna darrar lätt av deras drömmar. Gå försiktigt under träden där! De ramlar sällan ner men tycker inte om att bli väckta.

*Vildvinter, 1999*

What reflections can an oak make? What does foliage feel like? What can a tree express? Nothing is impossible. The only limitation in the life of an oak is, according to the artist, that it cannot move. However, it takes in its surroundings with its senses, its huge crown, and its massive root system, while all the far-flung migratory birds tell it about what's happening in the outside world. The originals for this book were all completely painted by hand (originals in acrylic).

Anna Bengtsson's unique depictions of nature also include urban environments. In *Vildvinter* ("Wild Winter") (1999),

together with poet Anna-Karin Palm, she depicts some beautiful neighborhoods in downtown Stockholm in the winter, with the city's streets and parks frequented by wild snow leopards at night.



*Vildvinter, 1999*



*En hög med snö, 2012*

In *En hög med snö* (“A Heap of Snow”) (2012), a nice pile of snow out in a suburban park attracts children and adults alike. Families and children come and go as the pile grows and grows to the point that it’s got to know the population of an entire neighborhood and all their many cultures. Despite the fact that her main character is often the collective itself, we get to know where the individual children live and what their names are. Anna Bengtsson employs an exquisite, almost imperceptible, zoom technique that she shares with the American picturebook artist Maira Kalman.

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In addition to these books centered on an environment, there are also Anna Bengtsson’s somewhat fact-oriented books about the social environments surrounding various professions and workplaces.

*Ny frisyr* (“New Hairdo”) (2011) looks at a family whose profession is their lifestyle – the entire family works in and around a hairdressing salon – and takes the eye-level perspective of little Stella, who plays with the heaps of hair and helps out.



*Ny frisyr, 2011*



Det är ganska bra här, tycker Freddie. Han knyter snörena på sina stålsockda kängor och trär på sina skyddshandskar. Nu kommer dagens första besökare. Containerarna gapar med sina hungriga munnar. De ska fyllas med rängliga soffor, fläckiga madrasser, hoptrasslade kablar och kvistar från trädgårdsröjningar.

*Välkommen till tippen, 2001*

Another business-oriented book is *Välkommen till tippen* (“Welcome to the Dump“) (2001), which uses broad, free brush strokes in watercolor (and with collage) to describe the various tasks of a city’s landfill site.

*Hela huset* (“The Whole House“) (2011), painted in watercolor, is about craftspeople who solve acute problems in a high-rise building. This book and the titles above show the drama that can be extracted from extremely mundane and often under-commented occupations that we may take for granted. The books have come to serve as an obvious basis for discussion and conversation with children of all ages in different contexts. In a review, a critic stated that Anna Bengtsson has breathed new life into the factual picturebook genre, which has laid dormant in Sweden for many years.



*Hela huset, 2011*

The latest example is her own picturebook *Farfars mammas soffa* (“Granddad’s Mother’s Sofa“) (2014), where a hundred-year-old wooden sofa tells its life story from the early twentieth century in the poor working-class neighborhoods in the port city of Gothenburg on Sweden’s west coast.

The story itself starts in the present day with the adult grandchildren getting the lovely kitchen sofa down from the attic.



*Farfars mammas soffå, 2014*

and illustrate a substantial amount of Gothenburg's history for an entire cohort of the city's preschool and schoolchildren from the ages of six to nine.

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The story of the sofa is then told chronologically in tableaux, with each decade getting its own spread, while historical developments are portrayed outside the kitchen window. In the pictures, Anna Bengtsson shows Sweden's gradually growing prosperity, with both the large full-page pictures and the many small vignette pictures in the margins being full of details typical of the era. The lively imagery and bold colors in the pictures balance the rather extensive text to give listening children a number of amusing events and details to explore while they listen. This book has been used to convey

Essentially, most of Anna Bengtsson's picturebooks belong to the category "picturebooks for all ages", which is to say that they offer something for children, young people, and adults, not just thematically but also artistically thanks to their highly sensual and aesthetically appealing art alongside the narrative.

But in a series of books, she also turns her attention to slightly younger readers, such as in the dramatic *Åskan kommer* ("Thunderstorm") (2004), which tells the story of a thunderstorm and what happens when you forget a beloved teddy bear on the lawn.



*Åskan kommer, 2004*

Havet var stort och tomt.  
 Efter tre veckor dök det upp ett djur.  
 – Var kommer ni ifrån, frågade djuret.  
 – Vi har fallit av en båt, sa Gummi-Lisa.  
 Fem ankor klagade:  
 – Vi har ingenstans att bo!  
 – Ni kan bo hos mig, sa djuret. Det är därnere  
 på bottenen.



Men gummiankorna kunde inte komma ner.  
 De kunde bara flyta ovanpå.



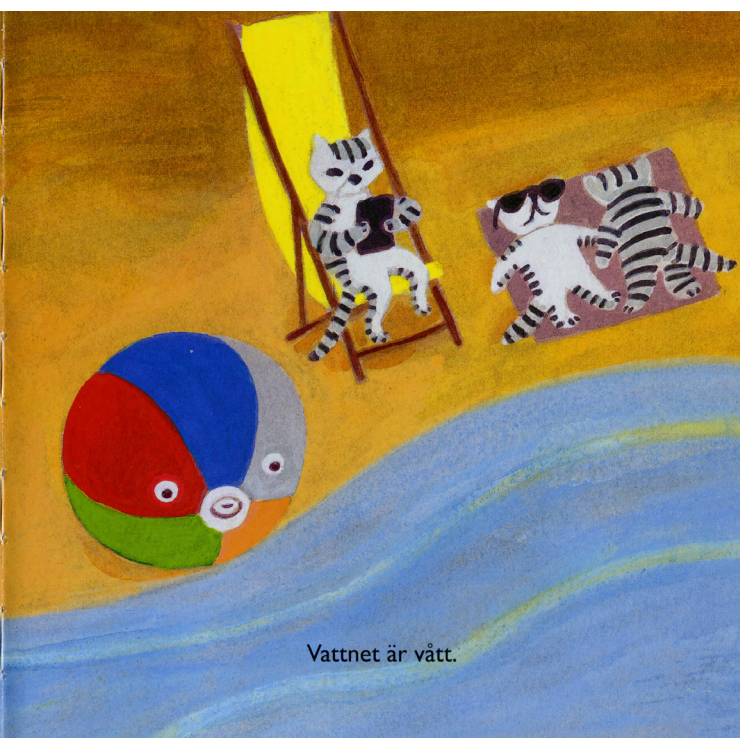
*Gummi-Lisa hittar hem, 2005*

Or when she tells the true story of the rubber ducks adrift in the ocean (as was reported in the news) that became the basis for the exciting story in *Gummi-Lisa hittar hem* ("Lisa-Duck Lost At Sea") (2006).

For the very youngest of children, Anna Bengtsson has established an innovative and fun series about unexpected "little trips" that pacifiers, balls, and – as we saw above – red coffee pots can make.



Det är lugnt och skönt.



Vattnet är vått.

*Bollar tar semester, 2017*

They have been joined by another travel book, *I garderoben* (In the Wardrobe) (2020), where a number of suitcases from different eras quarrel about who has the highest status. Their travel memories are depicted in various flashbacks that expand their cramped space in a variety of geographical directions and time periods, which the reader can follow in the pictures. It's no surprise that this book was a top recommendation of several critics for the pandemic-besieged Christmas of 2020.

In the spring of 2021 she will complete the sequel to the popular young children's book *Vad säger fågeln?* ("What Does The Bird Say?") (2010), with sound-mimicking text by poet Joar Tiberg.



*I garderoben*, 2020



*Vad säger fågeln?*, 2010

# Articles

## The World in Muted Colors Illustrator Anna Bengtsson is being rewarded

*Written by Barbro Westman Tullus,  
and published in Svenska Dagbladet, 1994*

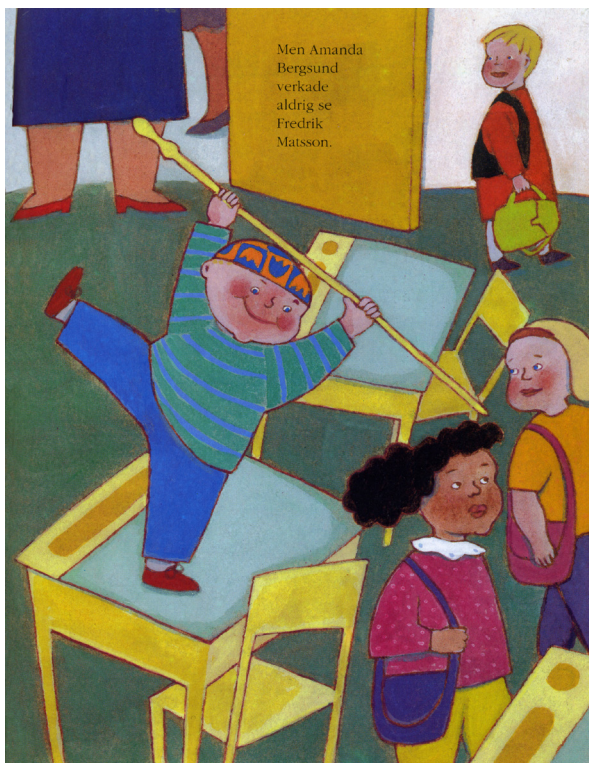


Illustration from *Fredrik Mattson blir kär* (Alfabeta) written by George Johansson

In a small studio, in a corner of her living-room in Solna, Anna Bengtsson paints the world in muted colors. Today, she will receive “Elsa Beskow-plaketten” for her picturebook illustrations, at the Gothenburg Bookfair.

