

” Pippi is in my DNA ”

The Reception of Pippi Longstocking in Sweden

Gunnel Bergström

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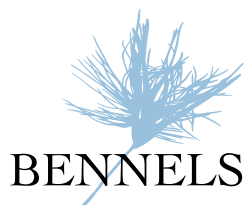
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PREFACE



In 2025, Pippi turns 80. In 1941, Astrid Lindgren's daughter Karin asked her mother to tell about Pippi Longstocking. But the book was first published in 1945.

In 2015, the Scandinavian department at the University of Gdansk celebrated Pippi's 70th birthday. This little book is based on a presen-

tation I gave at that time. It was about how Pippi has been received in Sweden.

Pippi is always current and inspiring. The books are being read and the films

are being watched by children all over the world. At the Swedish Guldbagge gala this year, Inger Nilsson received the children's film prize Guldspiran for playing Pippi so well, ever since the first film appeared 50 years ago. In an election campaign in 2022, a Swedish politician said that Pippi Longstocking has meant a lot for gender equality.

And you, dear reader, are welcome to write to info@bennels.se and tell about your own experiences with Pippi.

Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this book. A special thank you to the survey participants.

Finally, I would also like to thank Astrid Lindgren AB for lending pictures, because the booklet is free.

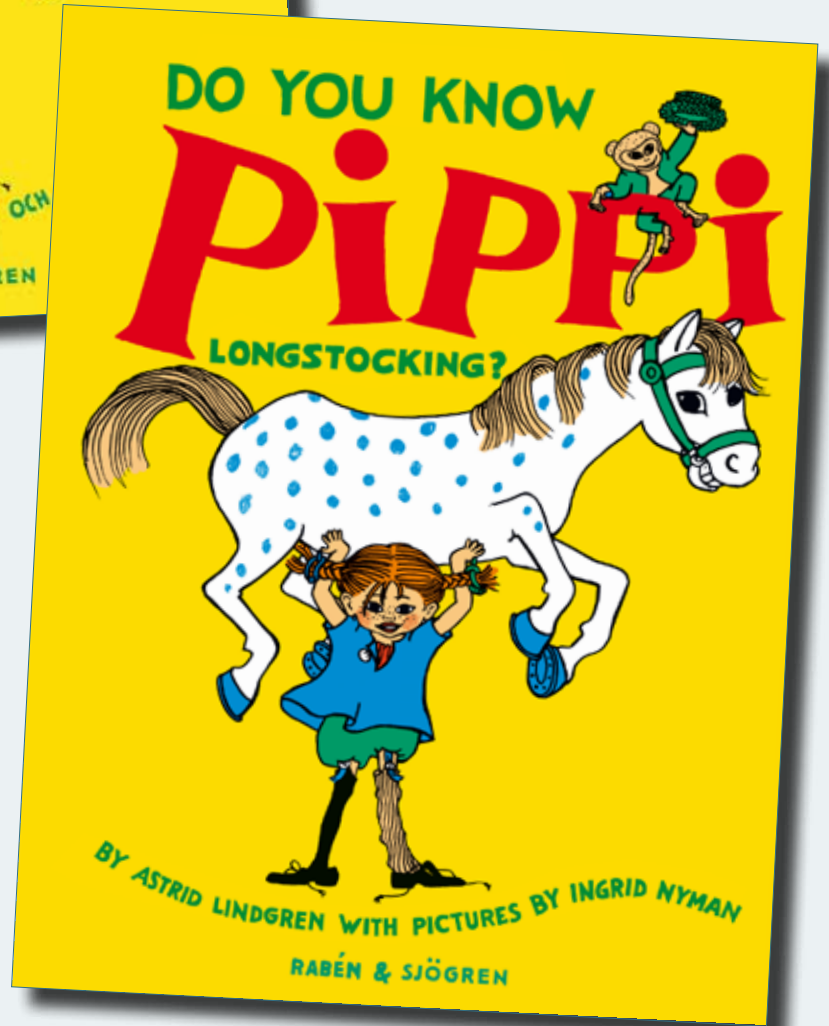
Always think like Pippi:
"They who are very strong must also be very kind"!

"Here comes Pippi Longstocking, chulahop ..."

