

Flora Brovina

Journalist and doctor

My name is Flora Brovina, I was born on September 30, 1949, in Skenderaj, Drenica. By profession, I am now a retiree, a former politician, I mean an MP for six mandates of the Kosovo parliament. With many years of experience as a pediatrician, having completed my studies in Zagreb, including postgraduate studies and specialization. A former journalist of *Rilindja*, and for this interview, I am very happy to have had the opportunity to speak about *Rilindja*.



I was a medical student and had never dreamed of becoming a journalist, but it happened that during my initial studies, which I began in Belgrade, where I completed the first and second year, I passed the exams for the first year. I was inspired by the Prishtina Television, which was

broadcasted from Belgrade, and that was when I first got involved in journalism. And, the beginning was a report about the first woman technology student at the time, Hafize Avdiu, who was from Mitrovica and was the first student in the Faculty of Technology, thus the first Albanian woman engineer in Kosovo, a technologist. This inspired me, and I made a report about her that was very successful. This is my beginning, an inspiration that I didn't know I had but discovered there.

However, shortly after this, meaning in the second year, I would return to the Faculty of Prishtina since the Medical School had opened here, and since I lived in Prishtina, it was very convenient for me to study here. When I saw the announcement, I had started, to be honest, I had also started publishing poems, perhaps as a challenge to my husband, because at that time there weren't many women poets.

<<<Scene from the lobby of Rilindja>>>

100 people applied for the open position at *Rilindja*. It was a very large hall, with people I recognized, known figures or authors, or something like that, but there were also women, and I entered the hall, a bit disappointed by all that competition, not knowing whether I would be accepted. Anyway, I completed the application, there were many questions, and when I heard that I was accepted, I said, "Why would they have accepted me?", "Why, I wonder? Did I do well among 100?", "Yes, surely, because I am a woman," and so I wouldn't accept it. I then went to the editor, I went that day, and I said, "Excuse me, I've come," he said, "Oh, how nice," and welcomed me warmly. I said, "I have two questions, the first one is why did you accept me? Because I am a woman?" I said, "But I'll be honest with you, I have two reasons." I said, "I am a student of the Faculty of Medicine, no student works at the Faculty of Medicine, it is such a difficult faculty that you cannot work, and I don't have time to now study journalism. But was I accepted because I did well, or because I am a woman? That's the question." He said, "Wait," he said, "Sit down." He took the files and told me, "Only one person before you did better than you, and that was Jusuf Gërvalla." I was very happy when he said, "In the questions you answered, we were surprised that we could select you as both a journalist and a sports reporter, because you did well." At that time, the Olympics were held in Munich, and I happened to get the sports results right, whatever they were, where we didn't participate, but I had followed them, and that was an inspiration. I said, "Alright, then," I accepted when all of this was explained to me. That's why I joined.



In the photo: Flora Brovina
From the personal archive of Flora Brovina

From journalism, I would receive so much love, I would receive so much, it would teach me so much about life, that I owe it a debt. In journalism, I felt like I was flying like a butterfly, like... I never worked in television, in other media, only in newspapers. But *Rilindja* itself was something different, it was a symbol of hope, of an opening, of all actions, or of moving forward. The first meeting with personalities, whom I had only known through reading, was also... to be honest, you might not believe it now, but I'm talking about a time, 50-some years ago, almost 60 or 50-some, I am 74 now, the newspaper had special sections. Some were covered by Jusuf and others, they moved to the culture section, while I, because of what I was assigned, even though I was an intern, would cover healthcare and social issues. Honestly, honestly, this, covering these topics, and my knowledge of social issues, both from my father and from my experience in journalism, helped me a lot as an MP too.

And now, my experience was very strange, because even my interlocutors were often men, and in the field, you had to go with them, with men, with journalists, with photojournalists, with drivers. But I got used to it, and this made me very independent, it gave me freedom. Apart from the material aspect, because the salaries were small, just enough to sustain oneself like a

student's scholarship, but this personal independence was taught to me by journalism. Especially the love for Kosovo. Because step by step, and... I'm not saying house to house, but I will say it, because I almost did go house to house as a journalist. There were good moments, there were difficult moments, but there were also slightly easier moments. One of the difficult ones was the epidemics, the Variola epidemic, the Typhus epidemic in the Rahovec region, in the Prizren district, where I almost went every day and contacted and reported on the situation there. Just like now when there are emergencies, you know when the epidemic was. Another thing, sometimes we took the initiative ourselves, to inspire the education of girls, and my very presence was proof that I was there, and "Look, if you like this model, let your daughter take this model." That's why, I had to be very tactful in communicating with these people. Sometimes I knew the circumstances, sometimes I didn't.