The detailed illustrations in *Banvaktens barn* (“Children at the Railway”) (Tiden) and her lively pictures in *Fredrik*

*Matsson blir kär* (“Fredrik Mattson Falls in Love”) (Alfabeta) have been named 1993 year’s best picturebooks by children’s books librarians in Sweden.

/.../

The jury praises Anna Bengtsson for “her style being expressionistic bold, individual, and insightful.”

### *Feelings and moods*

With color and form, Anna Bengtsson conveys feelings and moods. The muted palette that is characteristic for her, are considered by some to be dirty and ugly. Others find it beautiful and interesting.

Anna Bengtsson almost never uses clean colors. She finds the right shades by mixing freely from the tubes of egg-tempera. With the muted colors, she wishes to create a complication in the illustrations, making them compound and interesting.

### *Uses humor*

She defends herself towards those who asks for illustrations in “light, clean, and happy colors”. She thinks that is as in-

genuous as asking her to illustrate with “fun images”.

– Adults underestimate children. They think that children only like happy and funny illustrations. I’m happy to use humor in my illustrations, but they need more dimensions than that, says Anna Bengtsson.

– As an illustrator you must let the words control the illustrations you create. What colors and shapes are there in the text?

Fredrik Matsson, a character created by George Johansson, is a seven-year-old boy with firm opinions. Anna Bengtsson has painted him with a compact body and round head.

One of Anna Bengtsson’s favorite colors is a dirty lemon one. When spring comes, and Fredrik Matsson’s big love, Amanda, finally notices him, Anna Bengtsson paints sky and birch leaves in lemon.

#### *A story about family*

A similar shade is found among the platelayer August and his family in *Banvaktsbarn* (“Children At the Railway“), a book that Anna Bengtsson’s mother, Margareta Bengtsson, wrote. It is a story about their family, a few generations back.

The full-page illustrations by Anna Bengtsson gives an insight into the family’s life, and the more detailed illustrations depicts knowledge about that particular era.

Eager as a scientist, she researches her illustrations. She considers facts to be important, the illustrations must be

correct, even if the size is small. She is for example very happy if an illustrated stamp is absolutely correct, even if it is barely visible in the printed book. She still ponders about how the locomotive Stark got coal and water; she never got a grip about the pumping mechanism, not even after a visit to the railroad museum.

#### *Writes too*

Curiosity and researcher’s ardor also lay behind her latest book, *Bollong-expeditionen* (“The Bolloon Expedition“) (Alfabet), in which she also wrote the text. It is about a group of scientist ants who invented a “air bolloon”. The ants describe their endeavors with brief, dry, scientific text, in distinct contrast to the lively illustrations.

The inspiration to the text’s style comes from Andrée and his expedition to the North pole. The book is a result if two very different perspectives on life, two perspectives that allures Anna Bengtsson.

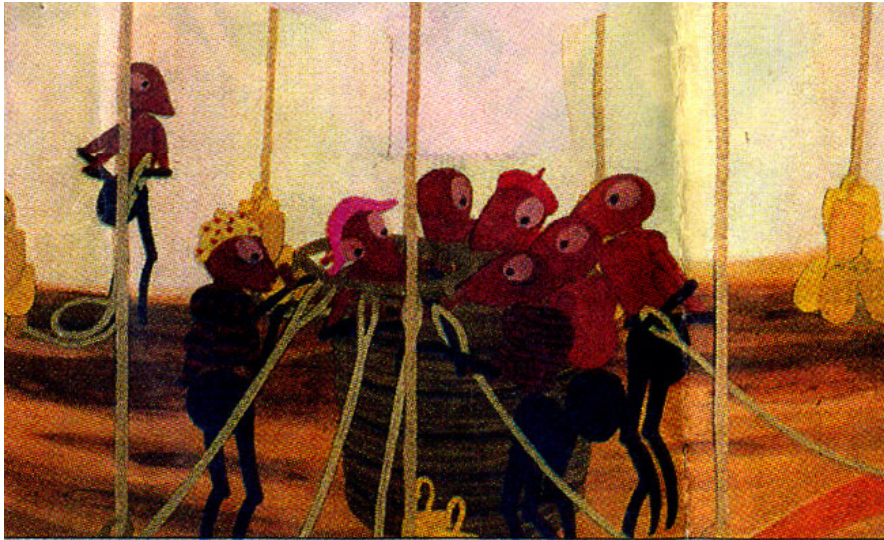
First, she is fascinated by small bugs. What is it like to be small and to see everything from beneath? And secondly, ever since she made two balloon journeys last summer, she is lured by the thought of seeing the world from above.

From beneath and from above together make ants on a balloon journey. Next time, they will embark on a submarine expedition.



# Anna Bengtsson's Balloon Lands in Berlin

*Written by Regine Nordström,  
and published in Norrbottenskuriren 10/2 2003*



SCIENTIST ANTS. In 1994, Anna Bengtsson's book *Bollongexpeditionen* was released. Tomorrow, Tuesday, the film with the same named is shown at the Berlin Film Festival.

It is really amazing to get to learn a new medium at the age of 50, Anna Bengtsson says.

And there is all possibility to create another film, as the story about the Balloon Expedition ends in a new discovery.

But let us start from the beginning. In 1994, a picturebook about some scientific female ants was released. They had built a balloon that was going to take them far beyond the confined anthill. The engineer Iver-Larsen kept a journal, while Trindberg and Krakel made the rest of the crew. With its extensive perspective, imaginative solutions, and funny reporting tone of words (the text is Iver-Larsen's journal) it gave us many delightful readings.

*"No Way"*

Anna Bengtsson continued to relate about the ants in *Undervåttensresan* ("The Journey Under Water") and *Myror i fara* ("Ants in Danger"), but the illustrator never kept a dream of becoming a filmmaker. Quite the opposite, in fact.

– I had seen Eva Lindström's hard work with her short films, so when producer Lisbet Gabrielsson, who worked at the Swedish Film Institute at that time, asked me if I wasn't planning on turning "The Balloon Expedition" into a movie I said: "No way". But she had planted a seed in my mind.

The seed rankled, and turned into a will, but it took a while before there were enough money to actually produce

the film. Among other things, Anna Bengtsson travelled to Oslo to pitch it. It was an event where film producers could pitch their ideas to financiers. They had five minutes to do so.

– Some of the others had prepared small shows. We only had the book and some film slides.

They didn't get the money they needed. Instead, the funding was solved through the Swedish Film Institute and their consult Margareta Norlin. Where it will run, apart from Gothenburg Film Festival and in Berlin, is not decided yet. The buyers at SVT (Swedish Television), for example, haven't got a chance to see it yet.

Film creator Gun Jacobson has been great support for Anna Bengtsson.

– She has been both my teacher in animation and my critic. I have made sample movies, and we have watched scenes together. She had opinions about timing, and when to hold a frame or expand a movement. It easily falls into a too quick pace, Anna Bengtsson says.

### *A Special Solution*

To get away from the need of having all the movements running from left to right, without having to create a large number of ants in different sizes, Anna Bengtsson came up with a special solution to fool the eye.

– I had the balloon, that flies in high grass, move in a diagonal direction. That way, the grass is both in front of and behind the balloon. That makes it look like the balloon flies aslant into the frame.

Let's see if you notice it while watching the film.

*Bollongexpeditionen* (“The Bolloon Expedition“) is made in a so-called cut-out technique. That means that all the characters are drawn at plastic, and then cut out. Every scene is arranged and photographed. For every movement you have to move the different parts for a new still shot, one walk cycle is for example four pictures. Between each take, you need to lift the glass frame keeping the image in place.

Anna Bengtsson might have appreciated an assistance for that last part of the work, but apart from that, she is rather happy about the fact that she did all the drawing and filming herself.

– The funniest part was to build a storyboard and build the film that way. Gun pointed out that it is important to remember that it is a film, not a filmed book, something that stimulated my way of thinking in different perspectives. I added some real closeups. And it was fun to make the backgrounds and characters, to create the different scenes, to work with the text, making it work in relation to the images.

But there were hard tasks too.

– The hardest part was to do the scenes in the camera. You know that you have made some errors, like keeping a piece of tape in the image, or forgetting to make a movement, and then you have to wait for the photos to develop before you can take a look at them. All the way up to the actual filming, the work has been creative.

*Specially written music*

In the role as director, she also became in charge of ordering the sound effects. Anna Bengtsson wanted a Yugoslavian wind orchestra, and the music was written by Jens Edenhed and Jonas Jersild from Stockholm based Süberstar Orkestar. And then the dialogue.

– Leif Westerlund, the film and dubbing editor, said: “It looks like they are talking” and wondered if there shouldn’t be any dialogue, Anna Bengtsson says.

And she added text. Behind the voices we find Vanna Rosenberg, as the narrator, Kajsa Ingemarsson, and Martina Haag.

All the events from the book appears in the film, but some of them are expanded. Unlike the 32 pages-long picturebook, which feels a bit cramped up according to Anna Bengtsson, the movie offers the possibility to let the events take up room.

– Films and picturebooks are different media. An illustration in a book gives the reader a chance to remain at it for a long time, and you can add details in the corners. In a scene in a film, focus must be on one event.

