

# How To Build An Instagram-worthy Food Business with Safeera Inayath

**David Crabill:** Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food businesses about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill. And today I am talking with Safeera Inayath. Safeera lives in Prior Lake Minnesota, and sells custom cakes, macarons, and other baked goods with her cottage food business, Sugardust and Sprinkles.

Safeera immigrated to the United States from India back in 2010, and at that time she had never baked a cake in her life. She calls herself a self taught Baker and since 2015 has been selling amazingly elegant items from her home kitchen. She now has over 10,000 followers on Instagram, so clearly she is doing something right.

I am especially impressed, not only by her beautiful creations, but also her photography. So today I am looking forward to learning how she makes everything look so good. And with that, welcome to the show Safeera. Nice to have you here.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:00:57] Thank you so much for having me, David.

**David Crabill:** [00:01:00] Safeera, can you take us back? Usually I ask people to go back to the beginning of the business, but in this case, maybe go back to uh, when you, when you immigrated to the United States and, and walk us through that journey.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:01:13] So I immigrated to the U S in April of 2010, along with my two and a half year old daughter. the U S was a new place for us. We had nobody whom we knew over here, so we would just confine at home. But thanks to my husband, living here prior to us moving, he had a lot of friends whom we could meet and interact with.

So, um, moving forward, I had my son in 2011 but at that time I started going to the gym and that's when I saw food network flashing on the TV screen. So I went home and then I started watching food network a lot, and that got me hooked onto baking items, watching on TV.

I came across the Pioneer Woman by Ree Drummond and barefoot Contessa by Ina Garten. These were the two shows I watched a lot and I started learning how to use an oven to bake cakes or cupcakes at that time. I started experimenting and just making small treats for my family.

And, um, sometimes it would be a lot. I used to even gift it to my neighbors to just try it out. And then slowly I started being, known as the dessert queen, amongst my friends, because they like my treats. but nobody encouraged me to actually start a business as such. It just struck to me that maybe I can do something with the skill I have since I've started learning how to bake and use the oven.

And I at least learned that by myself. And I just gave this idea to my husband. I'm like, you know um, he always wanted me to continue with my IT job, which I was doing back in India,

but I did not want, I did not like the idea of leaving my kids in a daycare. I just wanted to be, stay at home with them.

So Oh, when I told him this, he discouraged me actually. He's like, no, one's going to buy your treats. Everyone gets it from, you know from the bakery or target Costco and stuff like that, and they're not going to pay you with what you're going to charge. So My husband had the idea that starting a business was only, you know, related with friends or family.

So I'm like, I'm not gonna do it for friends. I don't know how I want to do it, but this is my thought. I would like to go ahead with it. So he just left it to me and I wanted to talk to someone about my idea. So I called my brother-in-law who in India.

And he's doing very well in his business. I called him and told him, I'm like, I would like to try this out. And what do you think? He said, he, he encouraged me a lot. And he said, if you feel you are good in this uh, you know, you have the potential go for it, but it will take at least three to four years for you to do well and be known in your business.

So you have to wait for that time. and he also told me that you have to give it your full and don't do 10 things at a time, just concentrate on this and start your business. So that was my first step towards it. Then I think I started from there.

**David Crabill:** [00:04:27] That sounds like pretty good advice to me. It sounds like he knows what he's talking about in the business realm.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:04:33] yes.

**David Crabill:** [00:04:34] Yeah. Anyway, so yeah, I mean, that's kind of amazing that you hadn't done any baking whatsoever and not only started to learn how to bake, but turn it into a business. And so you got that advice from your brother-in-law and how did that go? Did the business, start to take off quickly.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:04:54] After I got my advice from my brother-in-law. At that time I was working as a, I had a part-time job and then I went to my colleagues and um, my employer and I told them, you know I have this thought in my head and I would like to move forward with it. So if you would like any treats from me, let me know.

And my boss called me one day and she's like I was like, Oh my God, did I do something wrong at work? So well that wasn't the case. And she's like, okay, Safeera, it's my daughter's birthday coming up. So I would like you to make some cupcakes. I was so happy that I just got my first order just like that.

the next question was how much would it be? So I said, I don't know. And she's like, well, go figure it out. And I want the cupcakes on this date. So I went home and I tried to do some math and I kind of figured out a price and I let her know. And she said, yeah, well, that's fine. So that was my first order and a very memorable one, which happened in 2015 uh, November, 2015. Yep.

