

Learn Something Small About Indian Flavors and How You Can Help Their Covid Crisis — Right Now

Listen at www.JacquelineRaposo.com/podcasts/learn-something-small

Audio Story Transcript:

Music: An upbeat Indian song with sitars, drums, etc.

Jacqueline Raposo:

Hi friend, it's Jacqueline. If you can, listen to this small story while you're cooking food. If that's not possible, try to at least throw in some earphones and *really listen* while you take in the space around you, what your hands are doing... what your body is touching.... Things like that. Ready? Here we go... Welcome back to Learn Something Small.

Clip of Barkha Cardoz on the phone:

I feel like if we can show them where we can give... people give.

Clip of Floyd Cardoz from Love Bites Radio:

We connected on a lot of things. We were two foreigners in a strange land who had come in as immigrants with nothing in our pockets. And we just wanted to make it big.

Jacqueline Raposo:

That's Barkha and Floyd Cardoz. Floyd is a celebrated Indian-born American chef. Of the hundreds of chefs I've interviewed over the last decade, he's one of very few I call "friend." Floyd grew up in Mumbai but spent summers in Goa, where my godfather is from. He's Catholic – my godfather is a Catholic priest there. And Goa was part of the Portuguese empire for 450 years, until the Indian Army invaded and annexed Goa in 1961. My father is from Portugal, and this intertwining of Indian and Portuguese cultures remains particularly strong in the cuisine of Goa. Floyd and I connected immediately on all of those things – his dishes sometimes remind me of those my avó made and my father makes... with more flavor.

As a chronically ill eater, I ate safely and very well in Floyd's restaurants, at his kitchen table, and in Mexico, after he arranged for me to cover a food festival he was participating in. On that trip, I met his wife, Barkha, and became even closer friends with her than Floyd. A trained chef herself, Barkha's worked with Floyd throughout his career in varying capacities, and I'm now her Director of Creative Projects at [Cardoz Legacy LLC...](#)

Because Floyd passed away from complications of the coronavirus on March 25th, 2020.

Music: Shifts to a soft, sweet piano melody.

Jacqueline Raposo:

He had been working in India when the pandemic hit, and rushed to get home through airports, sitting on those long flights before mask mandates, before we knew which way was up.

Over one year later, we still miss him dearly. Over one year later, India is in pandemic panic.

As of when I'm writing this, [350,000 new infections are reported daily](#) there. Hospitals are full. My godfather messaged that "India is in the fight for its survival. Scarcity of everything," he says. Barkha is sick with worry for friends and family and the country she still calls home. I'll leave the *what* and *why* behind India's recent surge via resources you can find on this small audio story's website page. We're focusing on people here, and what we can do to help. Because as more suffer and go without during this worldwide pandemic, I look around the tiny, borrowed corner of Vermont I'm squatting in during my solo quarantine: the fresh food I've gotten from the market, the *many* prescriptions I pick up at the drive-through pharmacy, the heat I can just turn on, running water, clean air out the door I can breathe in deeply. It's easy to forget the delight on our bodies and spirits of these magical gifts, right? Can you feel them on yours, dear friend?

In the spirit of gratitude and nourishment, Barkha and I want to offer a way for you to Learn Something Small and help those in India right now.

One of the projects we've rolled out under Cardoz Legacy is a line of three masalas – spice blends – that Floyd was working on with [Burlap & Barrel](#) before he passed. They're a spice company that works directly with smallholder farmers all around the world to not only directly benefit the livelihoods of those farmers, but to also transform what we cook, here. Floyd's been dubbed the Spice Master, and he taught a brigade of chefs now cooking around our country how to appreciate and *love* spice; how to open palettes to it; how to embrace the *world* of it. And, yes, how the spices in the broad range of Indian foods can awaken our palettes and dishes and senses and bodies. And so we're going to cook with those spices, and pay it forward with them.

But first, I want you to get to know my friends a little...

A few years ago, I had a food and dating radio show called [Love Bites](#) on Heritage Radio Network. One stormy winter afternoon, Barkha and Floyd [came into the studio](#) to talk about how pushing Indian cuisine forward in the United States affected their relationship — and vice versa. Here's a little of that conversation...

The following is from Love Bites Radio on Heritage Radio Network. [Listen to the full episode here.](#)

Jacqueline Raposo:

And we are back with Barkha and Floyd Cardoz. And so listeners, they do run Paowalla restaurant together now, and they did meet in hospitality school. But Barkha has not worked the entire time of their relationship directly in the food field with Floyd as our other guests in the series have in one way or another. So at the beginning of your relationship of your marriage, especially when you're thinking about starting a family together, what were your concerns about one of you being in the hospitality industry in New York City, specifically as a chef?