The work has taken two and a half years. During that time, Anna Bengtsson, an established if not greatly noticed illustrator, has kept up the work of creating books. She made the illustrations to *Arg som en varg* (“Angry As a Wolf”) by Birgit Lönn last summer, and she is currently working on a book about the Universe for LL-förlaget. As she is educated in graphic design at Konstfack, she

has also, on top of that, designed exhibitions, worked at Alfabet, painted, and is also a medical secretary. The last part was only because her parents thought she needed a job that gave money. And, of course, now she has also made an animated film.

– I almost find the film better than the book, Anna Bengtsson says.

# TRUST IN THE PICTURE

*Written by Viktoria Myrén,  
and published in Opsis Barnkultur no 1 2013*



*She is passionately interested in adventurers, likes words such as “expedition”, but prefers to travel through the media of literature. Illustrator and author Anna Bengtsson is driven by a quest for the ultimate color scale – one that holds both personal expression and the right atmosphere for a particular book.*

It’s often the case that she’s a genius by night, and washed out come morning.

“You can fool yourself,” says Anna. “When everything’s flowing of an evening, everything feels so incredibly good, but then when you look back at it in the morning, you don’t understand a thing.”

I’m sitting in the living room of her apartment in Björkhagen. Anna walks between me and the coffee maker with

the coffee pot in her hand and has to put the coffee on in the kitchen, but she keeps interrupting herself each time I ask a new question, to try to explain how everything is connected. This is the process. There are no shortcuts.

“You always have to believe that you’re starting to finish the picture and then realize that you’re not there yet. This happens a few times. This is the process you have to go through.”

The only thing that has become easier is trust.

“If you’ve experienced this a few times, then you know, but I’m much more self-assured when it comes to image management. Things may be as bad as it gets, but I don’t worry. I know I’ll reach the end and it will turn out all right.”

When it comes to text, she’s more uncertain. Although she’s been writing her own books since 1986, it’s pictures that are at the heart of her work.

“The pictures are central. This is my starting point and my world. I’ve known since elementary school that I want to draw and paint. I was a shy child, and if you notice that, you can express yourself in pictures and text, this encourages you,” she says.

Shy, but also stubborn when it comes to creating books. Anna was always determined to create books, despite her mother always wondering if she shouldn’t “apply for a job”.

The fact that Anna turned to picture books after her years at the University of Arts, Crafts and Design is because this is one of the few areas where you’re free to make pictures when you want to work with illustration. The first books she illustrated weren’t her own, but Anna notes that there’s “not an abundance of picture book scripts” and, like so many other illustrators, she started writing in order to initiate her own projects. She thinks it’s noticeable that it’s pictures that are the starting point for many young picture book creators.

“It’s the pictures that are advanced and well thought out. The emphasis is not on the text of the book, but on the pictures.

SHE HAS TRULY REALIZED the meaning of the text over the years. She picks up the book *Åskan kommer* (“Thunderstorm”), which is in the middle of a stack of books on the coffee table. She flicks through the pages, showing them to me. The pictures are extremely atmospheric, the text sparse. An editor thought that the pictures were so strong it might be possible to do away with the text, but it didn’t work out when Anna tried.

“The small amount of text is very important. I changed it in a couple of places where the text was too close to the picture. It’s important that the text adds something, like a description of feelings or sounds. It’s not possible to paint a rustle in the grass.

“And in some cases, comical points can arise where the text and image repeat one another. But it’s more important to keep asking yourself what you want to achieve.”

We talk more about that shy child or, now an adult, the introvert, which doesn’t at all appear to be the case while talking about her books in the living room. Nor in her very funny adult book *Du ska vara spännande och varm* (“You Should Be Exciting and Kind Hearted”), which is in part based on her own experiences of online dating.

“I can ponder it many times, that I

can see myself as very introverted but also sociable. But I think I can be very sociable for a much more limited time than my peers who are more extroverted. After a few hours at a party I wane a bit – I have to go home and refuel,” she says.

Over the years Anna has developed some fundamental themes that recur over and over in her books. Collectives are depicted in *Hela huset* (“The Whole House”), which is about an entire apartment building, and in *Ny frisyr* (“New Hairdo”), the family-owned hairdressing salon. At the heart of both books is social life is – the meeting of people, as in last year’s *En hög med snö* (“A Heap of Snow”) where children gather around a pile of snow. Anna likes to find clear contexts and portray whole environments in pictures.

“I like collective stories – I see humankind as part of something bigger. I have a hard time dealing with the modern individual-centered view of man. It’s some kind of instinctive basic attitude that exists, not something I consciously think about when I produce my stories.”

Nature is another major theme.

“I’ve walked a lot in the woods nearby,” she says, and sweeps her arm out against the window.

The Nacka Nature Reserve begins just a few hundred meters from her apartment, and in the hall stands a pair of skis that she will strap on after lunch, unless it gets too cold.

“It has been enriching to walk to the woods and take in the late autumn dark-

ness and the trees’ wet shining trunks. I wanted to write a chronicle and was looking for a perspective that could give me a different story. It has almost become a method in itself to find that different perspective, as in *Det kittlar när löven kommer* (“It Tickles When the Leaves Come”), where I let the tree become the narrator.”

She likes it best when different ideas come at once from different directions, as in *Bollongexpeditionen* (“The Balloon Expedition”), which came out in 1994. She thinks the book was born from the best that a book can be born out of – her own powerful experiences, and an interest and commitment that are transformed into an idea for a book.

“I had the opportunity to go on a balloon trip over Stockholm, and shortly after I got my hands on the book *Ingenjör Andréas luftfärd*, which is based on diaries that were found 33 years after they had disappeared.

“For me, this set in motion my interest in reading old expedition stories. I read everything I found and it completely gripped me. It was like being in another world.”

THERE WAS IMMENSE HOPE in building such a large project together with sponsors, constructing the balloon, the invention, the preparations, and the desire for glory and fame.

“Then it all quickly comes crashing down to earth, and it becomes all about surviving. Human behavior is really fascinating in the sense that man wants



challenges, but also in that there are physical conditions to take into account. For some of us, the adrenaline is quick to kick in, while others can hold out a lot longer.”

Have you never been attracted to mountaineering and adventure yourself?

“No, I’m a nervous type. I’d never do anything like that, and I’m grateful that I don’t feel the need to,” says Anna, laughing.

She’s one of 31 selected illustrators whose work will represent Sweden at the children’s book fair in Bologna in March. She likes it when authors from different countries can share their experiences. Although she won’t be attending the Bologna fair in person, she talks about a ten-day meeting in Goa with Indian colleagues.

“The idea was that we would develop book projects together in small groups. I worked with another Swedish illustrator and an Indian author. We had our own strong reasoning about nature and the weather in our different parts of the world, which resulted in such a developed story that we saw an opportunity for publication, even if we didn’t reach that point.”

Anna’s interest in travel and expeditions is palpable in her books, not least in *Bollongexpeditionen* (“The Bolloon Expedition”), which is based on the ant engineer Iver-Larsen’s diary entries. The book combines two ideas – the desire to see things from another perspective (an insect’s) and a passion for expeditions.

“I like to see humankind as part of a larger context, not as the pinnacle of creation. By using small insects like ants in a large-scale project like a balloon flight, it’s as if to make fun of humankind’s view of itself,” Anna explains.

She believes it’s important to feed children with this kind of broadening perspective and other worldviews. To give man a distorting mirror.

After *Bollongexpeditionen* (“The Bolloon Expedition”), Anna spent several years animating the story as a film. This was extensive and laborious work that made her long to create books again.

“But then everything crashed. There was a kind of fear and emptiness. I poured out ideas to the publisher in a kind of hysteria, and most of them were turned down.”

She thinks she presented ideas that were too unfinished, while the dialogue with the publisher was not the best.

She continued with her sketches and script for *Gummi-Lisa hittar hem* (“Lisa-Duck Lost at Sea”), which a good Japanese friend and translator showed to a Japanese publisher who became interested. It was therefore first published in Japan, shortly followed by Sweden.

Maybe the Swedish publisher didn’t have the confidence that Anna has herself – the knowledge that it will be good, the knowledge that the sketches are far from the finished book and the vision she has in her mind.

“It taught me that I cannot present things at a premature stage. I think the story only starts to take shape once I



get started with the colors. Only when the pictures look more finished does the feeling of the book come through. This is the stage I work towards – it has to gel together in a number of ways, artistically as well as by way of striking a personal tone in the harmony of colors.”

In concrete terms, she also had leverage her stubbornness and just keep working, because then it all worked out in the end. Today, she tries to be more on the leading edge of her ideas and always has something else simmering when she has finished a book.

She opens the door to her study to show me what she’s working on right now. There are various printouts from the first book in the series *Små resor* (“Little Trips“), which will be published in the autumn. It’s about a coffee pot that goes out on a journey. The whole idea was born by chance when Anna was due to host a workshop for six-year-olds and needed a story to show how you can work with a main character and use different colors.

“I became quite fond of this idiotic and simple idea, which turned into two books on the same topic – one about a pacifier that finds a home, and the other about the Ball family on holiday. Since the coffee pot came into being completely without the intention that it would become a book, it could detach itself somewhat unexpectedly.”

She picks and chooses from color backgrounds made from gouache, watercolor, and crayon. For the most part, she sketches her book projects in Photo-

shop and then paints by hand. In her latest projects, this has been with gouache paint. But the coffee pot is made almost entirely using Photoshop. Various painted structures are scanned and then used to “paint” with.

