

Ismete Puka

Technical worker in the printing press



In the photo: Ismete Puka

From the personal archive of Ismete Puka

I was born in Prishtina, and I had many friends, about five or six of us, and we had so much fun when we got together, and it was a custom that when you got up in the morning, you had to clean the path in front of the house. We would compete, trying to see who would come out first, and then we would start playing with the toys of that time, we didn't have balls, you know, but we used to play with walnuts against the wall [*imitates the sound of walnuts hitting the wall*], to see who could make more, and those kinds of games. We used to jump rope, play hide-and-seek, just like it was common at that time.

<<<Neighborhood scene with children playing>>>

So, it was joy, joy, those are the memories that stay with me the most, I also remember the house where I was born and raised, that neighborhood there, I don't know how to put it, but it was a great pleasure. Back then, there were also the yards, the houses, and when we cooked outside, as they called it back then, *Mutfak* in Turkish, the smell would reach the street, there was a Serbian friend, we socialized with Serbs too, and she would say, "Oh, Zyrefa auntie has made the *pite*," or "the casserole," and so on... We didn't really care about who was what, the main thing was to be together, that's how it was at the time, and we children weren't too concerned. I did well in school, but I wasn't, you know, exemplary or anything, but good, at that time, even getting a five was hard [*laughs*]. School was completed, but in April, I had a tragedy, my father died at his workplace in an accident, leaving me, my mother, and six siblings, with the eldest sister already married. When my father passed away, I was 16 and a half years old, and I told my mother, "I want to start working," and until I found a job, I used to crochet scarves, hats,

gloves for the neighbors, just to avoid being a burden to my mother. I also have a memory where my mother fulfilled a big wish of mine by selling a pair of traditional trousers to buy me a dress, and that dress, I kept it... as one did back then.

When I started working at 16 years old [*thinks*] no, 18 years old, to help my mother, as she was young, where would I get employed? I thought about working at *Rilindja*. It was close to my house, as my parents' house was near the theater, on the park road, in the neighborhood where I grew up. I thought, "I'm close to my mother here," so I went and said, "I need to work to help her." My brother was in the army, the other two brothers and sister were all in school, but at that time, the state paid pensions very well, since my father's case was an accident at work, my mother received a very good pension. The children also received benefits as long as they were in school, you just had to send the certificate, and you would get that benefit. Still, [*sighs*] I felt sorry for my mother because she had to plan carefully from the beginning to the end of the month. So, I applied for a job at *Rilindja*, and I was accepted right away. When I applied, they needed to hold a Workers' Council meeting in the graphics department, and they decided to hire me. And when I started working, I saw some of my classmates there.

When I started working there, they had a six-month probation period, but I somehow couldn't wait six months to use the printing machine. I watched my other colleagues printing and thought, "What about me?" I asked them, "What should I do here?" "You," they said, "need to go around, observe, and learn." There was the foreman, and I told him, "No, I won't wait six months," so I asked one of the workers, "Do you know when they're on break so I can sneak in to learn how to print?" The type blocks were placed above, and you had to take one and feed it in, then it would print and fall into the other section. I started like that, making many mistakes at first, after a while, they said, "We have to throw all of this away, but we'll start again tomorrow." The next day, I was excited and thought, "I messed up once, maybe I won't mess up again," and that's exactly what happened. When the foreman came, what was his name again [*thinks*], I can't remember. When he saw me working at the machine, he said, "Ismete, what are you doing?" I replied, "What am I doing? I don't just want to sit around and watch, the practical part is great," I said, "because without learning a bit, I wouldn't even know how to pick it up." I told him honestly, "Yesterday, I made a mistake, and we had to throw everything away." "Oh," he said, "That's not a problem, but I'm glad to see that you said, 'I won't stay in training for more than two or three weeks, I want to learn.'" So, I immediately motivated myself, and that's how I started working.

I got hired, and they told me, "Go to the records office to register, so you can officially start work." I went there, as he (my husband) was working on the second floor, in the Old Printing House, while the Printing Department was downstairs. At that time, my husband saw me and liked me, he asked this guy from Gjakova, what was his name again [*thinks*], "Go check if she is Serbian, Albanian, or something else, you know, I just like her." He asked around, and someone told him, "No, she's from Prishtina, she knows Albanian and Turkish." He then approached me and said, "This is how it is," and I responded, "Leave me alone, I just started working," I said, "and now you want to talk about love? No." I rejected him once, twice, and Qamili Vogël tried harder than the guy from Gjakova.

<<<Excerpt from the song “Pasha sytë e mi” (I Swear on My Eyes) by Qamili Vogël>>>

And they were like, “No, he’s a good guy,” and, honestly, he was good-looking too, though looks aren’t everything, but at that time, we did kind of want a bit of that [*laughs*], anyway, just that glass separated us.¹ My husband was truly, as you might say, pure-hearted, never interfering in my life, never asking, “Why this? Why that?” We were very happy together, and we raised our children as best we could, educated them, and helped them grow.



Anniversary evening of Rilindja, February 12, 1982

In the photo: Ismete Puka and Muharrem Puka

From the personal archive of Ismete Puka

Work started at six in the morning during the summer and lasted until two. That completed eight hours. In winter, it started at seven and ended at three. The sheets had to be folded, and there was a colleague named Sheherzade, from Bosnia, people had come from all over when *Rilindja* opened, and jobs were created everywhere. The foreman was Abdurrahman Sekiraqa, who checked each machine to see how the sheets were folded before they went to bookbinding, then the bookbinders would come, take the sheets from us, cut them, and fold them over there. He used to say [*laughs*], “Look at Ismete and Sheherzade, when they fold, they fold like matchsticks.” So, you had to take the job seriously. Whoever completed their task, let’s say the

¹ Refers to the glass on the dividing wall between the two working spaces, hers and her husband’s.

goal was 1,000 copies in eight hours, if you could exceed that target, you'd earn extra hours. I'm not bragging, but I always thought, "Why couldn't I do it?" and I'd manage to work an extra two hours every day. I worked with Qamili for about eight years. Qamili, Qamili Vogël, wasn't that interested in exceeding the target, he was more into the books being printed, songs, and such, I'd say, "Qamili, set up the page so I can print it." He'd reply, "Oh, Ismete, we've already reached the target, go chat with your colleagues, take a break from the machine," but I'd always go back, thinking, "No, I need to finish the extra two hours."

<<<Work scene>>>

The environment in the old *Rilindja* was very good, we'd leave the courtyard doors open, and the yard was cooler. But in the *Rilindja* graphics department, where I worked, the environment was very closed-off. That department was huge, spanning hundreds of meters, with not just one machine but about ten, some larger, some smaller, some manual. There was no flooring, just concrete, as the rollers needed to be washed. The rollers had to be coated with ink, then the ink had to go somewhere, so the rollers had to be coated and rotated until the page was ready to be picked up for printing.

I got sick, my chest hurt, and when I went to the doctor, they told me, "Ma'am, you can't work there," as I had developed chronic lung disease. So, I retired early. I retired before turning 50, in '98, [*thinks*] no, in '89. Then, in February, on the 2nd, the Albanians started leaving their jobs as part of a strike, which was a big mistake. They thought it would achieve something against them, but many ended up without work, and the people became very impoverished.