**HYINK SCHOLARSHIP**

**Spring 2019**

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**The Journey Within**

**728 words**

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My name is Shalini Bhatia and I moved to the U.S. from India in 2012 to make a fresh start and decided to go back to school. A little daunting at first, I was excited to learn and adjust to an international ‘student-life’ in California. I was also faced with the challenge of supporting myself while being a full-time student in CA and started offering cooking services to families. Truly, I had no idea of what I was getting myself into.

I had always considered myself an average Indian home-cook where tasty food was the only focus and there was always help around to do the prep and cleaning. The reality of cooking even semi-professionally in the U.S. was quite different. Not only did I need to improve my speed and knife skills but also figure out how to work different portions and conversions. There were physical challenges working up enough stamina to cook for at least two clients daily while being a full-time student. What was almost second nature back in India, in the U.S. seemed like an education.

Almost 60 units into the Business Administration program and almost 2 years of being a ‘personal cook’, I began to feel that, upon graduating, I could not see myself sitting behind a desk 9 to 5. Instead, I felt passionate about wearing an apron standing in a kitchen at any given time. Despite the initial challenges, I always felt ready to try something new, blend different spices, create my own fusion recipes and learn about new ingredients. It all seemed like fun. I began to delve deeper into my evolving desire to be part of the culinary industry and clearly felt a reconnection with my creative side. Besides I come from a family of ‘foodies’ where everyone loves cooking. I was also reminded of my time at a five-star hotel in India where I worked front of the house and the energy of the hospitality industry still resonated with me; I thrived on satisfying my clients and felt appreciated for my craft. Clearly my part-time gig had taken a substantial shape. I was no longer just capable at cooking a meal for my family; cooking for other families had become like a real job. In hind sight, I feel this was also a self-evolving journey for me where I recognized the process of connecting the dots.

During the following months, I seriously evaluated my options and strongly felt that the culinary world was my calling. I explored school options to become a culinary student and formally learn techniques and skills that would expand my repertoire. The Culinary Arts Management and Food Service Management majors at CCSF have shown me the path that I had wanted to find and define a focused career that would continue to satiate my creative side and showcase my inherent and acquired skills within the evolving trends in the food industry. In that vein, my internship choice was very clear. I wanted to intern in a test-kitchen environment to augment my interest, provide structure to my unique skill set while in the bigger picture allowing me to transition from a *home cook- turned* -*private chef* towards a niche profile of a *recipe developer* in a *test kitchen*.

To my dismay, there were very few test kitchen internship options and unfortunately, none of them came through for one reason or another. I took the agonizing decision to intern at a corporate kitchen and spent 240 hours of the required internship what seemed like a ‘real-world job’. Prepping, cleaning, cooking, and cleaning again. The silver lining was the weekly happy hour where I could create anything I wanted. Gradually I started line cooking and thankfully since the menu changed daily, I got to cook different cuisines. I soon realized that, the creation of those dishes was a combination of my skills and judgement of following or tweaking the not-very-precise recipes. I was test-cooking!

My internship made me realize that every dish I cooked, gave me the satisfaction of having created something. Each time I used my tasting skills or decided to change an ingredient, I created something different. At some point in my journey I might end up exclusively in a test-kitchen environment. For now, I’m happy that my internship time helped me see the joy of creation no matter where I cook.