“I think it’s fun to mix the mechanical and the handmade. I would never like to work solely with a computer, with those kinds of flat colors, but I like mixing things up and seeing how I can achieve a different expression.”

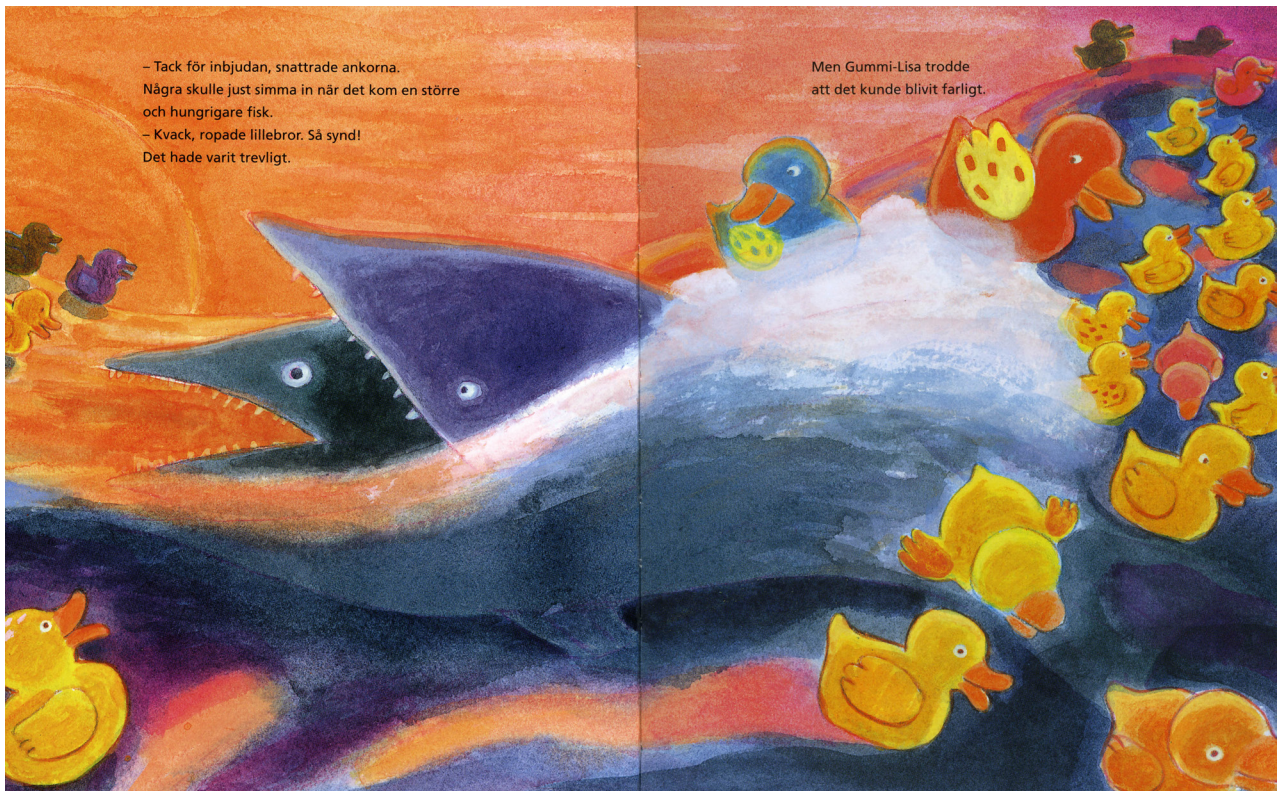
WHEN DEVELOPING AN IDEA FOR A NEW PICTURE BOOK, Anna thinks it’s difficult to sit at a desk and concentrate for long periods of time. She sits for a while, writes, sketches, and then she has to do something else.

“I have to keep my mind free and open for things to change. When a problem arises in the story, something to do with the structure, I put the problem in my mind, leave home, and take a walk in the forest to find solutions by moving around.

“Perhaps there’s something in being out and about that helps to unblock things, or perhaps it’s purely physical in getting my blood pumping,” she says, laughing.

# Awards

- Elsa Beskow-plaketten (Swedish Library Association's Award for Best Picture Book), 1994 for *Banvaktsbarn* ("Children At The Railway"), text by Margareta Bengtsson, and *Fredrik Matsson flyttar* ("Fredrik Matsson Is Moving"), text by George Johansson.
- Nominated to The August Prize (founded by the Swedish Publishers' Association) in the category Best children's book, 2005 for *Gummi-Lisa hittar hem* ("Lisa-Duck Lost At Sea").
- IBBY Honour List 2008 for *Det kittlar när löven kommer* ("It Tickles When the Leaves Come").
- Författarfondens särskilda författarpenning (A special allowance for authors from The Swedish Author's Fund) 2011 – 2020



*Gummi-Lisa hittar hem, 2005*

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- *Kan man äta hattar?* ("Eating Hats?"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 1988
- *Kookaburran och Sjöhästen* ("The Bird And The Sea horse"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 1991
- *Bollongexpeditionen. Ingenjör Iver-Larsens dagboksanteckningar upphittade av Anna Bengtsson* ("The Bolloon Expedition"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 1994
- *Undervåttensresan. Trindbergs brev till stacken* ("The Journey Under Water"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 1995
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After H.C.Andersen's *Tordyveln*
- *Myror i fara. En räddningsexpedition.* ("Ants in Danger"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 1998
- *Resan till Bortomhavet* ("The Journey To Faraway Sea") Alfabeta Stockholm 2000
- *Åskan kommer* ("Thunderstorm"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2004
- *Gummi-Lisa hittar hem* ("Lisa-Duck Lost At Sea"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2005
- *Det kittlar när löven kommer* ("It tickles When the Leaves Come"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2006
- *Hela huset* ("The Whole House"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2007
- *Du ska vara spännande och varm* ("You Should Be Exciting and Kind Hearted"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2008. For adult readers.
- *Ny frisyr* ("New Hairdo"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2011
- *En hög med snö* ("A Heap of Snow"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2012
- *Kaffekanna åker bort* ("Coffe Pot Out and About"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2013.  
From the series *Små resor* ("Little Trips").
- *Farfars mammas soffå* ("Grandad's Mother's Sofa"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2014
- *Vart ska napparna* ("Where are the Dummies going?"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2015.  
From the series *Små resor* ("Little Trips").
- *Bollar tar semester* ("Balls on Holiday"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2017.  
From the series *Små resor* ("Little Trips").
- *Barr är bäst* ("In the Anthill"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2018
- *I garderoben – väskor pratar resor* ("The Wardrobe – Bags Talking Travels"), Alfabeta, Stockholm, 2020

## With Texts From Other Authors

- *Ur katten Morris dagbok* ("Diary of Morris the Cat"), Manus Förlag, Stockholm, 1983  
(Written by Britta Thomander)
- *Galna gudar och glömda gudinnor* ("Crazy Gods and Forgotten Goddesses"), LT:s förlag, 1985 (Written by Birgitta Onsell)
- *Han som inte kunde åka tåg* ("He Who Couldn't Go by Train"), Fripress, 1985  
(Written by Gunder Andersson)
- *Pia Paloma* ("One Little Dove"), Korpen, Stockholm, 1988 (Written by Lena Kallenberg)
- *Jordens Moder i Norden* ("Mother of Earth in the North"), Carlsons, Stockholm, 1990  
(Written by Birgitta Onsell)
- *Skorppoeten* ("Trouble In The Bakery"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 1991  
(Written by Lena Kallenberg)
- *Fredrik Matsson flyttar* ("Fredrik Matsson Is Moving"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 1992  
(Written by George Johansson)
- *Fredrik Matsson blir kär* ("Fredrik Matsson Falls In Love"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 1993  
(Written by George Johansson)
- *Banvaktsbarn* ("Children At The Railway"), Tiden, Stockholm, 1993  
(Written by Margareta Bengtsson).
- *Farbror ärende* ("Uncle Help Me"), Norstedts, Stockholm, 1995  
(Written by Lena Kallenberg)
- *Fredrik Matsson vinner en vän* ("Fredrik Matsson Gets A Friend"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 1995 (Written by George Johansson)
- *Bråttombråttom* ("Hurryhurry"), Natur och Kultur, Stockholm, 1996  
(Written by Siv Widerberg)
- *Aktarej Thomas* ("Take Care Thomas"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 1996  
(Written by Berit Åberg)
- *Kampen i underjorden* ("The Struggle Down Under"), LL-förlaget, Stockholm, 1997  
(Written by Bisse Falk)
- *Potatislov* ("Autumn Feries"), Tiden, Stockholm, 1998  
(Written by Margareta Bengtsson)
- *Vildvinter* ("Wild Winter"), Natur & Kultur, Stockholm, 1999  
(Written by Anna-Karin Palm)
- *När min bror kommer hem* ("My Brother Will Return"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 2000  
(Written by Margareta Bengtsson)
- *När mormor glömde att hon var död* ("When Grandma Forgot She Was Dead"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 2001 (Written by Ylva Karlsson)