<<<*Car ride scene in the countryside*>>>

In the campaign for girls' education, I was assigned to the Drenica area, so when I went there, I was free of prejudices or of those behavioral norms. But I knew our norms of behavior, our citizens, so I had no problem in this regard.

A few days ago in Gllanasella, as it used to be called before, now Driton, a village, there was a gathering of fighters, a memorial plaque was unveiled, and I was invited by the Lladrovci family, by the friends of Adem Jashari. And I received a special welcome, and after the event was over, I wanted to meet with the women, and this is the first time I'm sharing this story, which left a strong impression on me. Many years have passed, and one of them, who seemed more emancipated based on her clothing, came and hugged me and said, "Doctor, I am so happy to see you," she said, "It's you, the one who made it possible for me to be the most educated among them, and today I work," I said, "I don't understand," you know, "How did this happen, because I might have forgotten?" She said, "You came and spoke with my grandfather, and the plaque is being unveiled for my grandfather, today's ceremony was held for my grandfather, and you came." So, what actually happened? What's the truth now? I went, unaware of the custom, I knocked on the door, I said, "Good afternoon," "Good afternoon," I asked, "Who is the eldest in the house?" They said, "Grandfather," "Where is grandfather?" they said, "Here." I knew they had girls whom they wouldn't allow to attend school, so I sat with the grandfather, saying, "Send the girl to school," and so on... I spoke with him, and he shook my hand. That's it, [*laughs lightly*] that's all it was.

When we entered *Rilindja*, this part wasn't finished yet, it wasn't finished, and we entered on the fifth floor. Honestly, there were some problems initially, there were problems with the elevator, there were problems with the heating, but it was a very large space, especially the view gave you a breath of fresh air. However, fortunately, I wouldn't work for long in this building. I graduated and was waiting to be told, "Are you moving to occupational medicine?" And I made the request to be given the specialization and to go specialize in occupational medicine. "Oh," he said, "No," the editor I had until the day before said, "How do you think you can go and specialize now?" He

thought that I would go somewhere and be delayed for four years. He said, “No,” he said, “We’ll announce the call, and then the ready employee, the ready specialist doctor, will come.” That made such an impression on me, and I said, “But, I, and all the employees have saved for this building, and we dreamed of our workplaces, surely we had a goal, and I’ve stayed this long, this long without going into my profession, where I was developing, waiting to take over this clinic.” And I got very upset, and, even though I had graduated, I worked as a journalist for another year and a half. It was ‘81, it was a very difficult year, unlike the years I mentioned, which were the most beautiful, but this year was difficult, politically. The demonstrations happened, my closest friend fled Kosovo, that was Jusuf, he was my closest friend, and to whom I expressed all my revolt, and sometimes he criticized me. Sometimes I wanted to be part of the underground movement (*Illegale*), he said, “No, not you, because your family is already labeled, and you immediately stand out and harm us,” and he said, “Secondly, because the moment will come when you will know where to join, at that moment you will know where your place is, and you will be part of us, but for now, hold back.” And that’s how it happened. Politics started to change, different people were promoted, something started that I no longer liked at *Rilindja*, something that I faced, which was the hardest, besides the issue with Medicine, were the imposed topics, topics like “Take this topic, write against Doctor Sadete Mekuli, against,” me, writing against Sadete Mekuli, who was my idol in Medicine, how could I write against her? I said, “I will never write against, I won’t do it,” “Do you know you’ll be punished?” “Well, punish me then,” that’s it. And then suspicious people came to lead, to be honest, the student protests made me start working before fully integrating into the profession. There was a shortage of doctors, there were no Albanian doctors, and I had now decided to work.



While editing writings

In the photo: Flora Brovina

From the personal archive of Flora Brovina

And I left *Rilindja*. And I never went back to *Rilindja* again. I mean, I have that... you know when you have a great love and then you separate and say, "I don't even want to see it on the street because it bothers me," and that's what it is. I don't know who told me that there was an exhibition, of photos of children victims of the war, and I asked, "Where?", they said, "In the foyer of the government building," I said, "In *Rilindja*?", they said, "Yes," oh, I thought to myself how terrible, "I cannot go." It connects me with everything. And when the building became a state building, I don't know what feeling I had, somehow I thought they would make it their own building, because two or three buildings were taken over, it wasn't a very wise solution, the assembly was taken, the presidency as well, meaning to this day, the MPs don't even have a room where they can receive people, and journalism faded away. I even dedicated poetry not to *Rilindja*, but to the *Rilindja* kiosk, where we would go to buy newspapers. Today, for example, I long for a newspaper called *Rilindja* and simply feel its absence as if a part of my life experience had died, and I will read the poem to you.

The Rilindja Kiosk,

The year 1991, I wrote it, out of longing.

Your rebellion was not extinguished, not even when you endured the shackles

In the city of students

Hands bound, defiant you wait

To be revived, rejuvenated, to have the shackles removed.