**David Crabill:** [00:06:01] Do you remember how many cupcakes you made for that order and how much you charged?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:06:07] Yes. I think I had made two dozen cupcakes and I charged her \$2 per cupcake. So that was \$48 at that time.

**David Crabill:** [00:06:19] I think that sounds like a reasonable price for starting out. And what was it? Were these fancy cupcakes or regular size?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:06:26] they were regular sized cupcakes and there's a little bit of decoration on it. I made small flowers and then little letters with her daughter's name and placed it on the cupcake. So yeah, it was simple and cute.

**David Crabill:** [00:06:41] Now you said that you had learned from the food network and from other shows, was that just the only place you were learning from was TV or were you getting courses from other places or tutorials from other places?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:06:56] So at that time I still wanted to learn something to relate it with flowers, like decorating flowers. So I did one small course. So the full lessons, basically with my local crafter here, a local craft shop, called Michaels. Uh, I did a Wilton um, flower decorating course with them and you know, full classes is just not enough.

You have to actually do a lot of practice by yourself. So, well, it was a good start that I learned to basics from the class. Like how would you fill a piping bag? And what piping tips do you use for different kinds of flowers? So that was very helpful. But after that, it was you know, you have to put in the effort and practice and look for more tutorial. So I found some different cake makers who are doing tutorials online. So I went on YouTube and started searching.

And then when I found uh, caker who had the style I was looking for, I started following her and doing exactly the way she was, you know, teaching flowers and stuff like that, or with butter cream. So that's how I, I learned.

**David Crabill:** [00:08:05] So it was mainly one person. And who was that?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:08:09] Yes. It was mainly one person called cake style. So she does not do any more tutorials and she's not in the baking industry anymore, but I think her tutorials are still available on YouTube

**David Crabill:** [00:08:21] Well, if they're still up there, then, you know, we can find it and put a link to it in the show notes. Yeah, you mentioned finding a style that you like, and I noticed that all of your cakes have a very similar style. There's a lot of differentiation and variation between them, but they do have, I want to say a very elegant style, even birthday cakes, they look like.

Very elegant and very nice. I don't know how to describe it, but they definitely have a certain style to that. So that seems like a very intentional decision on your part.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:08:55] Yes. So when I started initially, I was like all over the place I, I made a few cakes with fondant and then fondant decorations, but that was like taking a lot of time and I was also being underpaid for it. People don't do not understand how much time it takes to make a small figurine, and they do not want to pay as much.

So, I decided that I wanted to stop fondant altogether and just concentrate on buttercream. And then once I started doing only buttercream cakes, I wanted to uh, have Particular style that, you know, people will like. And so I got into the elegant side of it where I, I just do textures on cakes with buttercream and sprinkles.

I use a lot of sprinkles and I always like a touch of gold on my cakes, so that I think makes it really look pretty and nice. And of course flowers has to be there. So I do a lot of buttercream flowers are fresh or fake flowers on cakes.

**David Crabill:** [00:09:56] Yeah, I did notice a lot of sprinkles, a lot of gold in there. Um, but kind of has more of a feminine look I would say, but it does look really beautiful. And you know, you said that you, only do textures, but I've noticed that you've taken buttercream a long ways.

I mean, you've been not just doing textures, but you're literally making designs on the cake with buttercream, right.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:10:23] I do a lot of stenciling also. So we get these very pretty stencils, which is made with vinyl, I think. Uh, So it's very easy to just stencil the cake with some buttercream and then you can decorate, leave it as is, and just decorator it with some gold are uh, just do some stenciling and again, do some textures or some pallet knife painting.

I do quite a bit of palette knife painting too on the cake. So yeah, it's really interesting that you can do so many different techniques on a cake.