- *Födelsedagspresenten* ("The Birthday Present"), Rabén & Sjögren, Stockholm, 2001 (Written by Helena Dahlgren)
- *Välkommen till tippen* ("Welcome to the Dump"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 2001 (Written by Anneli Jordahl)
- *Arg som en varg* ("Angry As A Wolf"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 2002 (Written by Birgit Lönn)
- *Ut i rymden* ("Universe"), LL-förlaget, Stockholm, 2003 (Written by Marie Rådbo)
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- *En natt på jorden* ("One Night on Earth"), Alfabet, Stockholm, 2008 (Written by Stefan Casta)
- *Britta börjar i klosteskolan* ("Britta Begins Nunnery School"), Föreningen Klosterliv i Vreta, Vreta kloster, 2009 (Written by Margareta Bengtsson)
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- *Utflyktbok för rim och ramsare* ("Expeditions For Small People"), Hippo, Stockholm, 2014 (Written by Åsa Lind)
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- *Brum - skogens djur i ord och bild* ("Animals In the Woods") Hippo, Stockholm, 2019 (Written by Åsa Lind)

## Participation in Anthologies (illustration)

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- *Barndomslandets klassiska sagor* ("Classic Fairytales for Children"), Bonnier Junior, Stockholm, 1986
- *Konsten att börja skolan* ("The Art of Starting School"), Natur & Kultur, Stockholm, 1989 (Text by Hans Peterson)
- *Sånggåvan* ("The Song Gift"), Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm, 1989
- *Gräset skrattar* ("The Grass is Laughing"), Bonnier Junior, Stockholm, 1991 (Poetry by Britt G. Hallqvist)
- *Sagolådan* ("Box of Fairytales"), Lärarförbundet förlag, Stockholm, 1994 (Text by Helena Dahlbäck)
- *Sångskatten* ("The Song Treasure"), Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm, 1994
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- *Bland tomtar och troll* ("With Trolls and Goblins"), Semic, Stockholm, 2000  
(Text by Ulf Stark)
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- *Min skattkammare 5, De fyra årstiderna* ("My Treasury 5"), Natur & Kultur, Stockholm, 2002
- *Stora högläsningboken* ("Big Book to Read Together"), Bonnier Carlsen, Stockholm, 2004
- *Silvriga barnkammarboken* ("The Silver Nursery Book"), Bonnier Carlsen, Stockholm, 2004
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- *Du och jag, min skatt* ("You and Me, My Treasure"), Bonnier Carlsen, Stockholm, 2013
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*I garderoben*, 2020. The sailor's bag's journey.

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## ***Bollongexpeditionen***

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## ***Undervåttensresan***

- *Rejsen under vandet. Snudeberg skriver hjem*, Sesam, 1995 (Danish)

## ***Banvaktbarn***

- *Børnene i ledvogterhuset*, Sesam 1993 (Danish)

## ***Fredrik Matsson blir kär***

- *Frederik Madsen blir forelsket*, Sesam 1993 (Danish)

## ***Aktarej Thomas***

- *Take care Thomas*, private, 1996, (Japanese)

## ***Vildvinter***

- *Les Léopard des Neiges*, Møtus 2002 (French)

## ***Kurt doesn't want to fly***

- *Fukuinkan*, 2000 (Japanese)

## ***Gummi-Lisa hittar hem***

- *Fukuinkan*, Shoten, 2005 (Japanese)
- *Gummi-Lise finder hjem*, Alfabet/Läsrörelsen, 2005 (Danish)
- *Gummi-Lisa finner veien hjem*, Alfabet/Läsrörelsen 2005 (Norwegian)
- *Kumi-Liisa löytää kotiin*, Alfabet/Läsrörelsen 2005, (Finnish)

## ***En natt på jorden***

- *En nat på jorden*, Klematis 2009 (Danish)

## ***Ny frisyr***

- *Fukuinkan Shoten*, 2013. (Japanese)

### *Vad säger fågeln?*

- Fukuinkan 2014 (Japanese)

### *Du ska få gröt och en lillasyster*

- *En lillesøster til dig*, Klematis, 2016 (Danish)

### *Farfars mammas soffa*

- *Prababiccina pohovka*, Meander 2016, (Czech)

### *Kaffekanna reser bort*

- Korean Herman Hesse Co., 2013 (Korean)

### *Barr är bäst*

- *Vild med grannåle*, Klematis 2018 (Danish)

### *Åskan kommer*

- 2005 (Suryoyo)

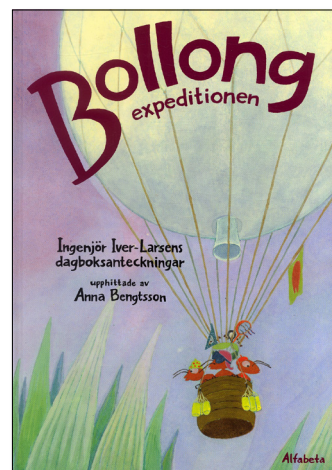




# Ten Important Titles

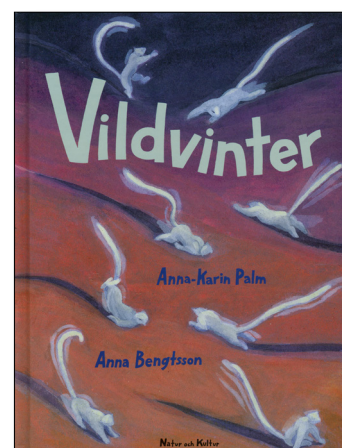
- *Bollongexpeditionen* ("The Bolloon Expedition"), Alfabeta, 1994

The first title in a trilogy of picturebooks about a group of ants led by the explorer Engineer Iver- Larsen and their exciting adventures in the big wide world far away from the ant hill. Their expeditions are recounted in diary form in the vein of the historic polar explorers. Based on the story of Engineer Andrée's expedition.



- *Vildvinter* ("Wild Winter"), Natur och Kultur, 1999

Strange things happens in town at dark winter nights. The snow leopards that 's sleeping in the park during daytime awakes and slides down from the trees. They are playing and dancing on the ice and sometimes scares a little girls who are crossing the street and happens to look into their dark eyes.



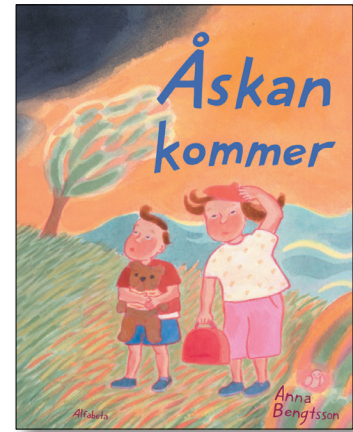
- *Välkommen till tippen* ("Welcome to the Dump"), Alfabeta 2001

What is happening in the dump nowadays? It 'not just to throw things away – Freddie and Mork has to guide those who wants to get rid of old mattresses, newspapers and wheels. It can be used again! Remarkable things can be found on the dump – when Freddie's daughter comes visiting they've just found a little rabbit. Someone has to take care of it!



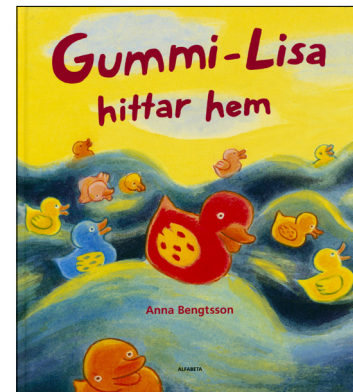
- *Åskan kommer* ("Thunderstorm"), Alfabet, 2004

It's summer and the sun is shining. Two little children are playing in the garden with their teddy bear. Suddenly it gets windy and a large dark cloud approaches. The family goes inside. There is a roaring thunderstorm with lightning and rain. But what about Teddy? He was left behind.



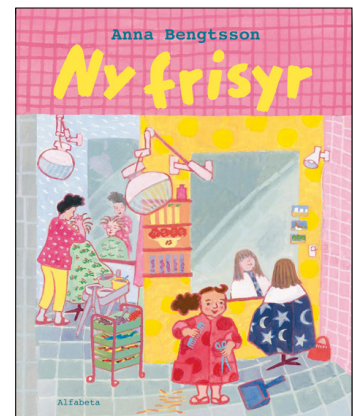
- *Gummi-Lisa hittar hem* ("Lisa-Duck Lost At Sea"), Alfabet, 2006

In the big toy factory there is a machine making rubber ducks and one day Lisa-Duck and her brother came out of the machine. All the rubber ducks were loaded into bags and on to a ship. One stormy night one bag falls over board and the ducks spill out. That is when the big adventure begins. The ducks drift across the ocean and dream about a place to call home. Eventually they find it, but the way there is arduous.



- *Ny frisyr* ("New Hairdo"), Alfabet, 2011

Stella's mother Mimmi has a hair salon and Stella often spends time there. She helps out with various little tasks, but also takes the opportunity to add to her collection of hair braids. We get to meet regular customers, children who doesn't like having thier hair cut and various interesting characters. A book with lots of recognition and humour.



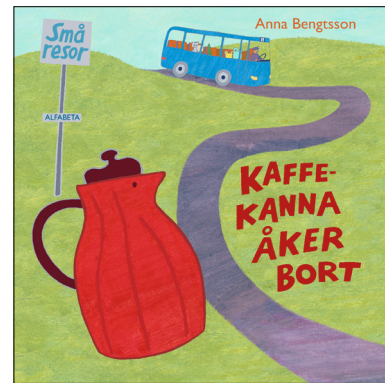
- *En hög med snö* ("A Heap of Snow"), Alfabet, 2012

A story about the rise and fall of a heap of snow and all the exciting things that happen on top of it and around it. The heap of snow has an almost magnetic pull on all the children who pass it and It grows higher and higher each day. But in the end, spring arrives and the heap starts to shrink until there is only a little dirty pile of gravel left. The heap is already forgotten.



