

**Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?**

I am no Emeril Lagasse or Bobby Flay, but just like them, I have a passion for food. I love standing in front of a burning stove and creating something unique that no one else can. I love how simply sautéing a red onion can infuse an entire room with its sweet aroma that will make mouths water. Most importantly, I love it when I see the smiles on people's faces, after they eat something I have created. I love to cook.

My passion started out as a secret. When I knew I was at home alone, I would enter my haven, the kitchen, and I would find anything that I thought would work well together: vinegars, fruits, spices, herbs or meats. Whatever it was I found a way to fuse all of it together, and create something delicious. One day, my sister caught me, and I felt as if I had done something horrifically wrong because males do not traditionally cook in Indian culture. On this particular day I chose to emulate Rachel Ray's broccoli chicken quiche, and my sister rudely entered the kitchen to have a taste. The next thing I saw was this rather large smile on her face. She approved of what she had eaten, and from there, my passion no longer became a secret. I cooked freely.

Cooking, to some may appear to be a horrid task that must be completed at the end of the day, for the utter sake of being fed; but to me, it is never a task. I do it because I love it. I never see it as a chore, but as a form of reflection. What I make is how I feel. At times I will cook up a batch of chicken curry, infused with the essence of *lal marchu* chilies and *leemri* leaves, *jeera* rice that turns a vibrant turmeric yellow, and a desert of carrot cake a family favorite. I am filled with a sense of satisfaction because I am able to entertain and bring my family close together with something as simple as a home cooked meal.