**David Crabill:** [00:10:55] I just feel like you're underselling yourself. Cause I, I, I feel like I saw a cake. I'm trying to find it, but I feel like I saw a cake where you drew a house or something onto the cake with buttercream.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:11:07] Oh, yes. The Paris that's the Parisian cafe kind of a cake. Yes,

**David Crabill:** [00:11:13] exactly it. Yeah.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:11:15] yes. That was for a 13th birthday, I think. So I made that.

**David Crabill:** [00:11:19] Well that, that cake, I mean, it's, mostly buttercream, but it's not just the texture. It's a little, literally looks like a cafe.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:11:28] Yes. Yeah. Thank you so much. Yes. That's a buttercream cake with some fondant details with the cafe and yeah, it has some flowers and like tables and chairs and yeah, a lot of things going on over there.

**David Crabill:** [00:11:43] Yeah, well, it's impressive stuff all around, but I was like looking for more of a traditional birthday cake where, you know, primary colors, bright colors, like I see you've done a dinosaur cake and things of that nature, but most of your birthday cakes look like they're more elegant for like making a girl feel like she's a princess.

And uh, I don't see any like Paw Patrol cakes or uh, frozen cakes. Is that something that you just say no to.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:12:10] Yes. Right now I think uh, it's been a couple of months since I started refusing to do novelty cakes. Kid's cakes. Um, I want to just go in one direction where I want to be known for, you know, elegant cakes and like pretty cakes. So I, I don't want to like waste my time doing these novelty kids' cakes. So I usually say, I'm sorry, I stopped doing those kinds of cakes.

**David Crabill:** [00:12:35] Well, I think that's smart. I mean, you're definitely niching yourself into one thing and someone who's looking for that really elegant and probably higher end price-wise cake, you know, they'll definitely go with you. Um, So it's, it's a smart move and you definitely have the talent to do all those cakes, but it's not just the cakes themselves, but your photography is really phenomenal.

I mean, I see a lot of photos just looking through people's Facebook pages, Instagram feeds, and. Quite frankly, a lot of the photos I see are really, really good. Um, Just taking photos with the smartphone and portrait mode uh, to see a ton of amazing photography. But I would say that your photography is a touch above most of the good photography.

I see. It really looks professional like professionally done, like someone who does it for a living. So what have you done to uh, either learn photography skills or how do you make your photos look so great?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:13:35] So in 2020 of I think February of 2020 um, so I've been following this sweet friend of mine. Her name is Sadra and she. She's in Canada. So she also was a caker before she moved her business to uh, dessert photography business. and then she came up with the course for bakers uh, something to do only with phones, because most of us are just taking pictures with phones.

And it was a hard decision for me in February to take up this course because it was, it was an expensive course. And also we had plans of traveling abroad we wanted to visit Mecca and Turkey.

So when she had launched it and she was giving it at a good deal. I was in two minds because we had a big trip coming up and I did not want to miss this opportunity to, and then I just, I just prayed and I'm like, okay, God help me with this.

Help me with my expenses and stuff like that. I think I just need to do this course. And I took the course and it was really a life changing um, moment for me after that, you know, And the thing, what happened was I couldn't go for my trip because pandemic hit at that time and all our plans got canceled.

so thankfully I it's good that I did my course, because that was still helpful. And my business, even though pandemic hit, I, it was still booming. I did not have a dull moment, even during those bad days when everybody was so stuck at home. I think it was like, I kept trying doing different cakes.

And I had learned some techniques of how to take pictures with natural lighting. And then she, it was, it was a simple course, but I, I felt, I learned quite a lot, like how to use props and how to have a backdrop, which I initially, I made some backdrops by myself. So that was so

helpful in that I did not know before that, that we have to use these things, you know? yeah. And as I said that uh, with the pandemic a lot of my events had got canceled and my uh, markets had got canceled because of this. And but yeah, with God's grace, it, my, my business had not stopped.

I was still doing, getting orders and making cakes and macarons and stuff like that. So I think the photography did a major role in changing my business from, from like down to high up. I can say it.

**David Crabill:** [00:16:07] Yeah, I can imagine if you had not taken the course because of the cost and then the pandemic hit you probably would have really regretted it. how much did you pay for that course?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:16:17] I think I had paid about \$500 or \$600 at that time.

