



## The Lake Mary Life Book Club Featuring...Besa Kosova and her My One School

By Julie Compton

In an unassuming building on Ronald Reagan Boulevard, just south of State Road 434 in Longwood, Besa Kosova is hard at work running her nonprofit organization, My One School, Inc., whose mission is to defeat global illiteracy "by utilizing the most powerful weapon – the book." Through book donations and community partnerships, Besa says her organization is determined to utilize books, one by one, to

build schools and libraries internationally, while providing backpacks filled with school supplies for local families in need.

My One School started on November 2, 2008, as an online presence, but in June of this year Besa opened the Longwood store. Using \$20,000 of her own money, she renovated the building to build a store where she sells donated books, the proceeds of which are used to support My One School's mission. To date, several thousand books have been donated, and more donations arrive each day.

Donations of shipping supplies are also welcomed to offset the cost of shipping the sold books.

**LML: Why did you decide to start this organization?**

**Besa:** Ever since childhood I've dreamt of helping others. I've yearned to use my talents so others may benefit. For a long time, I wrote with an aspiration to use my books to inspire. But when I couldn't get published, I contemplated giving up everything, the writing and the dream of helping. This was a difficult decision, and after I made it, I wrote a letter to God about it. The next morning, I had a revelation. I realized that I did not have to give up my dreams. I decided to start selling books in order to build schools. I had sold some books online a few weeks earlier, and I thought I could do the same for my dream. I told myself I could use books to inspire even if they weren't written by me.

I started by telling friends and neighbors, and before I knew it, the books came from all sources. Hence, My One School was born.

**LML: What are some of the projects you've been involved in since you began raising money?**

**Besa:** We recently raised enough funds for our first school project, in partnership with Child Literacy, Inc. (a New York nonprofit) to build a school in Uttar Pradesh, India. This school will provide education to over 300 children. Construction is expected to begin in the fourth quarter of 2009.

Our current project is the Backpack Project, which offers school-age readers backpacks filled with timeless books, journals, as well as an assortment of school supplies. These students are of diverse backgrounds from local families in need.


In addition, we are planning to embrace a new project in Bihar, India. For this project we

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will be raising funds to build a school, library, and a shelter for a few hundred orphaned girls.

**LML: Can you explain a bit about the Longwood store?**

**Besa:** The store in Longwood is the first. It is approximately 1,000 square feet and features the sitting (reading) area with four rooms. The rooms resemble a home, but are more like a



Volunteer Terri Avellons, who helps at the shop, with Besa Kosova

book lovers' sanctuary. I wanted to do this so that readers and shoppers can come in and read with us and not feel rushed to leave.

We offer free Wi-Fi, as well as free coffee and tea. We offer children's reading hours, and host book and writing groups, author nights, and other events. We have a small conference room with a dining table and six chairs for the book clubs and meetings. We also

feature the children's room, where our children's and teen literature are displayed. In the kitchen area, the shelves are in alphabetical order by authors' last names, in case someone is looking for a specific author.

Currently, we are turning our office into another room where we will feature rare finds, first editions, classics, etc. We do have an online bookstore as well, on Amazon. Our Amazon store currently features over 3,000 items. We are on a mission to add at least 100 items a day until our store reaches 10,000 items.

**LML: Tell us a little bit about Besa Kosova.**

**Besa:** I like to call myself an Albanian-born, American writer. I discovered my passion for books, poetry, and writing in elementary school. The first poem I penciled, at age six, was about peace. At age eight, I decided to become a writer. Since then, I have not stopped writing. My first poetry collection, *Raindrops*, was published in September 2007.

When I am not writing, I enjoy helping others and collecting anything Coca-Cola. Besides that, I am also many other things: the founder of My One School Inc., director of fundraising and development for Child Literacy Inc. and Save a Girl Child, proud Rotarian, a creative writing student at the University of Central Florida, and now a bookstore owner! Nonetheless, my greatest job is raising the two most 'awesomes' children, my brilliant son, Nathaniel, and oh-so talented daughter, Gentiana.

**\*Did you know?** According to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization),

there are about one billion non-literate adults in the world today. This is approximately 26 percent of the world's adult population.



The children's book area at My One School

Julie Compton is the author of the legal thriller, *Tell No Lies*, which has been published in four countries and three languages. Her second novel, *Rescuing Olivia*, will be released in the U.S. by St. Martin's Minotaur on February 2, 2010. She reads and writes from her home in Longwood, where she lives with her husband and two daughters.

Book clubs or local published authors who would like to be profiled in an upcoming issue should drop Julie a note at [Julie@LakeMaryLifeMagazine.com](mailto:Julie@LakeMaryLifeMagazine.com). Other book-related news, or information about local literary events, is also encouraged.

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