

# Mirsad Krasniqi

Technical worker in the warehouse

My name is Mirsad Krasniqi, I was born in 1960. Like most of my peers, I had a relatively good childhood, at least I can say that about myself, because my father worked, and my father worked at the *Rilindja* Publishing House, so we had a modest life.

I completed primary school, which was eight grades back then, at *Ganimete Tërbeshi* primary school in the village of Llukarë. I was born in the village of Nakovc, but the school was there. I finished gymnasium at what was then called *Ivo Lola Ribar*, now *Sami Frashëri*. Unforgettable memories, to tell you the truth, during gymnasium, you might ask which was the most monotonous day, but I'll tell you that back then we worked and attended school even on Saturdays, for me, Sunday was the worst day, even though it was a day off. Because, honestly, we were a class that made history, if I may say so, we were so connected to each other that even to this day, we continue our friendship.

Just one year after I finished gymnasium, the *Rilindja* Publishing House needed workers, so, I had already started working a bit privately... because many books were being published, and there was a need to package them and deliver them to the people who had contracted them. I never thought I would one day be part of *Rilindja*, and to be honest, I was so nervous, so afraid, because I would say, "There are journalists, there are writers, there are very important people there." I was very, very nervous, even as a 20, 21-year-old... I had a lot of fear, but over time I saw that *Rilindja* was a very, very good collective. I was employed in 1981, on March 21. I started as a simple worker, doing everything. For one, I wasn't afraid of work, I did it with passion. But on the other hand, I'll tell you another truth, because my father also worked there and was a simple worker, but a very, very good one, and surely as a result of that, they called me as well, meaning, to help the family.

<<<Work scene in the warehouse>>>

I started as a simple worker in the book warehouse, meaning, I did everything, from cleaning the warehouse to packing and distributing books, everything. And to be honest, I didn't want to, so to speak, disgrace my father by having people say, "Look, we hired your son, and he isn't working." And, let me tell you, without modesty here, I was named the best worker at *Rilindja* twice, among all those journalists and writers. Our warehouse was a very modern one, a 1,000-square-meter space, a very large, well-organized, beautiful place, an ideal location for storing books. We had everything there, though I must admit, lighting was a bit lacking, maybe that was a flaw. In winter, it was somewhat cold because there was no heating, even though *Rilindja* had central heating, strangely, it was missing in the warehouses. But maybe, being young, I didn't notice it as much, and it was a pleasure to work. I tried to be very diligent, as I was the youngest, so I had to be the most obedient, so to speak. In the warehouse where I worked, there were older people, and it would have been unfair to expect them to work as much

as I did. It's not honorable. They advised me on how to organize books, like, for example, in this column, children's books, in another, poetry, in another, novels, and here, short stories. I learned it all there, and later, I had no problem finding books, even though we had around 1,400-1,500 titles, imagine finding and knowing where everything is with so many titles. Sometimes, I would ask myself, "Will I manage?" I had moments when I wondered, "Why did I come here, why?" but I quickly caught up.

Work would start at 7 AM and finish at 3 PM. In the beginning, I was greatly helped by the head of sales, Abdullah Zeneli, who did tremendous work in book distribution and organization, very, very tremendous work. He helped me the most, although others did as well, but I must acknowledge that he stayed the closest to me because I needed guidance, as I didn't know that job. However, it didn't take long for me to adapt. The books would come to us from the printing house, we were downstairs, the warehouse, while the printing house was upstairs, the books were brought down by elevator, and I would receive, organize, and arrange them, like that. I must again mention Abdullah Zeneli, an exceptional worker who put everything in order, once things were set, even if the work was hard, it became easier. It was called an 'automatic' system, meaning that every book that was printed was sent to municipal libraries, the National Library, and some schools. A book would be published within a week, ready for students to read. We supplied schools, municipal libraries, and the National Library. But also, "Did books also go abroad?" yes they did to various fairs. I was fortunate to attend the largest book fair in the world, the "Frankfurt Book Fair," right before the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. I was truly very happy to see all of that, all those halls, all those places where books from all over the world were gathered. Our stand was very, very well organized, meaning we didn't feel embarrassed to say, "Hey, look, we didn't do well, others did better." And that was not only in Frankfurt but also in the former Yugoslavia, in two or three cities like Zagreb and Belgrade, where we set an example as well.

Let me tell you something else, we also worked on Saturdays and Sundays sometimes, just to distribute the books, because in '81, when the unrest started, we were all afraid they might shut us down, so you register the books, but you can't, you don't dare to release them. Our goal was to distribute the books, to keep them in the warehouse as little as possible. Let the bookstores be supplied, let the schools be supplied, let the municipal libraries and the national libraries be supplied, and so on. I said I worked from '81, not counting one year of military service in '87-'88, until the early '90s when the violent measures came, and *Rilindja* was shut down, and the books were closed. But we continued, let's call it resistance, like the schools did, meaning we continued publishing. We would meet at Café Koha, across from *Rilindja*, all activities were held there, and many, perhaps numerous sales exhibitions of books were held there as well. Yes, at Café Koha, owned by Ramiz Bala, now near Hotel Prishtina, that's where that café was. It did a lot, not only for *Rilindja* but for culture in general, with the owner Ramiz Bala, who never once asked us to pay rent for holding the exhibitions there because there were book exhibitions, and I also saw painting exhibitions there. We would meet there and then coordinate the work that we would carry on afterward. That was, let's say, our nest.