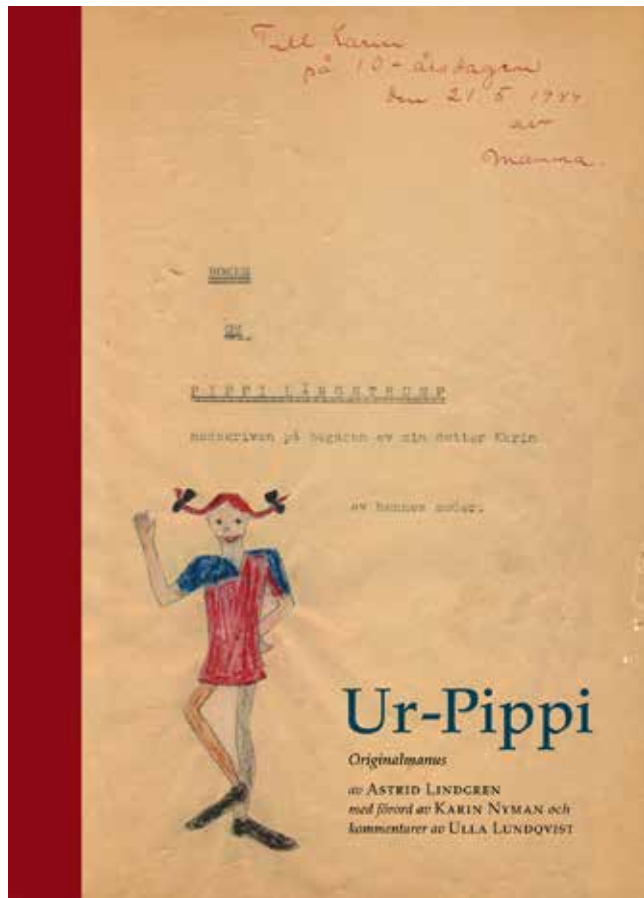
The song from the films about Pippi is indeed catchy. Inger Nilsson has been praised for having played the perfect Pippi ever since the first film appeared in 1969.

Photo: Unknown photographer, Wikimedia Commons.





"Pippi Longstocking is in my DNA"



Once upon a time there was a girl who lived in Vasastan in Stockholm. Her name was Karin, and she had pneumonia. When she was in her bed, she suddenly asked her mother to tell her about "Pippi Longstocking". The name just came out of nowhere. The mother, Astrid Lindgren, immediately began to spin her daughter a story about a strong and independent girl in red braids. About Pippi, who had both a monkey, a horse, a villa, and gold money, and whose real name was Pippilotta Viktualia Rullgardina Krusmynta Efraimsdotter Longstocking.

She first told that story in the winter of 1941. In March 1944, Astrid Lindgren sprained her foot and had to rest for a long time. She used that time to write down Pippi's adventures with her friends Tommy and Annika, and Karin got them as a present on her tenth birthday. The book about Pippi Longstocking was published the following year, making 1945 Pippi's official year of birth.

Pippi conference in Gdansk

In autumn 2015, the Department of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Gdansk held a conference in honor of Pippi's 70th birthday. I was asked to give a talk about how Pippi has been received in Sweden over the years - and about how she is understood today.

"The attitude of Pippi Longstocking comes natural to me, and so she does to an incredible number of other people in Sweden"

First, I showed the audience my keyring. A few years ago, I put a Pippi doll on it, when my mother had to move to a nursing home and I explained to the staff, that I needed to be "strong like Pippi".

During the talk, I was standing on an orange towel, and it symbolized that I don't wipe the floor with a mop, but rather slide around with a towel under my feet. Just like Pippi does with her brushes.

This article is based on my talk with some additions.

Pippi comes natural

I was born in 1952 and, like the Lindgren family, have mostly lived my life in Vasastan. My best friend claims that when we were little we ate "I don't want to become a stur"-pills, "I don't want to grow"-pills. We rhymed "stur" (big) with "krumelur" (doodle?), because that's what Pippi did. We didn't want to become adults, and those pills sure worked on both my best friend and me. We have never really become grown-ups.

The attitude of Pippi Longstocking comes natural to me, and so she does to an incredible number of other people in Sweden. I draw this conclusion not only from my highly unscientific review of newspapers and other literature, as well as from some equally unscientific surveys, which I have asked friends and acquaintances to answer.

No and yes from publishers

When Pippi Longstocking was looking for a publisher, the first response was a polite no. Bonniers publishing house made the biggest mistake of the last millennium, when in the fall of 1944 it passed up Astrid Lindgren's script. The unsigned letter from Bonniers reads as follows: "The manuscript is very original and entertaining in its spectacle, and we sincerely regret that we will not be able to undertake publication." (Aftonbladet 2012).

