

Maya Batra

THE SWEET ESCAPE



When the Coronavirus pandemic hit in 2020, Naiel and Punhal were just eleven and nine, respectively, and found themselves in a similar situation to the rest of us. They were desperate for a hobby, a reason to keep going when nothing was looking up. As parents Aifra and Mozzam reflect, they did not want their children to fall into an unproductive rut. Rather, they tried their best to channel their kids' boredom into creativity. When it came to television, the only shows that Naiel and Punhal were allowed to watch were productive ones, including cooking shows. Recent studies from MIT show that creativity thrives within limits, and Aifra and Mozzam's parenting of setting television boundaries corresponds with several of the institute's suggestions for nurturing creative minds. This includes involvement with projects that require socialization and passion, baking being a great example of this (Resnick).

Naiel excitedly tells us about how watching these cooking shows became a family routine and something that bonded him and his sister. "Every Saturday morning, Punhal, my Dad, and I would watch the Kids Baking Championship," Naiel explains. Seeing the rows of bakers intently perfecting their craft was a huge source of inspiration for him and kept him motivated through the isolation. Little did he know that in just over a year he would be on this show himself, presenting his famous fusion recipes to world renowned bakers Valeri Bertenelli and Duff Goldman. Naiel and Punhal officially started their business on Valentine's day of 2021, the perfect time to delve into a new set of desserts that their customers would love. One of the primary desserts that they offered during this time were fruit breads, given the copious amount of fruit trees in their backyard. Around this time Punhal also tried her hand at crafting healthy desserts such as keto truffles and cakes. However, Naiel and Punhal knew that if they were going to stand out in the baking business alongside hundreds of thousands of others, they needed to offer something special to their customers that would make them stand out.





Flashback to pre-pandemic times, the Chadury family would spend a few months each year in Pakistan, something that Naiel and Punhal have done since they were little, and are heavily inspired by the foods there: “We grew up with flavors that we get from there and our grandparents’ cooking, our parents’ cooking, and a lot of South Asian flavors.” Naiel tells us, referring to the hints of rose, cardamom, and saffron baked into all of their specialities. “When we started our business we wanted to sell flavors that were different from just chocolate or vanilla, so we decided to include flavors that we grew up eating and that really helped our business.” “A lot of people wanted to see that,” he explains, which is surely implied by the 4,000+ desserts that the siblings have had to craft since then. With this came the title for their business, Lá Jawab Treats, meaning unmatched treats in the Urdu language of Pakistan.

After launching this idea and selling their first few rounds of fusion baked goods, Naiel and Punhal decided that if they were going to be earning money for their desserts, they would want to donate a portion of their money towards causes that are important to them. While this is not the first thing most people would assume to hear from an eleven and thirteen-year old, it does not come as a surprise given the environment Naiel and Punhal were raised in. “I’m on the board of a few non-profits, and we tell our kids [about it]” Mozzam explains. Not only have they been hearing about their parents’ work



within charities from a very young age, but they have also seen it first hand: “We make sure that whenever we go to Pakistan we take them to a village,” he adds. “In the Bay Area, especially here in Los Altos, this is a bubble. You have to go and see the majority of the world and how they live. When they were young, we took them to a village that had a lot of mud and animal poop on the road, and Naiel and Punhal were like ‘Where did you bring us? I can’t even walk on this road. Why are you torturing us?,” he laughed. “And I told them, there are about 100 kids who walk twice the same road to their school which we were going to. Now [on] the next trip, they were looking forward to that, and they made friends.” Despite being in such a privileged area of the world, being able to witness this level of poverty and misfortune first hand has played a huge role in their determination to use fame and money from the business to help the less fortunate. Their Pakistani roots continue to play a huge role in both the flavors

that they cook with and their inspiration when it comes to using their money for a good cause, and they certainly don't fail to credit this when talking about the origins of their business. Some of the charities that Lá Jawab Treats donates to include LifeMoves, the Human Development Foundation, and GiveLight. "Recently we've been donating a lot to the Turkey Syria Earthquake and local homeless shelters as well." Naiel adds.