**David Crabill:** [00:16:23] Yeah, that's quite an investment and, but it sounds like you have more than recouped the investment.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:16:29] Yes, definitely.

**David Crabill:** [00:16:30] Do you remember any other like tips or specific things that you learned that were aha moments in that course that really took your photography to the next level.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:16:39] Oh, well at that time when we were doing the course, we used to have some live sessions with our teacher. And also you know, like when I would take a picture and then send it to her for her comments or critiques, and then she'll like, little tips is like, should not keep your cake too close to your board where, you know, you've kept on your.

Hiding everything from the backdrop. Right? So make sure that the cake is much more, forward not, it should not be against the wall. That's what I mean. It should be towards you and try to take it an angle a way you're tilting the phone a little bit from the top angle. And then you click the picture and you get a nice image of your entire cake.

So yeah, those little tips, like she used to teach us. And then after uh, also for editing, she like, she taught us to use some apps to enhance the kid, the picture a little more. So I use the Lightroom app on my phone after I, I click the picture and then I just play with the colors and shades and shadow and this and that, and just make it both perfect the way I want to.

**David Crabill:** [00:17:48] So you're, you're not using a DSL, our camera for this. You're doing everything from your phone.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:17:54] Yes, I have uh, Samsung S9 edge. I think that's what I use all my pictures from, I clicked from it.

**David Crabill:** [00:18:04] Well, it does look like it was taken with the DSLR. And I think it's probably because of the extra effort you put into setting up the shot and the, all the extra

little details that you add to it, I think make a big difference and yeah, they look, they look amazing. So yeah. And, and, and what has been the result of improving your photography?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:18:26] I feel uh, with that, like I said, my business really took off like when I used to, once upon a time I would use to do like maybe one order a week after my course and my pictures like started doing so well on on the social media. I I've been having like six orders a week, so four to six orders per week.

And that's quite a lot, you know, and I'm really busy. And also apart from that, other brands have started noticing my work. And I'm so proud to say that I'm an ambassador. Oh, with fancy sprinkles, because I use a lot of sprinkles on my cake. I used to always tag them that, you know, I'm using your product.

So just have a look. But I never dreamed that they would contact me and say that, you know, would you like to be a part of fancy sprinkles? So that happened recently. And then also I'm with another brand called global belly. Uh, I'm a tastemaker with their brand, I make macaron or cupcake kits and we assemble everything together with videos and PDF.

And then uh, when, when somebody purchases the kit, you know, they ship it to them at all the items what's required for them to just make it at home and enjoy with the family. So, yeah, I'm a with these two brands right now, and I'm really happy about that.

**David Crabill:** [00:19:48] Wow. So yeah, you're definitely the right person to be an ambassador for a sprinkles company because you have it in your business name and you use them all the time. So it's very cool to see. And so are you getting paid for that to be an ambassador?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:20:02] Yes, I did get paid for that. Yeah. So for the videos, as well as I get some commission, when somebody purchases sprinkles using my unique code uh, they get a discount of 15% and I get some commission out of their purchase.

**David Crabill:** [00:20:17] Yeah, that's a, that's amazing. And uh, they, and they contacted you about that, right?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:20:21] Yes. They contacted me

**David Crabill:** [00:20:23] So just putting your stuff up on Instagram probably is Instagram because that's where the great photography has taken off as it tends to do. and then global belly. So you're, you're making these kits that people can make at home and what, I couldn't quite figure out what it means to be a tastemaker like, are you actually designing or coming up with the flavors?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:20:45] So I design yes, but I don't make the flavors. So we send them prepackage powders, which, you know, they have to again, use the perishable items at home and then make the uh, like buttercream. So you have the powder, which is whatever's necessary to make a buttercream, but you still have to use the butter from your fridge.

So apart from that, I just do the designing and I do a tutorial of how you can make a particular design and then global belly puts in all the things together with Like piping bags, piping tips food gel colors.

And then like a cake mix, the butter cream mix. All these things are included. If it's a macaron or they include the Macaron, the silpat, the, you know, you don't have to go and shop for all different items. Everything is, is all nicely put together in the kit and then it's shipped to your home and then yeah, you have to just make it.