The book publisher Rabén & Sjögren was lucky enough to get the rights to release Pippi Longstocking. After having been slightly reworked, the book won a prize in the publisher's children's book competition. Rabén & Sjögren became Pippi's publisher, and the books about her have been translated into more than 90 languages (Rabén & Sjögren).

Pippi feud in the media

On August 18, 1946, a war broke out over Pippi Longstocking. It began with an article by literary critic John Landquist, professor of pedagogy and psychology. In Aftonbladet he wrote:

"No normal child eats an entire cake on a coffee rope or walks barefoot on powdered sugar. They don't even have the slightest possibility to do so. But both are reminiscent of a lunatic's imagination or morbid obsessions." (Landquist 1946).

The article ends with the words:

"The memory of the unnatural girl and her unsavory adventure in Lindgren's book, if she is not remembered, can only be the sensation of something unpleasant, which tugs at the soul." (Ibid.)



Some readers agreed with Landquist, and he was also supported by the Folkskolläraryrkesförbundet, the society of school teachers. In contrast, female secondary school teachers defended Pippi (Svanberg 2011).

James Rössel, journalist and later culture editor at Aftontidningen, protested against Landquist's article. During the newspaper's vignette "Through the magnifying glass" he wrote in the text "Pip på sej, professorn!": "If something is awake in Landquist, it is not a sense of humor, [. . .]. (Rössel 1946). He was of the opinion that Astrid Lindgren had a "talent to amuse both children and the elderly".

Pippi 50 – criticized again

When Pippi turned 50, she was attacked in an article in Svenska Dagbladet. The author was journalist and author Carin Stenström, and the article was titled "Time to retire Pippi Longstocking". The preamble to the article reads: "Fifty years of worshipping her has put an end to everything - school, family life, normal behavior..." (Stenström 1995) and in the text it says, for example:



"Pippi 70 lat" in Polish means Pippi 70 years. This impressive chocolate cake had been baked for the participants in the anniversary conference at Gdansk University in 2015.

"As a child, I saw what the adults were unable to see, namely that Pippi was severely antisocial, that she was emotionally disturbed, that she lacked adaptability and normal relationships with other people." (Ibid.)

Opinions about Pippi continued to diverge. In 2002, Bishop Emeritus Krister Stendahl was quoted in the newspaper Dagen as saying "I have been fascinated by Pippi Longstocking. She amuses me theologically, and is a wonderful example of a good and slightly disobedient, slightly wild, slightly fantastic figure who is so nice to have when you sit and read to children." (Dagen 2002))

Pippi 70 – just as relevant

Ahead of Pippi Longstocking's 70th anniversary in 2015, journalist Björn Wiman wrote in Dagens Nyheter about Pippi as a symbol of the Swedish welfare society. In it, he described Pippi as "a very radical and very Swedish individualist with red braids, a horse and a monkey." (Wiman 2014) He also drew a current parallel:

It took almost 60 years before Pippi grew up. But

then she really did. When Stieg Larsson created Lisbeth Salander (*in the Millennium books, GB's note*), he naturally knew exactly what he was doing: Pippi as an adult became an antisocial hacker with tattoos and superpowers as great as her need for freedom. And the two female citizens in the Swedish imagination who have attracted the most international attention have done so precisely for one thing: They represent the Swedes' exotic need (at least exotic in the eyes of the outside world) to do the only thing they really want: to be in peace - and let others be.

A little "by the way", Wiman mentioned that the three princesses and the little prince (*our current king Carl XIV Gustaf who is only a couple of years younger than Pippi, GB's note*) as toddlers at Haga Castle were very fond of Pippi Longstocking.

In the spring of 2015, the magazine ETC published the article "70 years of stubbornness", written by journalist Jörgen Lund. A large part of the text contains an interview with the Swedish director and playwright Suzanne Osten, who was

born in the same year as Pippi Longstocking. Osten tells Lund that she had "a rather tough childhood" and that Pippi was a protective figure and extremely crucial for Susanne Osten's own cultural work. To Jörgen Lund, she says: "Pippi stands for independence and shows that imagination is vital. She conveys that we always manage and get through things, even though they may look impossible. In addition, she is empathetic and kind." (Lund 2015)

Suzanne Osten also adds that Pippi has had a great impact on today's child-rearing: "Parents of young children today respect the world of the child, Pippi has a big part in that." (Ibid.)