Floyd Cardoz:

I am selfish, so I didn't really think about it. But it did bother me that I had to work when the kids were young. You know, I was there for holidays. I was there for Christmas, Thanksgiving, for baseball games, for football games, for fencing tournaments...

Barkha Cardoz:

Yeah, it was it was hard. We didn't... It wasn't even a decision or a discussion because that was what was Floyd's passion. And I mean, he... A very long time ago, I remember being in college and him telling me, "Somebody has got to take French cuisine and add flavor to it." And I was like, "And who's going to do that?" And he said, "Me." I said, "Make sure I'm around to watch you do that." And fast forward 30 years down the road and he's doing it. So when someone has that passion, they're blessed. And when they're blessed with that, you can't put impediments in their way because they have a purpose to be doing what they're doing. And it's not just cooking. It's way beyond that. So we decided, when we first got married, I tried working in the hospitality industry and we realized that if we both did that, we would not have a family life. So I decided to take a back seat, get a regular job that would give me weekends off, evenings off...

Floyd Cardoz:

...I wouldn't say backseat. I'd say you supported everything I did. And you also paid the bills when I was a line cook at L'Espinasse making 300 bucks gross a week working 72 hours a week. You know, Barkha said "Just do it because he's a chef that will teach you."

And she paid the bills. I would watch Pete in the morning, because I would go for evening shift and be home by 2:00 o'clock in the morning and then I'd wake up at 7:00 to be with him. But she supported that passion. And she was always there to tell me, like, "Go out and do it. We'll figure it out." Even when I decided to do Paowalla. She said, "We'll figure it out." So it's not that I decided that I was going to do it. But if I was alone, I would never have been able to do it.

Jacqueline Raposo:

But Barkha, it felt like your career or what you had wanted was taking a backseat and that it became necessity to make the income for your family?

Barkha Cardoz:

Yes and no. You know, when you're young and you're in your 20s and you're starting life out, you really, unless you're blessed like Floyd to know exactly what you want to do when you grow up, you're still trying to figure out what you want to be when you grow up. But I just felt at that point that I didn't have a choice to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up; I just had to make sure that I did something that gave me money and gave me the flexibility to be home with my kids when they needed me or when I had to be home. So considering that, I feel like I didn't do what I want to do. But if you asked me today, I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up. So it doesn't matter. We're ahead of the game. We're doing something that I feel is going to be more than just a restaurant because it's a feeling and it's a place that makes you happy because I walk in there and I feel I'm home. So it was worth the wait.

Jacqueline Raposo:

How did the dining scene in New York and your work, Floyd, as a chef, how did that - or did it not put extra stress, do you feel, on your work as a chef, and therefore on maybe your relationship as well as you were sort of coming up in the ranks?

Floyd Cardoz:

I know.... I'm very focused on what I want to cook. I know exactly what I want to do. I don't... I'm lucky and blessed where I can create something without having to think or plate or cook it 15, 20 times. I do it once and I know what I want. You know, I'd say 25 years ago, actually, twenty-nine years ago when I came to this country, I wasn't given a chance. I wasn't given a chance because I was Indian. A lot of restaurants that want to give me a chance. So my first job had to be in an Indian restaurant. And at that point, I saw that in Indian restaurants the food was nothing close to what it is today or what it could be, or what it is in India. And I knew then that A) either I'd never do Indian food

again or do something to change it. And when I was approached by Danny Meyer to do Tabla - and this was after I was at Lespinasse for a while - he said he wanted an Indian restaurant. And I told him, "I'm willing to cook that, but I want to cook it on my terms. I want to do it with things that, I want to introduce America to flavors."

And not so much now, but in the early 90s, late 90s, people either loved Indian food and flavors or absolutely hated it. And there were more people who hated than loved it. So, I didn't want to, I don't want people to come in and ask for dishes - and I still don't want me to come in - for dishes like chicken tikka masala, which is a) not Indian and something that I didn't grow up with. Or even, you know, yeah, I do naans in my restaurant. But having naans that - I ate a naan when I was 18 or 19. So people's palates have changed. We're lucky to be in the United States because they love flavor, they love.... We are, you know, we are pioneers. We want to discover new things and we enjoy things very, very much in this country. And I love that about the United States. I love that every immigrant is allowed to come in and do what they want and people are allowed to embrace it, no matter what the cuisine is. And we got, I got the chance. And I'm still doing things that people have not seen in Indian restaurants before. Because on my travels in India, I find things that are very interesting and very simple and not overly spiced, not overly greasy. And I think Indian food has changed because the question that people would ask me, "Where would you go to eat Indian?" I'd say, "my home." And I want to bring my home to you. And we do that at Paowalla.