**David Crabill:** [00:21:41] And dig global belly reach out to you as well.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:21:44] Yes. So it's really funny when global belly sent me a message. Uh, The first time I uh, I follow a lot of bakers, so I, I already knew some bakers who are tastemakers with a global belly and, you know, they're all like the biggies of, you know, the bigger industry. So when they reached out to me, I said, So I was like, Oh my God, I'm like, I'm sorry, I have nothing to offer.

So I had no idea how it works. Right. So they're like, don't worry, we'll walk you through what you, how it works and how, what you're supposed to do. And then we had a call and I was like, Oh wow, that's a great opportunity.

And I was so happy that, you know, they saw my work, they liked my work and contacted me. So I joined global belly in December of last year. And when we put up a first kit, it was a reindeer macaron We had a good business with that kit, and yeah, it's, it's going well with global belly too.

**David Crabill:** [00:22:41] So do you get a commission on like all sales of your design?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:22:46] Yes, I do get a commission every month. Yes.

**David Crabill:** [00:22:49] Wow, very cool. Um, And I also noticed that you were in the casting process for food network Canada. And was that something that they reached out to you as well? Or did you apply for that?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:23:02] No. They reached out to me. And that again was of a big opportunity. I've I was. So happy that they noticed my work and they, you know, reached out to me. So I uh, spoke with my family and I'm like, what do you think? What should I do? And they said, you know, just give it a try. My daughter and my husband and my son all were very like, excited about it.

So I fill out my form and I sent it to them. And after a while I got an email that I have been selected for the second round. So the second round was um, a live interview. And I did the second round, but unfortunately I wasn't selected so, but I, it was a nice opportunity and, you know that I got to try this out.

So I'm happy about it.

**David Crabill:** [00:23:49] Oh yeah. It's a good experience. And you keep it up and keep growing your Instagram account and keep doing podcasts or whatever. And, you know, it's,

not the last time that you need to go through that process, so you might get on someday, now you've hit 10,000 over 10,000 Instagram followers.

That's exciting. Congratulations. did you ever imagine, you'd get to this point with your business

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:24:13] No way. Not at all. I used to see other pages with, you know, this big a number and I would always wonder and think that will I ever reach that I never even dreamed that, you know, I would like hit like 4,000 or 5,000 even then reaching 10K is a big dream come true. So I'm really happy about that.

**David Crabill:** [00:24:38] doesn't 10,000 unlock a feature of Instagram or something.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:24:43] Yes. So we get the feature of swiping up where you know, you can always add uh, a web link and that's the feature you get on Instagram where you know, people can just swipe up and go straight to the link. If not, you have to actually type it out. So when you hit 10,000, you get that feature.

**David Crabill:** [00:25:02] And I don't remember it. I think it's been pretty recently that you've hit 10,000, but have you noticed any changes, have you implemented that feature?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:25:12] Yes, I did a I used the feature a couple of times, so for now, and I'm really liking it. I hope, you know, like today we launched the global belly, Easter chick macaron kit, and I put that up and I also put the swipe up feature. So I hope I ha I've got some good business with that. We'll see later.

**David Crabill:** [00:25:33] Now have you paid attention to social media marketing and like how to make your Instagram content play nicely with their, their algorithm? Is it something you've been doing intentionally or have you just been throwing stuff up on Instagram and hoping it does well?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:25:52] I've just been doing what I should do. I have, I've just been seeing others, what they do. And sometimes I would just watch uh, you know, your where we get these free Instagram lessons and stuff like that. Uh, So I had signed up and then the one thing they say is you have to show up very often on stories and make sure you post every day.

So that's what I've been doing. I post why not two pictures on my feed every single day. And then I put up stories at least a three or more than three sometimes on my story. So that's what I'm, I've been like doing consistently.

**David Crabill:** [00:26:28] Three a day or a week.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:26:31] Yes. Three a day.

**David Crabill:** [00:26:34] So you're posting it like at least four to five times a day on Instagram.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:26:39] Yes. That takes a lot of time.