Politically incorrect

Even people who like Pippi may worry that she is not always politically correct. A current example of this is the TV series "Here comes Pippi Longstocking". When the series was broadcast on Sweden's Television for the first time in 1969, Pippi told us that her father was a "negro king".

But when the series came on DVD with better sound and picture, the n-word had been removed. Now she just says "king".

Surveys about Pippi in Sweden

Now I move on to my own investigation about what Pippi Longstocking has meant - and means - to people in Sweden of different ages. Despite the unscientific nature of the surveys, I conclude, on the basis of them and my own experiences, that significantly more women than men have

been impressed by Pippi, at least in my own generation.

For example, four of my male journalist colleagues of the same age answer that Pippi meant nothing to them at all.

One of them remembered Winnie the Pooh better,

and another preferred Karlsson on the roof.

A neighbor who is just over 70 years old calls Pippi "a fun type" and likes to read Pippi to her grandchildren. "It has been fun to follow her as she grew up and changed her name to Lisbeth Salander," he says. Another neighbor, born in 1955, also replies that he liked Karlsson on the roof better than Pippi. But his three-year-old granddaughter "has become completely Pippified and starts the day by singing 'Here comes Pippi Longstocking'".

Incidentally, it is very common for us in Sweden to sing this song for children and grandchildren, preferably by changing the name to "Here comes Carolina." . . . or "Here comes little Vera, chulahop, chulahop san sa!"

Pippi influences the men indirectly

As I ponder the men's responses, it occurs to me that these men may not have understood that they may have been indirectly influenced by Pippi Longstocking. Many women in their environment most certainly have become more independent and stronger by reading about Pippi.

A man, born in 1949, writes that he was seven or eight years old when he first met Pippi. He answers: "Pippi was something new for me with her rebellion against authority, doing so with a lot of ingenuity. Her gold money was also exciting and gave unimagined opportunities compared to allowances. Papa the King was an extra spice. Plus Pippi has meant so much to children and grandchildren." This man is my brother.

Another man, born in 1951, was four or five years old when he had his first contact with Pippi. For him, Pippi is an important part of the childhood canon and associated with reading

"Pippi was something new for me with her rebellion against authority, doing so with a lot of ingenuity"

"It has been fun to follow her as she grew up and changed her name to Lisbeth Salander"

aloud by the bedside. He replies: "We have read it to our children, including our Russian orphanage daughter who also played Pippi at the orphanage's concerts and read Pippi and Karlsson to her son. It's a little rough, scary, that today there are those who present Pippi as a negative example of anarchistic child-rearing with the 'crazy 70s' as a result."

No Pippi on the bookshelf

Another journalist colleague, born in 1948, describes her "sad experience with Pippi". Pippi was raised in this friend's middle-class home during the 1950s. My friend says:

There were no Pippi books. They were probably not considered suitable for children whose main task was to be obedient, i.e. without their own will, and who could only speak when spoken to. Pippi was therefore not a good role model. A headstrong girl who revolted against the adult world, no chance. Just think what that could lead to.

The film adaptation of the books and especially Inger Nilsson as the main character Pippi, I only got to enjoy as an adult. As a child I was so oppressed and anxious that Pippi did not arouse any particular reactions in me at all. She was just a strange figure and, as I said, appeared only in the periphery.

So writes a journalist, who thinks that Pippi has stood the test of time and today feels "more modern than ever".

A female photographer, born in 1951, grew up in a working-class home in Söder in Stockholm, where there weren't very many books.

She doesn't remember anyone reading anything to her at all, and she only got to know Pippi Longstocking when she herself had a child in her 30s. She answers:

As a result, I read a lot to

my children and bought a lot of books. "Pippi was troublesome", I thought when my first child arrived. I was afraid he would follow her examples and climb the roofs. When I had my daughter, it was different, and she was happy to take after Pippi. I was now more used to raising children and to the role of mother.

There are, even in Sweden, fewer children's books with a female protagonist, so I was happy about Pippi because of that. Today there is only one television series, "Madam Secretary", Secretary of State in the USA, which shows a woman who saves the world time and time again and she does it in a different way than her male colleagues would. So we probably need more Pippi all the way up to adulthood.

Incidentally, this photographer has given her daughter a financial book, where Pippi has been made a symbol of financial freedom for young women today.