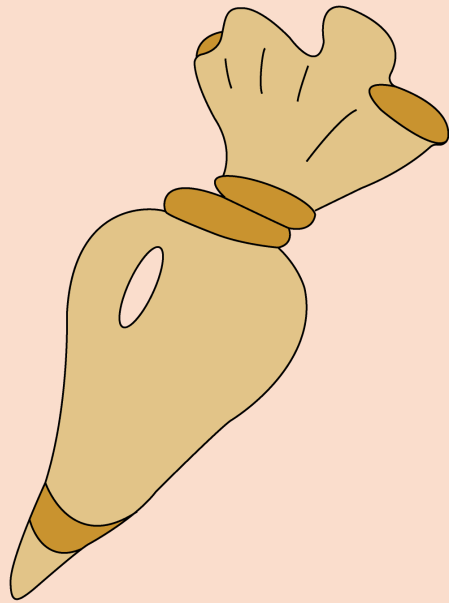
As the siblings continued to work hard on baking, promoting, and satisfying customers, their efforts did not go unnoticed. Not long after it was launched, Lá Jawab treats began to capture the attention of news outlets in the Silicon Valley, landing them on local television, newspapers, and more. As a result of their successes and unique work with fusion treats in the Bay Area, Naiel was one day approached by Food Network with a show called Kids Baking Championship. Naiel and his mom Aifra Chadury were asked to fly to Tennessee for weeks of an extensive filming process, during which 12 kid bakers competed to impress



judges Valeri Bertenelli and Duff Goldman. According to Naiel, this felt surreal, while also being one of crucial sacrifices that his family has had to make in order to foster the success of Lá Jawab Treats. "It was really crazy because this show had a big part in our baking passion," he explains. Spending weeks away from school, friends, and family is a big commitment for a thirteen year-old. However, Naiel and his parents were aware that making these decisions are an unavoidable part of the journey to pursue the Chadury siblings' baking passion. Naiel was both excited and determined to be a part of the Food Network world and surround himself with young people who share his passion for baking. The show featured ten intense rounds of baking competitions in which ten young bakers had the opportunity to showcase their own specialties and flavors through carefully crafted desserts, one getting eliminated per episode until a winner was left standing in the finale. This was yet another opportunity for

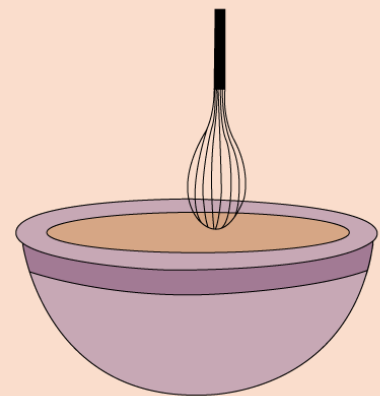


Naiel to return to his South Asian roots when crafting delicacies for judges, including some of the treats that are sold as a part of his business. Just like so many customers before who had been drawn to these beautiful desserts with unique flavors, Goldman and Bertinelli were enticed by what Naiel was presenting them week after week.



In addition to his baking skills, Naiel was able to apply the entrepreneurship skills he had learned from running his business thus far in order to advance on the show. For example, his unique, fusion flavors are a huge selling point, and for the first few rounds he impressed the judges through a traditional South Asian dessert called Ras Malai, a baked donut with Mascarpone Masala whipped cream, and other such fusion desserts. In a room full of baking talent, Naiel was able to stand out and impress the judges time after time, enough to make it to the final round with two other contestants. In the season finale, each baker was given a theme, and without any prior preparation was challenged to come up with an elaborate cake to satisfy Goldman and Bertinelli. Naiel approached crafting his nautical themed cake in the same way he approaches many of the cakes for his business, with both efficiency and intricacy. Somewhere along the process the cake started to fall apart, an extremely stressful situation given the time limit and pressure of the final round. However, Naiel was able to act quickly

and correct the mishap, going on to produce an award winning cake within the allotted time. Naiel's passion and entrepreneurship skills became visible to audience members throughout the series, but the last episode truly showcases several of the abilities that he has been able to learn through running Lá Jawab treats. When it comes to any aspiring young entrepreneur, we see that the journey requires risk taking, time management, communication, and often compromise. Naiel took home the winning trophy for Season 11 of Kids Baking Championship with his blue sailing themed birthday cake, as well as \$25,000 in cash.



As of future hopes and dreams, the pair hopes to one day be able to start their own bakery. “We want to open it up in Downtown Los Altos because it’s close to our home and we’ve been there a lot” Punhal states, describing her ideal location for this big dream. Indeed, their accomplishments of the past two years show that anything is possible, and as long as their famous fusion desserts keep selling at the current rate it’s safe to say that Lá Jawab Treats has a successful future ahead.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Maya Batra is a Junior at Mountain View High School and part of the Design program at Freestyle Academy. She lives in Los Altos with her Mom, Dad, and brother. Aside from visual communication, her biggest passion is music and songwriting. She hopes to one day be able to pursue a career in digital marketing, in addition to being a singer-songwriter. In her free time, she enjoys running, podcasting, and planning events.