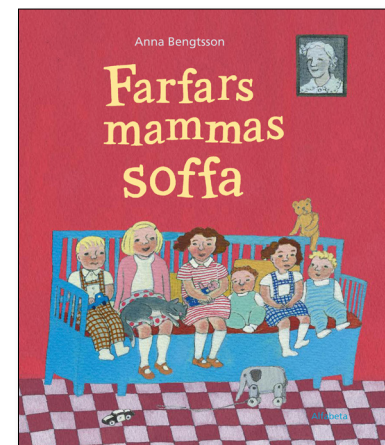
- *Kaffekanna åker bort* ("Coffee Pot Out and About"), Alfabetabeta, 2013

A coffee pot is waiting for the bus. But where is the coffee pot going? Up and down hills, along winding roads. Passengers getting on and off, a cucumber there, a bag here. Finally the coffee pot arrives! It has been invited to a tea party in the coffee cup village. This is the first book in a new series called *Små resor* ("Little Trips") for the younger children. Short and simple stories full of humour and warmth with colourful illustrations.



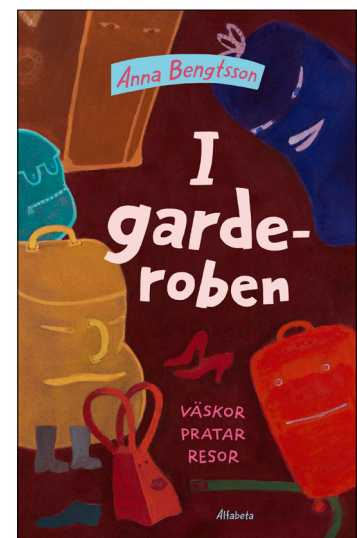
- *Farfars mammas soffå* ("Granddad's Mother's Sofa"), Alfabetabeta, 2014

A history lesson told from the perspective of a wooden kitchen sofa over a period of 100 years from the time it is bought by a young couple, Gustav and Nanny, in 1913 to when their great granddaughter Matilda is told the story of the sofa and that of her family in 2003. We learn how society changed, how inventions changed people's lives and how the world wars and other big events affected them.



- *I garderoben – Väskor pratar resor* ("The Wardrobe – Bags Talking Travels"), Alfabetabeta, 2020

The wardrobe is a place where all sorts of old stuff gather. Often there is a collection of different kinds of bags. They all have their own story. But what happens when a new one is introduced to the gang? About new vs old, about belonging and being needed.



# Sent To The Jury

- *Bollongexpeditionen* (“The Bolloon Expedition”), Alfabet, 1994
- *Ny frisyr* (“New hair Do”), Alfabet, 2011
- *En hög med snö* (“A Heap of Snow”), Alfabet, 2012
- *Farfars mammas soffå* (“Granddad’s Mother’s Sofa”), Alfabet, 2014
- *I garderoben – Väskor pratar resor* (“In the Wardrobe – Bags Talking Travels”), Alfabet, 2020

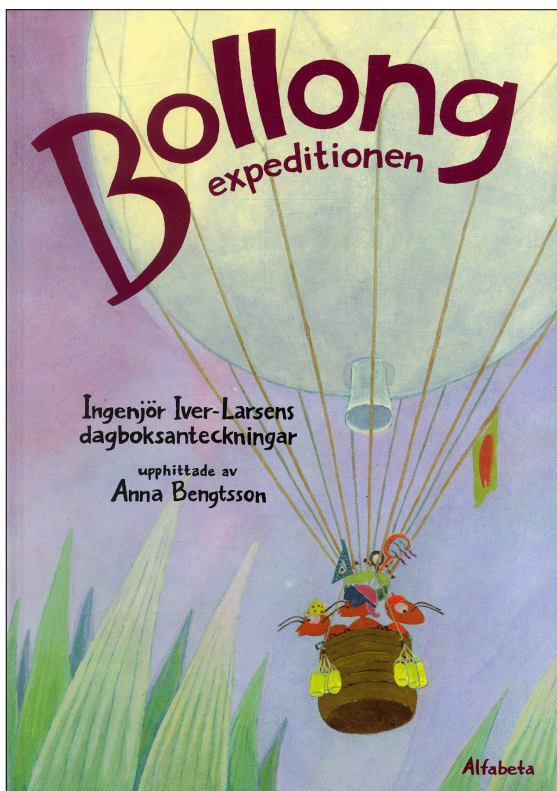


*En hög med snö*, 2012

# Reviews

## Worker-ants as Flying Heroes

*Review of Bollongexpeditionen ("The Bolloon Expedition")  
by Dag Hedberg, published in Westmanlands Läns Tidning,  
18 January 1995*



A storm of cheers can be heard when the balloon rises towards the sky. The queen has given the flag to the three members of the expedition. It is time for Iver-Larsen to show his calculations are accurate.

Together with his brave companions Trindberg and Krakel, he quickly rises

towards the treetops. Professor O'No is skeptical. He claims no one can fly without wings.

With Andrée's balloon journey in her mind, Anna Bengtsson has created a fun and intelligent parody of expeditions and scientific exactness.

Efficiently, she punctuates the halo that surrounds the mythical adventurers.

The main characters in Anna Bengtsson's *Bollongexpeditionen* ("The Bolloon Expedition") are three female worker-ants. Full of inventiveness and with hard work, they strive to widen their horizon and get closer to the truth.

It is refreshing how everything is seen from below in *Bollongexpeditionen* ("The Bolloon Expedition"). A whole new world opens up to the ants in the balloon. The cow in the meadow resembles a giant mountain. The wasps are as big as the balloon basket and the giant beetles are, of course, cars. The move around in an anthill of proportions the ants have never seen before.

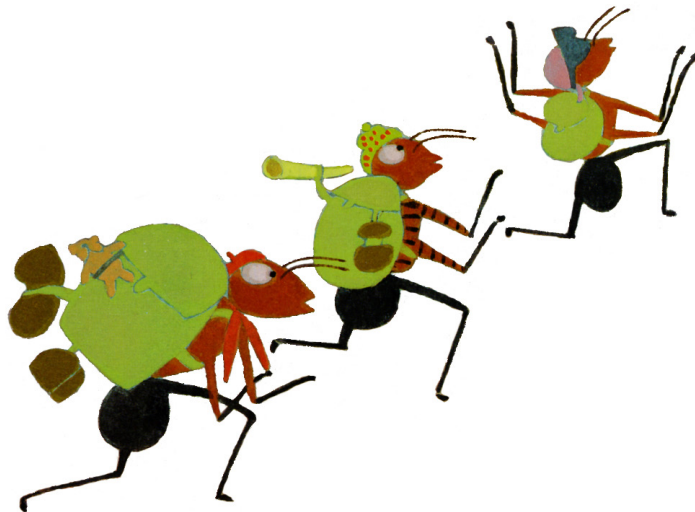
Anna Bengtsson plays with perspec-

tive. Sometimes, it can be hard to follow, but in most cases, she gives us a grand adventure filled with humoristic segments.

Above all, she uses the illustrations to tell the story. They are in the big format, naïve style we are used to from her earlier books. The text is, on the other hand, severe and dry. The scientific tone becomes a great contrast to the fantasy and inventiveness. The ants have their

own weights and measurements. The balloon rises in antmeters and the packing is weighed in kiloneedles.

The ants don't get much use of their discoveries, but they are celebrated by the masses. Even though they discovered a great deal, they were not able to draw any conclusions from their discoveries. It is easy to draw parallels to great projects performed by humans.



## Ants Are Flying. Exciting Balloon Expedition.

*Review of Bollongexpeditionen ("The Bolloon Expedition") by Ulla Rhedin, Ph.D., published in Dagens Nyheter, 10 December 1994*

*Some ants release their balloon and start on a dangerous journey on high level. Suddenly they are hit by a terrible smell. A cow's backside can be seen, with buzzing blow flies around. Skillful! is Ulla Rhedin's opinion about Anna Bengtsson's new picturebook.*

Here is this fall's funniest picturebook for all ages! Anna Bengtsson must have had lots of fun while putting together this meticulous scientific expedition. On a child's level, *Bollongexpeditionen* ("The Bolloon Expedition"), with the subtitle "Engineer Iver-Larsen's diary notes, found by Anna Bengtsson", relates an exciting ants' expedition. The research trip is prepared in every detail and documented, and above all spiced with sententious scientific observations. The ants let their balloon lift and start a dangerous journey on high level. The text reports the events in the short style of a diary, where the scientific love for details is easily caricatured. But the story gets its humoristic load first when the text meets the illustrations.

"We fly towards north. Altitude 250 antmeters. In front of us high black-and-white mountains can be seen. We approach fast. Terrible smell. Trindberg faints, I hold my breath."

The illustration shows a giant close-

up of a cow's backside where the blow flies are buzzing around the tail. In a distance, we can see the actors of the balloon frantically throwing out bags of seeds to help the balloon lift from the terrible smell the text tells us about. They succeed.

On the next spread it is reported: "Better smell but has ended up in a swarm of nasty buzzer coming from the mountains. Krakel scare them off with the fart-gun. T. recovers."

