

Well Read Kids at My One School

By [Amy Green](#) | Wednesday, August 19, 2009 9:38 AM ET

When the recession hit, Besa Kosova did the unexpected: She quit her job to follow her dream of inspiring others through books. She opened a bookstore at a time when books, magazines and newspapers are giving way to online media, and she plans to donate her proceeds toward spreading literacy among impoverished children worldwide.

Her gritty, inspiring idealism was born during her escape from war-torn Kosovo when she was just 17. Today, this 32-year old single mother of two is the exuberant founder and director of [My One School Bookstore](#), which sells donated books for the benefit of child literacy. The store opened in suburban Orlando in June, and she has already raised enough money to build a school for up to 300 children in rural India.



"Thank God I don't have a shower here because I'd never leave," Kosova says. "I am playing the best game of my life. I hate going to sleep and I can't wait to wake up -- and I hate that I have to sleep at all because this is me. Sometimes I have to laugh at myself because I say, 'Am I really doing this?' It's fun."



Kosova left all her family in Kosovo when she moved to Florida for high school through a student exchange program. Eventually her dad emigrated to Michigan; she soon joined him there, married, and began working on a novel drawing from her experience with the war. In 13 years her marriage dissolved, the novel turned into a series of novels and she returned to Orlando for a second degree in creative writing. She grew weary of the rejections her first novel was garnering and asked God how she could inspire others through books. She woke up the next morning with the idea for the bookstore.

Kosova began gathering donated books from schools, libraries and estate sales and started selling them online. She quit her job in May as a leasing agent at an apartment complex and invested \$20,000 of her own money in leasing and renovating an old pet food store. Already she has raised \$3,500, which was matched by the New York-based [Child Literacy, Inc.](#), to open the school in India later this year. Though she plans to live off of savings for two years, she hopes to sell her novel, live off her writing and put all the bookstore's proceeds toward running the store and spreading child literacy.

"She has a model that is strong. It will work," said Anupam Satyasheel, co-founder and executive director of Child Literacy, Inc. "Our projections have told us if she can tap into the surplus books that are tossed around the US... they can potentially accumulate 1 million books in two to five years... Even if she sells a book for \$2 she can raise a substantial amount of money, and we felt that -- given her focus and drive -- we felt we are pairing up with a worthy nonprofit."

Kosova is on the board for Child Literacy Inc., and the organization has helped her apply for nonprofit status and offered other guidance with her business plan.

The bookstore is a tiny, homey place where the walls are the shade of chocolate milk. It exudes the feel of a parlor -- a cushy couch centers the main room and artwork by a New York artist adorns the walls. A children's room features bean bag chaire, white walls with hand prints in primary colors and pages torn from damaged children's books. Kosova and her friend and fellow volunteer Terri Avellone did virtually all the renovations themselves. They serve coffee, tea and snacks and offer children's reading times and author meet-and-greets. Eventually they want to assemble a writer's group, poetry group and book club and turn the store into a community gathering place.



Kosova still wants to return to work on her historical fiction novel told by a 17-year-old girl in a manner Anne Frank's diary. She exudes a warmth and bounding energy that comes across as refreshing during a recession, and she is undaunted by the challenges her bookstore faces. She tells the story of her journey to the United States, how no one at the time could get a visa and her family had no money for a plane ticket.

When it looked as though she had no chance, her dad asked, "Do you believe in your dream? Then let your dream handle that for you. Believe in it. Believe in it with your whole heart, and against all odds it will beat them, and it will fight for you."

She was granted a visa, her family gathered the money, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Second photo courtesy of Besa Kosova.

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