A very bad feeling, a feeling of insecurity, like, "What will happen to *Rilindja*?" We also had the fear, "What will happen to *Rilindja*'s documentation?", "What will happen to the books?", "What will happen to the documentation, but also to us?", "How will we manage, how will we live?" I swear, not just me, but others too, we started to fear, thinking, "How will we manage?" The fact that you are left without a job creates insecurity. You were afraid because, as a parent, you had no other means of existence, naturally, you became worried. Then you were afraid, "What will happen to Kosovo?" Because when they take away these basic rights, "What will happen tomorrow?" Unfortunately, I and others who thought like this were right, because then the war happened, not because we wanted it, but because it was imposed on us. However, as they say, "The more it tightens, sometimes it gets better." Because maybe we were living in illusions like our ancestors did, without their fault, of course. Freedom came, but the feeling of fear remained, like, "What will happen to us, how will we manage? How will we support our children?" Because the Serbian occupying power began putting obstacles everywhere. And I had no idea that I should leave. Could I have done it? "How could you have done it?" I could have done it through wrestling, as I was, without boasting, the best in Kosovo. Meaning, I could have gone wherever I wanted, and even before the war, I could have, but I didn't want to, I swear. Let me even mention an instance in Poreč, Croatia.

<<<*Scene of the wrestling tournament*>>>

A tournament was being held, and I beat all my opponents, the coaches were saying to me, "Hey, young man, come to us," you know, "Come to us, you'll prosper." And I would have prospered much more than in Kosovo, but I didn't let them finish talking, I didn't even let them speak, I said, "No way," in Albanian, but to them, I said it in Serbian, "I won't leave Kosovo."



*At a wrestling tournament, Palace of Youth and Sports hall*

*In the photo: Mirsad Krasniqi*

*From the personal archive of Mirsad Krasniqi*



*Mirsad Krasniqi wins the match at the wrestling tournament, Palace of Youth and Sports hall  
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*Mirsad Krasniqi wins the match at the wrestling tournament, Palace of Youth and Sports hall*

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We also continued after the war, when Kosovo was liberated. We started returning to work, but unfortunately, not everyone could return because it seemed there were no opportunities, so not all those who worked at *Rilindja* or in the publishing editorial team came back because different conditions and new people came along, I mean I don't want to blame or praise anyone here, but out of all those people, very few were taken back. Out of the 24-25 people we had in the editorial team, only six or seven were rehired, a very small number. That's because the ministry took us under its "patronage," let's say, the Ministry of Culture took us in, saying they could... they could support us or pay salaries and help with publishing for that many people, so the number was small. But unfortunately, even that didn't last long, just three years, after three years, *Rilindja* was shut down. **UNMIK took over without giving us any explanation**, surely, some of our own people were at fault because everything was centralized at *Rilindja*, all newspapers, publishing houses, everything. And now, to be pushed out of there felt like a second occupation, so to speak. We returned there, and after two or three years, we were told, "No, leave, because this will be transformed into something else." Even today, the government has taken it over, but **they still haven't paid us 20%**... and that, too, was a very symbolic payment, something that would leave you astonished.

<<<Scene of Prishtina's main square>>>





*Mirsad Krasniqi among books, Mother Teresa Square, 2024*

*Rilindja* closed, meaning, after three years, it shut down in 2002... and we were left without work. I had to find something. I didn't know any other job besides books, to be honest, and wrestling, the sport I practiced, but now, there was a need for work and survival. I went to the

square to sell books, starting with a single table for several years, after that, the Municipality of Prishtina, during Mayor Shpend Ahmeti's term, provided a very good solution for us, so they created those kiosks in collaboration with a Swiss organization called *Demos*, and they were quite good for that time. They could have been even better, but we should be grateful because they took us off the streets, so to speak, from the harsh conditions, giving us a place where we could shelter, leave the books without having to carry them around, and so, it's been over twenty years in the square. People often ask me, "For how much longer?" But at my age now, there's no other job I'd do. Even though sometimes there are complaints, about tiredness, the heat, the cold, I do it with passion, I truly love it.

It was a great fortune, even as a child, because my father worked there, and every book that came out of *Rilindja*, my father would bring home since every *Rilindja* worker received a copy. So, my connection with books started before I was employed in '81, around '74-'75, many years earlier, as my father would bring us every published book. So I was fortunate, and perhaps I became familiar with it more easily than others and made more friends. It's a good feeling to work with books because you meet a lot of people, get to know many people, and these aren't just anyone, but people of books, people of the pen, people of knowledge, humane people. Thanks to books, I have met many, many people. Books have made it possible for me to have many friends, which I probably wouldn't have had in other circumstances.

I am very sorry that now there is not a single newspaper in Kosovo. Not a single newspaper, none, is published in Kosovo! I'm again reminded of the former Yugoslavia, meaning, when people ask in conversations, all of them have preserved their national newspapers. They all have them, Slovenes, Croats, Bosniaks, Macedonians, all of them do. We are the only ones who don't have a daily newspaper. I'm not even sure if there is still a magazine being published, and even those are very, very rare. This creates a very, very bad feeling in me, and I say, "How did it come to this? Are we really unable to publish even a single newspaper? How can Kosovo not have a single newspaper?"