Jacqueline Raposo:

Barkha, how, with everything that Floyd just said, how do you feel like that journey specifically has affected your relationship and your family?

Barkha Cardoz:

We've watched - I think my kids would be a party to this answer, because it's been a family journey, even though it's been Floyd's individual journey, he's taken us along for the ride. So we've done highs and lows and new frontiers. And just seeing a lot of people accepting what he does, acknowledging what he does - not just his food, but his sheer diligence, hard work, discipline - and for us, as a family, I always say this, as somebody that was growing up in India, in this business, I never dreamed I would watch Indian food take on the role it takes on today. Even these past 20 years of just watching, when we first started doing Indian food at Tabla to seeing it today with the amount of chefs that are doing it and the recognition that's out there, but knowing that it all started with Floyd and his mindset and his decision to say, "I am actually going to go the road less traveled and take a chance," and it's paid off big for all of us to just see that.

Floyd Cardoz:

You know what, what I really love is, like I told Barkha this a few weeks ago, I said, "You've got to be my Chief People Officer because people absolutely love you." And people are seeing what I see in her, because she has this character of bringing the warmth out of people and embracing them mentally. You know, you feel safe with her. So, for me, that is the best part of it.

Ambient Sound: The chopping of vegetables, whisking of eggs, etc. comes in and underscores the following.

Jacqueline Raposo:

Goan, Kashmiri, and Garam — those are the first three masalas we rolled out with [Burlap & Barrel](#). Honestly, I love all three.

The Goan is gentle and balanced and unassuming, with turmeric and cumin and ginger that play well together in my morning egg salad and the chicken soup I defrost from the freezer. It adds flavor and spice without claiming too much space. You need it for curries, but you *want* it everywhere.

The Garam is sweet and spicy, with floral notes of cardamom and refreshing bay leaf that sneak through mace and cloves and cinnamon. I add it to my hot cocoa, and my mug cakes, and my morning lattes. I put a pinch into my stews to play a bit of warmth against meat and heat.

The Kashmiri is brilliantly alive. The more I play with it, the more I find that I enjoy all the boys it brings to the yard: the ginger and cardamom and coriander and turmeric and fennel that play against the fiery chili to transform eggs and soups and stews.

Barkha carried Floyd's work with [Burlap & Barrel](#) forward after he passed last year, finalizing the recipes, blending the spices, and getting them onto the market for what would have been his birthday in October. \$1 from each jar always goes to a charitable organization, because Floyd paid forward the good with every step he took in life. For April and May, that dollar goes to [FeedingIndia.org](#) and [Mission Oxygen](#), two organizations that are getting life-saving supplies into hospitals *right now*. You can donate directly to them or give-and-get when you purchase the masalas at [FloydCardoz.com/spices](#).

And now, let's cook... something simple. An omelet. With chorizo — because I'm Portuguese and had some on hand I need to use up... and whatever else is on Barkha's mind...

Barkha Cardoz:

Slice the chorizo up and pan cook it a little bit. Take it out, and if any of the fat is left from cooking the chorizo, sauté a little bit of finely chopped ginger. Add the whites of chopped scallions. Sauté that a little bit. To that, add about a teaspoon of the Goan masala and a pinch of salt. Let the masala cook a little bit. And then to that, add chopped tomatoes. Just for a couple of minutes, let the bite stay, so don't overcook them. Then add two whole beaten-up eggs to it. Add the chorizo back in there, and then just let the omelete cook on a low fire, put a lid on it, then flip or fold it into half. Let it cook. And that's it.

Music: A sweet, slow, Gaelic melody with strings and piano.

Jacqueline:

Now, I confess I also added a pinch of the Kashmiri masala, because fiery flavors work so well with omelets. But until I made this, I didn't realize how well ginger does, too — it's bright and refreshing and sharp with the green onions and sweet tomato and gentle Goan masala and fatty chorizo. I gobbled this onion up. Exploring the relationship between Portugal and Goa — the colonizers and the colonized — is something I'm taking seriously and slowly. But wow... do we work well together on a plate. And ow... do I miss Floyd's Food. And wow... am I thankful his spice stays with us. And ow... how it hurts that family and friends and millions upon millions of people in India are feeling the worst of what illness can do to individuals and family, right now, as I'm speaking... and you're listening.

Thank you, for listening.

You can find more about everything I've said in this story at JacquelineRaposo.com and more about Barkha and Floyd at FloydCardoz.com. Donate, buy, share, whatever you're able to do. Take care of yourself, dear friend.

And thanks for Learning Something Small with me.