A letter from Astrid Lindgren

A female literature scholar, born in 1942, writes that she got Pippi Longstocking as a Christmas present when she was six years old. The book became a favorite, and this girl sent her photo and a letter of thanks to Astrid Lindgren. Now, as an adult, she writes: "Of course I was overjoyed by the author's reply. She hoped that I would soon recover from my stomachache and - best of all - she wrote that I was 'good enough like Annika.'" The two letters are available at The Royal Library in Stockholm.

A woman born in 1991 answers that she probably had Pippi read aloud to her in kindergarten. Sometime after, she watched the movies. She remembers: "It was strange to have a horse in the living room. But today, Pippi is in some way the personification of the motto 'How do I know it's impossible if I've never tried?'" She thinks we should carry that attitude with us.

A woman born in 1982, my niece, was probably

"There were no Pippi books. They were probably not considered suitable for children whose main task was to be obedient"

"If you eat spinach, you will not become strong like Popeye – but strong like Pippi"

three years old when her parents read Pippi Longstocking to her. She mainly remembers the films, and writes:

[She was a] Big idol when it comes to playing, fooling around and being a child! For me who lives

abroad, Pippi is an important part of our everyday life. Not a day goes by without Pippi being mentioned, seen on film or Pippi's songs being sung with my daughters. If you eat spinach, you will not become strong like Popeye – but strong like Pippi. I associate Pippi with a happy childhood.

She says that her daughter was around one year old when she got to see the films about Pippi for the first time. The girl "adores Pippi, who teaches her everything from being a good friend to cutting spaghetti with scissors. There is no 'fairy tale character' that has such a place in our home as Pippi has."



Conference speakers told that books about Pippi have been translated to almost 80 languages.

Here, I would like to add that today's children are probably more influenced by the movies than the books. Therefore, they may not notice Pippi's loneliness as much as readers of older generations do and have done.

A teenager was almost surprised when asked what Pippi means to her. She replies: "She's so important to me. Pippi Longstocking is in my DNA!"

A friend my age learned to read partly thanks to the books about Pippi. She was then four or five years old. Her brother, six years older, thought Pippi was great, but thought: "Too bad it was a girl!"

A female journalist friend replies that she was four when she first heard about Pippi Longstocking:

Mother read aloud. I liked Pippi a lot, she had a lot of animals and I wanted that, too. I also thought she was brave and could handle most things. But I felt sorry for her because she was alone at night (probably because I was afraid of the dark). She inspired and still inspires me. Little girls can be tough as hell. If needed, they could just lift away the stupid old man who tries to stop them.

On the other hand, my friend's son, who is about 20 years old today, thinks that Pippi was a bully. He didn't really like how Pippi treated the other children Tommy and Annika and felt sorry for them. He also felt sorry for Little Brother in the books about Karlsson on the roof. But he had his mother read the stories about Emil in Lönneberga, over and over again.

Fresh views

The day before this article's deadline, at the end of January 2018, I received a stack of papers with responses from nine- to ten-year-

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"On the other hand, my friend's son, who is about 20 years old today, thinks that Pippi was a bully."

old students. A relative of mine had asked her class (both boys and girls) to answer some questions about Pippi. Everyone had read books – or seen films – about Pippi, but several answered that they no longer do so. Most of the answers are that Pippi is "funny", "naughty", "kind" and "stubborn" and that the books and films are "good" and "funny". Someone added "exciting".

A boy briefly answers the question about what he thinks of the books/films: "They sucked" and next to that an angry face is drawn. A girl writes that the books/films are "a bit too childish". Someone thinks they are "perfectly ok", another one writes that they are "super good", a third that they are "so-so". One girl replies that the books were fun and great, but that she doesn't read them anymore. "No, I only read thick books," she replies.

Several of these students have drawn funny pictures of Pippi.

Vibrant Pippi

I have a very playful friend, 70+, who reminds me of Pippi. She also has red hair, and she says that her hair was VERY red when she was a child. She used to put steel wires in the braids, so that they would stand out like Pippi's braids did. This friend writes:

I think I was seven or eight years old when I first read Pippi. At first, I was probably most interested in the relationship between Tommy and Annika and Pippi. I thought it was nice that they got to play with Pippi. Then I thought it was funny that she dared to be so cheeky at school.

It seems that Pippi has followed me through the years. And now that I think back, she has meant a lot. Comfort, object of identification. To draw some kind of strength and independence from.