I can easily imagine the older child's amusement when "reality" behind the comically twisted ants' perspective gradually is revealed in the illustrations. This humoristic take is heightened and reaches climax when the ants sail over a "giant anthill" and when they, at an emergency landing in a bowl of cherry jam, first meet humans.

The illustrations show portions of the reality the ants helplessly are trying to puzzle together: A close-up on some skin, a mysterious glass object, a giant piece of food that must be eaten in all its largeness. The child will guess, of course, and the next spread confirms it: a hand, a glass of juice, a regular bread. This play with reality is an example of great children's humor, but also funny for the adult reader. A joy to read out loud.

For most adults, it is clear that Anna Bengtsson leans against engineer Andrée's diary from – and most likely also the documentary by PO Sundman about – the fatal balloon journey with “Örnen” in 1887, together with Fränkel and Strindberg. If you look closer into that trip, you will also notice that Bengtsson amuses herself by letting her adventure take place during the exact same dates, between 11th and 14th of July! The fact that the leader of “The Balloon Expedition” is a female scientist is a certain point in itself, not to mention strictly ant-logical. Anna Bengtsson clearly shows that the picturebook medium – although demanding strict and reduced storytelling – doesn't have to smooth out the act of telling. She neither shy away from chronological retro-

spect of the hectically months preceding the adventure, nor does she travesty old times frame stories. In the start of the story (July 11th), a sour-faced ant with a walking stick comes to the laboratory. Iver-Larsen coldly establishes: “Professor O'No is skeptical. Says no one can fly without wings. We will see.” In the last act (October 30th) that same professor is fleeing in panic with his stick raised. Iver-Larsen just invented “The Under Water Boat” and is planning a trip in the forest brook. She states matter-of-factly the traditional skeptical ways of the professor: “Says you can't move in wetness without fins. We will see, we will see.”

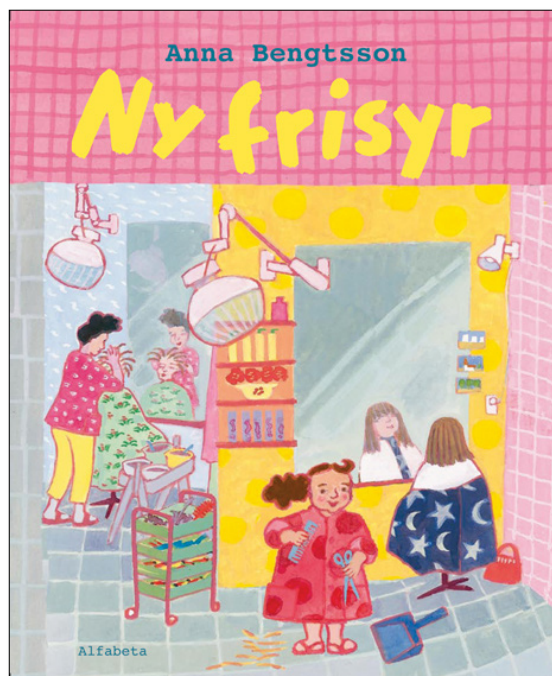
It is skillful! And for us, it sounds like a promise of upcoming reports. That would be something to look forward to.





# Review of *Ny frisyr* ("New Hairdo") by Helene Ehriander

*Published by BTJ Bibliotekstjänst, 2011*



Anna Bengtsson is one of our most creative picturebook creators, and constantly finds new way to describe the world around us, no matter if it is a house, a tree, or a hair salon. In this new book, a hair salon is depicted together with the people working there, and those who come for a new hairdo. There are stories within the story, and every spread is a surprise with new characters, varying takes on the narration, different illustration techniques, and well-thought-out layout, that has been adjusted to fit the different focus that are presented. The picturebook is well put together, as the main character actually is the hair salon, something that ties together the differ-

ent people and scenes to a lively entirety. A big portion of the humor can be found in the illustrations, and the attentive reader gets the points that are made in the interplay between text and illustrations, as well as in those things that are left unsaid. The illustrations contain a lot of details to discover and explore. This is an attractive picturebook that will last for many readings, and appeal to both children and adults, albeit in different ways.

## Wide-Eyed Everyday Observations

*Review of Ny frisyr ("New Hairdo") by Kristin Hallberg, published in Svenska Dagbladet, 11 October 2011*

At work. In Anna Bengtsson's *Ny Frisyr* ("New Hairdo") every scene is a study of the essence of a hair salon. It is exciting, jubilant, amazing, and ordinary, according to Kristin Hallberg.

Like in the books *Välkommen till tippen* ("Welcome to the Dump") and *Hela huset* ("The Whole House"), Anna Bengtsson depicts in her latest picturebook, *Ny frisyr* ("New Hairdo"), the collective situation that is a workplace. Using the work at a hair salon as a hub, she shapes a symphonically story where voices and wills from different places meet. Grandma is by the cashier, big brother has his own customers, and Stella's mother is taking care of hers.

Through the eyes of the young girl Stella, the wide-eyed perspective of children's literature is maintained. Even if Stella is not the narrator, and the adults are the dominating characters, it is with the girl's eyes and ears the salon is looked upon. Children who want and don't want to get their hairs cut, men and women with stories from their workplaces and lives. Memories, dreams, and wishes whirl around like locks of hair.

Anna Bengtsson uses the hair salon as the room, as a space, as pattern in clothes, capes and cloths, as stream of

events – it is exciting, jubilant, amazing, and ordinary. It is a world of its own, and Bengtsson draws its map over full-spread interiors. These are complemented by close-ups where particularly interesting situations are looked upon.

Stella appears on every page, in her shiny red coat, always looking, listening, sweeping, constantly brisk and curious. Sure, everything is fascinating from the childhood perspective, but Bengtsson maintain the demands of the workplace portrayal by showing different work tasks, like letting the customer look at the new hairdo in a neck mirror, shampooing, blow-drying, and the fatigue at the end of a long day with aching feet and aching back.

Every scene can be said to work as a portrait, a study over the essence of the hair salon. You feel tempted to talk about the picturebook's Zola. Reality should be looked upon with an objective, almost scientific, intent. And just like with Zola or Strindberg, the richness in detail and the openness become esthetical diversity.

When I reviewed *Hela huset* ("The Whole House"), I wrote that Anna Bengtsson would not be Anna Bengtsson if she didn't find her very own take on handicraft portrayals. I can say the same today.

In “New Hairdo”, she shows how a picturebook story about a workplace through the collective genre’s realistic telling patterns can develop and help take back the non-fiction picturebook as alluring children’s literature.



## Review of *En hög med snö* ("A Heap of Snow") by Kerstin Hagstrand-Velicu

*Published by BTJ Bibliotekstjänst, 2012*

Can a heap of snow be the starting point for a picturebook? Yes of course, at least if you are called Anna Bengtsson. Everything in the book evolves around the newly fallen snow that has been shoveled into a great heap of snow. A heap that you can slide down, or lose your doll in. The children love the heap, and mothers and fathers need to stop and let the children play on their way to day-care. The text is short, with only a few sentences per page, and it is placed in the illustrations that spans over a whole spread. The light and the mood in the illustrations are almost magical. Exactly the way it is, a snowy December day. The illustrations reminds you about the way the first snow smells, all the muffled sounds and the way the wet flakes stick to your clothes and in your hair. The colors are subdued and deep, no contours. The illustrations also express the children's playfulness and noise. It is fun with parents who are checking their phones while the children are playing. The winter ends, and from the heap only some gravel remains, no one remembers the snow anymore.

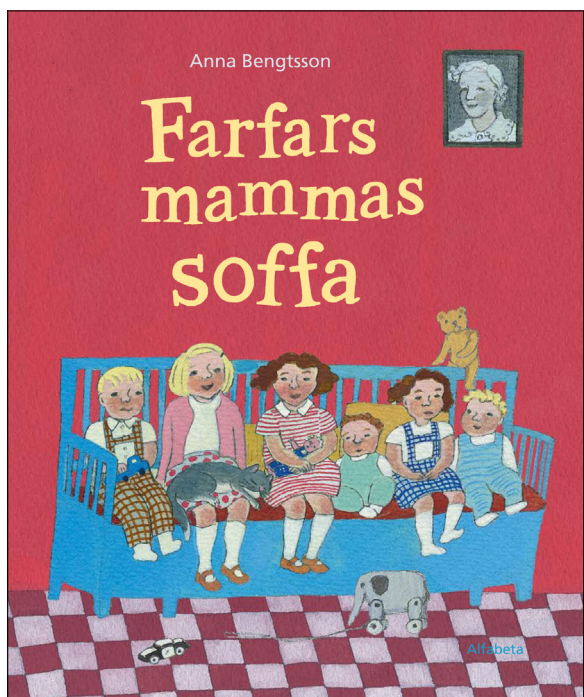
Anna Bengtsson has produced several picturebooks, and among my favorites



are three books about ants on adventure, *Bollongexpeditionen* ("The Bolloon Expedition") (1994), *Undervåttensresan* ("The Journey Under Water") (1995) and *Myror i fara* ("Ants in Danger") (1998).

