

FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD

By: Zainab Malik

Only a few things make us feel as nostalgic as comfort food does. We associate many of our childhood memories with our favorite foods. Think of how summer time was for you as a kid. Let yourself travel back in time. It's hot and sunny, and for me the first thing I do is crack open a nice, cold bottle of Mirinda (orange soda). The sound of the bottle cap popping off and the taste of orangey goodness were summertime for me. Maybe it's the feeling of kulfi (Pakistani frozen dessert) dripping down my hands as I desperately try to finish before it completely melts away; or maybe, if you're like me, summer was all about Kolson chips (yum!). My dad has always called me his little chaskhori (meaning I enjoy munching on food!). Whatever your childhood memories may be, I guarantee you that if you think back, a lot of your favorites involve food.

My all-time favorite food is biryani. The last time I ate it was with my great-aunt and grand-uncle back in my hometown in Karachi, Pakistan. They had been away in America for quite a while, so my parents and I figured that they might be a bit homesick. We went to our favorite Pakistani restaurant and ordered qima (chili), bihari boti (spicy chicken), and chicken karahi (more spicy chicken). Of course, I ordered biryani. As we sat and ate together, laughing and reminiscing about things that happened so long ago, I felt like the five-year-old I once was and was transported back to my childhood. We were no longer at a restaurant, but sitting around the kitchen table in my great-grandmother's house. I'm sitting with my cousins, laughing and playing, my nani (grandmother) and mom fussing in the kitchen over who is responsible for the

meat and potatoes - spoiler alert: the meat always turns out the best when my nani makes it. It smells, tastes, and feels like home. But, you don't have to just take my word for it. Comfort food reminds other UCLA students of home too.

UCLA sociology major Durana Saydee moved to the U.S. from Afghanistan with her family in 2001. Resettlement was difficult for Durana and her family. Her father worked three jobs and went to school to provide for his family. Her mother stayed home to take care of Durana and her sister. The pair grew up eating traditional Afghani food like mantu, chalow, and curry. She recalls that her home was fairly close to school, so she and her sister knew that after their walk home, their mom would have dinner waiting for them.

"Believe me, she always stood watching, waiting for us to come home," Durana recalled, "She'd wave with a smile on her face and rush to meet us at the door." Durana said that she could smell her mom's cooking from a mile away, and that she and her sister would guess what their mom made based on what they smelled. She was always able to guess correctly when it was her favorite dish, chalow and korma-e-morgh (rice and chicken curry). Years later now, Durana says that she developed a primarily western diet while eating on the Hill (the residential restaurants at UCLA), but when she goes home, her mom sends her back to school with her favorites. "I no longer have my mom waiting for me after school," Durana says, "But...whenever I eat [her dishes] I am reminded of a much simpler time in which my world revolved around my family and our cultural background."