Mother in heaven and father at Kurrekuredutt Island. . . as a child I thought it was cool. . . As an adult, I can also see and feel for myself the sense of abandonment that Pippi must have felt as she sat and talked with her mother in heaven.

And as an adult, I also cry over the lonely child – which was Pippi. Or me. Perhaps Pippi served as an object of identification for all the children who, for one reason or another, shared the almost existential sense of loneliness that Pippi had.

Perhaps she became a symbol of one's own abandoned inner child that one could not articulate?

Then there was the fact that she didn't allow herself to be impressed by the adult world, but joked with it, or played with it, or simply ignored it. She has given me the courage to question given truths. Laughing at the adult world. I probably still do. Even since I became an adult myself.

I also took this friend for a walk and talked a little extra about Pippi. Among other things, we have come to some similarities between Pippi Longstocking and the Millenium series' Lisbeth Salander: They are both self-evident, they don't care what others think, they are lonely, sad, caring and generous. They care for children, they both have a sense of justice, they have humor and self-distance. They are strong, independent and have a complicated relationship with their parents. And both are good at solving problems.

Understand Lindgren, Långstrump and Sweden

I have taught Swedish at several foreign universities. In addition, I sometimes teach Swedish for immigrants in Sweden. Gender equality and social information should also be included in this subject.

I realize more and more clearly that you cannot understand Sweden without knowing Astrid Lindgren and Pippi Longstocking.

"I think back, she has meant a lot. Comfort, object of identification. To draw some kind of strength and independence from"

"I would have become much more obedient, quiet and insecure, if Pippi Longstocking hadn't existed"

Recently, I showed Pippi books in Swedish, Arabic and Farsi to a group at a folk high school, and that particular day only women who were born between 1952 and 1980 attended. When we talked about Pippi, it turned out that some knew Pippi through their children and grandchild. One of the participants remarked that Pippi was very ill-mannered and a bad role model for children. But in general, the participants answered that Pippi is "strong" and "kind" and that she "likes animals and children". Some mentioned the word "busig", "mischievous", which the group had just learned in Swedish. For my own part, I feel grateful that my parents – who actually also thought that little girls should be obedient and quiet – without grumbling, let both my brother and me read about Pippi Longstocking. I like to tell my pupils and students that I would have become much more obedient, quiet and insecure, if Pippi Longstocking hadn't existed.

Today, I like hearing Astrid Lindgren read about Pippi in her warm voice. I often think of both of them, especially if I need to resolve a conflict. Then I can ask myself what Astrid or Pippi would have done in my situation and perhaps act based on the presumed answer. Astrid Lindgren was not afraid of anyone, I want to believe. In Sweden, she had to teach a finance minister to count, and she got the prime minister to improve conditions for animals in cages. She also dared to rebuke skinheads and ask the former Russian president Yeltsin to create peace in the world.

Karin's bed

I usually brag that I live a stone's throw from Astrid Lindgren's home at Dalagatan 46 by Vasaparken in Stockholm. The four-room apartment is sometimes shown to small groups of visitors, and appointments must be made well in advance.

I was there in September 2017 with my godson, his mother and his godfather. One of the most lasting impressions of the visit was the small white pull-out bed, where Karin, when she had pneumonia, once asked her mother to tell her about "Pippi Långstrump", Pippi Longstocking.

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7 hours ago - Pippi Longstocking. There aren’t that many female figures to identify with. Pippi is strong, free, and independent - I think she meant a lot...

ENGLISH SUMMARY

- ”Pippi is in my DNA”
The reception of Pippi Longstocking in Sweden
When a girl with red plates turned 70 in 2015, Gdansk University gave a birthday seminar. Gunnel Bergström presented reactions to the first Pippi Longstocking book, and how the author Astrid Lindgren’s heroine has influenced gender equality in Sweden. The text includes some articles pro and con the Pippi phenomenon and a simple questionnaire about what adults and children think of the girl today.

Films about Pippi

- <https://www.astridlindgren.com/se-en-gb/pippi-langstrump-tv-series-swedish-910014>

KEY WORDS

- Pippi Longstocking
- Strong and independent girl
- Gender equality
- Anarchic upbringing of children
- Understand Lindgren, Longstocking and Sweden

Do you know Pippi Longstocking?

This little book tells about how Pippi has been received in Sweden.
And that she is always relevant.

May Pippi continue to mean a lot to everyone's playfulness,
kindness and equality.

Astrid Lindgren would have liked that.