# Review of *Farfars mammas soffan* ("Granddad's Mother's Sofa") by Eva E:son Fransson

*Published by BTJ Bibliotekstjänst, 2014*



Everyone has a story tell, even a sofa! This particular, beloved piece of furniture has been in the family for almost hundred years and is longing to share some of its memories. The first page in the book shows the family tree, and I find myself returning there several times, following the generations during the story. We get to follow the family over the years, with some important features from history (women's suffrage, the water closet, the telephone, television, etc.) and world events (first and second world war). The sofa, as the narrator, relates about the change from being the center of family life, to end up in the attic, to be needed once more. The author has

illustrated every spread with her own water-color illustrations. They are filled with details typical for the different periods and must be studied closely in order to discover it all. In the margins, there are small funny pictures with entertaining and informative texts. Apart from conveying facts about the Swedish Welfare State in a simple, informal manner, *Farfars mammas soffan* ("Granddad's Mother's Sofa") will also work as an excellent base for group discussions in classes with younger children. In the end, we find some general facts, meant to enhance the reader's curiosity to keep learning more about history.

# A Sofa Leads Way Through a Historic Sweden

*Review of Farfars mammas soffas ("Granddad's Mother's Sofa")  
by Lotta Olsson, published in Dagens Nyheter, 27 December 2014*

A well-made furniture can survive several generations, and in Anna Bengtsson's new picturebook it is a blue kitchen sofa. Simple and functional, straight bars in the back and armrest. "Straight ones are easy to clean, and modern", Nanny points out when she and her husband Olof buy it at a fair in Gothenburg 1915. They take the sofa home by horse and carriage, and when their son Henrik is old enough to need his own bed, the sofa is ready for him. At night, the family removes the lid, and place it against the wall, Henrik, dressed in his night shirt, is getting his ears washed.

That is one of Anna Bengtsson's characteristics, this thorough account of how the world actually is. Hjalmar puts some wood in the fire, the water bucket is placed next to the stove, and the sink is just a sink with a tap.

Accuracy might sound like a boring feature, or perhaps obvious, but Anna Bengtsson is quite unusual with her detail-filled thoroughness that never becomes pedantic but give life to the illustrations. It is a reminder of Garth William's soft pencil drawings in Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House on the Prairie", same concreteness that fires the imagination and gives a deeper understanding of past times.

The sofa quickly becomes the natural safe place in the kitchen, a central point everyone passes. The family moves their furniture to bigger apartments, it gets painted red, then green, then blue again. Children and adults sit on it at uncountable gatherings, at night, cats and children are sleeping in it, it listens to everything that is said, has its own thoughts about most things.

While the children dream of future jobs, the sofa dreams about "becoming a boat and see the world", and at the bottom of that spread, Anna Bengtsson allows the sofa to sail away with four of its people and the flag raised. At the end of second world war, the sofa keeps a sleeping Norwegian man, and the sofa is "the only one knowing he was carrying a gun".

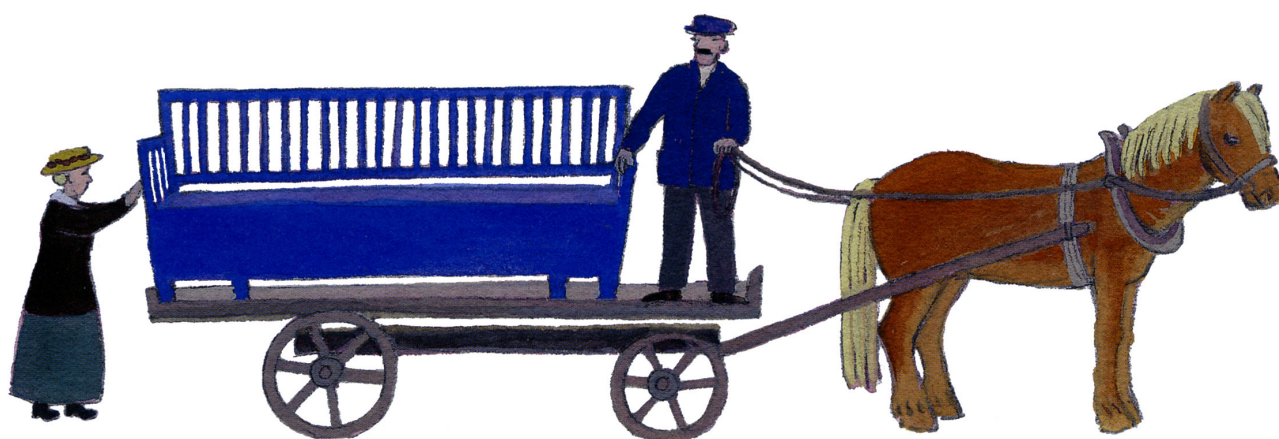
Every spread has a central illustration, but also a line of smaller images on the sides. In the smaller images, details from respective year are told. Anna Bengtsson adds strollers and vacuum cleaners, rationing coupons, and mobile phones. The generations passing are marked with portraits and straight-forward texts about the life of each person, "Olof became 67 years old."

*Farfars mammas soffas* ("Granddad's Mother's Sofa") becomes a concrete historical tale about the last hundred

years of Swedish history from the eyes of a working-class family, and, of course, during one era the sofa is in danger. It comes out of it, well under the circumstances, it only ends up in the dark attic for about twenty years, showed in a lovely black spread with white contours of the furniture in the storage area. Eventually, it is carried down again, and gets a new life as the family has bought a summer house.

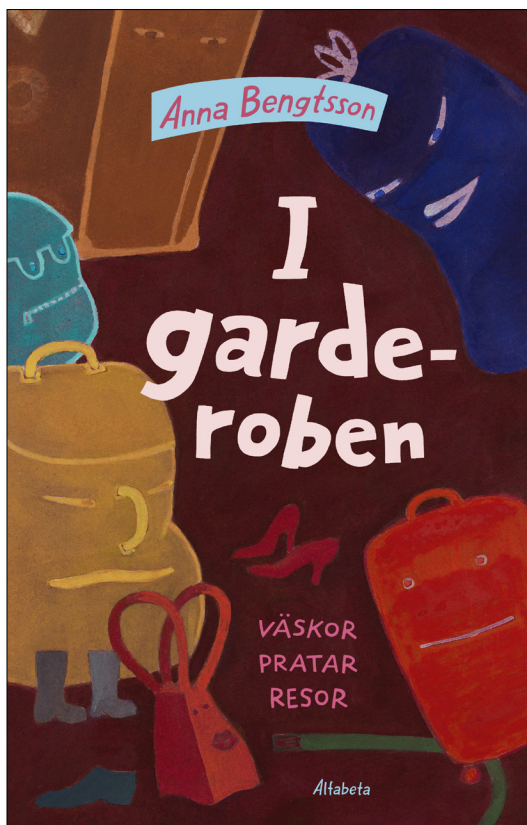
The theme in *Farfars mammas soffa* ("Granddad's Mother's Sofa") reminds about Anna Bengtsson's *Det kittlas när*

*löven kommer* ("It Tickles When the Leaves Come") (2006) about the life of a tree. She connects the world in a way that no other picturebook illustrator can, depicting the passage of time and our own rather short role in it. There is no sadness in it, quite the opposite: there is a surprisingly large amount of security in the fact that the sofa (and the tree) will remain, even after the people are gone.



# Review of *I garderoben* ("In the Wardrobe") by Annika Lundeberg

*Published by BTJ Bibliotekstjänst, no 16, 2020.*



I am completely charmed by the story – perfectly executed, funny and well-thought out. The shiny new red suitcase with wheels steps into the wardrobe and asks the dusty bags and items in there: Do you travel much? And then the story begins. The picturebook twists back and forth between the murkier, more muted images in saturated colors inside the wardrobe, to the lighter, more lively, more detailed illustrations when the stories about the bags and items different adventures are portrayed, but all the images have a glow over them. /.../ the idea is absolutely perfect, and the slightly ambiguous title is fun. They all long to get out of the closet, but who will be allowed to?



# When the Bags Remember Their Travels

*Review of I garderoben ("In the Wardrobe") by Lotta Olsson, published in Dagens Nyheter, 16 January 2021*

More and more books appear to comment on the age in which we live, but I suspect that Anna Bengtsson may have worked on her latest book long before the pandemic put an end to travels. Her wardrobe is the waiting room that bags end up in when they are not needed, between journeys.

Life among bags in a wardrobe is such a concrete topic it could have been monotonous, but Anna Bengtsson creates a low-key, soft story about human life, mirrored through the bags. Here, we find the purse, the school backpacks, the bicycle basket, the old, dented suitcase that has travelled to many fun places, and the brand new red one in hard plastic (that has wheels, as it points out a bit too often to the older bags). Here is even a representative for working life in the olden days, the old sailor bag without modern fineries, that has sailed all the way to Halifax, and lived through a storm!

When the bags start sharing their memories, they realize that their experiences are quite diverse. The old suitcase has been to Hongkong (here, a silk dress and a pair of shoes chime in, as they came along that time too). The school backpacks have, as everyone already knew, lived exposed and dangerous lives, since children are not very careful with their

bags. But the nice purse who got to visit a restaurant has experienced the most dreadful thing of all: to be left behind.

Picturebook artist Anna Bengtsson has an ability to put a soul to objects, or more accurate: to see the world through their eyes. The new shiny suitcase is impressive, and the wheels come in handy! But it hasn't travelled very far yet, not like the old and sometimes broken ones have. Those are the ones with stories to tell.

Anna Bengtsson skillfully uses the light: From the warm, muted darkness in the wardrobe to the travels that usually are light and happy adventures, but with dangers lurking in the illustrations' edges. *I garderoben* ("In the Wardrobe") reminds me of HC Andersen's stories, but without the worry that characterize some of them. Here you will instead find calm security, and the bicycle basket's joyful hopes about getting outside again when spring comes.

