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PINECREST TRIBUNE

June 12 - 25, 2008

Tantalize Your Taste Buds with New Indian Cooking Classes

As I walked into the Pinecrest home of the D'Mello family, little did I realize that the distinctive aroma of Indian spices was coming from the delicious foods I was about to enjoy – and learn how to create!

Almost one year ago, Bruno, Ayesha, Byron and Brhea D'Mello relocated from San Francisco to Pinecrest. Moving for a job opportunity and to try a new city, the D'Mellos were greeted with open arms by hurricanes Rita and Wilma.

"I didn't even know about hurricane preparedness," Ayesha said. "By the time Wilma arrived, our family was ready with supplies!"

Originally from Goa, an Indian state with a predominantly Portuguese influence that infiltrates the culture, religion and food, Ayesha D'Mello grew up in a comfortable home, the fourth in the line of five children.

"I was always a sunny, optimistic child with an 'I can do it' attitude," she said.

Her father was a doctor and her mother a teacher; having cleaners, gardeners and cooks was standard. "Servants, especially the cook, were very personal in our society," Ayesha said. "I watched our Goan cook prepare our meals for 25 years."

When their family cook finally succumbed to old age, Ayesha jumped right in to help out. She took it upon herself to buy fresh produce at the market and prepared meals before going off to school each day. She enjoyed the entire process, prepping, creating unique culinary delights for her whole family to enjoy.

After Ayesha graduated high school and left for college in Ontario, Canada, there was a huge void in her Indian home. Of course her family missed Ayesha and her delicious cuisine; Ayesha also had left her comfortable, familiar life to embark on a new journey — to Canada, so different from her home the warm, tropical climate of Goa.

Ayesha graduated with a degree in Computer Science and then went on to the University of Texas where she earned an MBA.

After completing her MBA, Ayesha went back to India where she met her husband, Bruno. They had a "fall-blown" wedding in Bombay and moved to San



Inside Pinecrest WITH ROBIN KASKEL POLSKY

Cooking is a family affair in the D'Mello home; Ayesha, Brhea and Byron prepare a delicious Indian dish for dinner.

Francisco, where she and Bruno worked fulltime with two young children, Byron and Brhea.

When her children were very little, Ayesha decided to take a year off work to spend time with other mothers and their children. She enjoyed preparing elaborate food for the women in her "Mother's Club" for her husband's friends and colleagues.

"Everyone told me that I should start giving cooking classes," Ayesha said. "They all loved the food I made and thought I cooked so well."

Ayesha uses the same fragrant spices in her Indian cooking that she uses for healing colds, cuts and to lower high cholesterol.

Ayesha uses garlic to help boost the immune system, cloves for a toothache, okra and bitter melon to help lower cholesterol.

"When my daughter or son has a cold, I give them Ginger tea, which helps clear the phlegm, and if someone cuts themselves, I put Turmeric on it," she said. "Red Kashmiri chilies are great for helping clear up a runny nose, as well." Ayesha has a designated Krups coffee grinder for grinding all her fresh spices.

The criterion for all her recipes — healthy and quick. Ayesha only uses utensils and equipment that people would have at home, including a rolling pin. Her biggest challenge? Figuring out the exact measurements for the recipes she has been making by "feel" for 30 years.

"My husband nearly got sick after I made him try all my different curry recipes," Ayesha said.

After talking with Ayesha, she asked if I would like to try some of the foods that we discussed. A lover of Indian cuisine since childhood, I eagerly agreed. What I didn't expect and will always remember — the feast that Ayesha prepared for me.

I eagerly offered to help her bring each dish to the table after she warmed it in the microwave. Ayesha had made an incredible smorgasbord of some of the meals that she makes for her family and those that she teaches in her classes. I felt like the luckiest person in the world. I had never expected I would be savoring these Indian delicacies, made fresh in someone's home.

Shrimp Coconut Curry — prepared with coconut milk, garlic, onions tomatoes and tamarind; spicy and sweet, the flavor subtly tantalizing. Chicken

Rechad — chicken pieces flavored with red chilies, spices and vinegar Marsala; a unique, pleasing type of spice combination; a medium-spicy Goan Okra, that, to Ayesha's surprise, I devoured without hesitation. The Okra was "slimeless," stir fried until crunchy and prepared with onion, mango powder and red, crushed chili powder. All was served with a warm, melt-in-your-mouth Chapatti bread and a meat curry, usually prepared with lamb when available. The almond, Cardamom-flavored stew was complimented a fragrant Basmati rice — a longer, fluffier, more delicate variety. There were Pastis Samos as well, a delicate pastry stuffed with mashed potato. Luckily, I had not eaten since breakfast and was able to savor it all.

A similar menu to what Ayesha will teach in her classes, this memorable meal was topped off by sweet and flavorful Cardamom tea and Bibinca, a time consuming, Indian dessert that Ayesha had painstakingly prepared. Bibinca is created with layers of coconut milk, egg yolk, sugar and nutmeg, blended together, layer after thin layer to create an incredible combination that is truly beyond description. My full-to-the-brim stomach was the only thing preventing me from devouring the entire piece.

What a kind gesture, to invite me to her home and create this feast — I truly felt that this was one of the kindest things that anyone had ever done for me. I was fortunate to meet her daughter, Brhea, who came home from Pinecrest Elementary rather hungry. She happily helped herself to the delicious foods she knows so well.

Ayesha's next cooking classes will be on June 10 and 17, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The fee is \$60 per guest, which includes the ingredients, the class and a wonderful sit-down lunch where you can exchange stories and meet interesting people. Recipes for all courses will be provided.

Call Ayesha at 305-666-1952 or email her at <ayesha_dmello@yahoo.com> for questions or to register. Bring a friend for a most memorable and delicious day!

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