**David Crabill:** [00:26:41] it's a lot. Yeah. Do you ever feel like you're at a loss for something to post? Like, do you ever feel like you don't have content to fill it

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:26:51] no, no, I don't. I have enough content and I ha I make sure that I have enough content even for like the next week. So yeah, I make sure I have something going on. If I did not have something new, I always go back to my old pictures and grab something from there and post it again. So you can always repost and say that throwback to, you know, this picture and you'll still get likes because you're still having new followers on the ground.

So, you know, it's something new for them. So you will still keep getting your likes and stuff. So yeah, I keep doing that also.

**David Crabill:** [00:27:26] and our people also reaching out to you with DMs direct messages to contact you and you're responding to those as well?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:27:34] Yes. I get a lot of DMS now, and also I get messages Like a hi, you know I really like your work and can you give me a follow? I want to follow you. So I ignore those kinds of messages because I've never, I've, I've never done that for myself. Like, you know, contacting somebody to follow me because I want to follow you.

It's, you know, if you like somebody's work, you'll just follow automatically. So I do not like that approach, but otherwise I do get a lot of DMS from other bakers from customers. Uh, And uh, when I get DMs from clients, we have like two to three lines chat. And after that, I tell them, please go to my website and fill out the form and then I'll contact you from there. So that's how it works with the clients.

**David Crabill:** [00:28:21] Now, what do you have on the order form on your website?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:28:25] So on the order form, it's basically your name and your phone number, your email. And then uh, what you're looking for, when is your event date happening? What is the event about, what would you like to have? And if it's a cake just to give some brief description of what you would like on the cake and any toppers you like, like flowers or buttercream flowers or fake flowers and then I asked them to send me some inspiration pictures as well. And then after I get an idea, I, contact them again and we go from there.

**David Crabill:** [00:28:59] About how much time would you say that you're spending on social media, between posting and direct messages?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:29:09] Yes, that is something I would like to work on. I'm spending a lot of time. Sometimes it's like more than three hours. uh, Three hours to four hours. I would like to cut it down to an hour at least. That's something I have to work on, but it takes a lot of time, so that's not good.

**David Crabill:** [00:29:26] I've actually heard similar things from other entrepreneurs. And especially when you're in this big growing phase right now, you might not be quite ready to

hire a virtual assistant or another assistant to offload some of that social media work. But you do still need to put in the time to, to keep up with it all.

So it's not uncommon to hear people say they're putting in that much time per day. It's a lot. And especially since you're making cakes as well, in addition to all of it. So it's

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:29:58] Yes, as well as have the family always with me. So it's really hard sometimes

**David Crabill:** [00:30:03] Yeah, I did want to ask you about your family. I read something you wrote somewhere that you went into the business full time after you had your third child, which is, I thought it was so funny. Cause it's like, I feel like most people have their third child and then they're like, okay, I don't have time for the business, but that's when you went full-time into it. Can you talk a little bit about managing the business with your family?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:30:26] yes, that was like I got a lot of questions about that after having my third child, like, how could you do this? How can you do with the baby? And when my parents visited me after I had my baby, they were here for a couple of months and the day they left back to India, I started baking like right the next day.

So he was about two months old, so I would just, you know put him in his little swing and then I would turn on the TV for myself and start baking. So I, and then if he would just cry, go to him, you know, feed him or change his nappy, get back to the kitchen and kids were in school. So it was easy at that time.

And I was like, it's really working out perfect for me at this time as he was growing bigger. Sometimes I, he needed more attention, but then thankfully after pandemic hit and you know, the whole family is at home. It was a blessing for me with my business. I had my husband doing most of his work. So it, it really worked out for us actually.

**David Crabill:** [00:31:23] Yeah, I know my son's in that transition phase too. And he's, he's a handful. So um,

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:31:29] Yeah.

**David Crabill:** [00:31:29] pretty hard to run a business with a little kids, but it's. It sounds like it's worked out nicely. but it's not easy.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:31:36] no, it's not easy. And I, for some time I had to be a night Baker because after everyone's gone to bed, I would start doing my work. And sometimes I've been up until, you know, midnight until 1:00 AM. So there are sacrifices also along the way. So it's not easy.

**David Crabill:** [00:31:53] Well, we've talked about your cakes a little bit, but what else do you make in your business?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:31:58] I concentrate on cakes uh, French macarons and cupcakes cookies is very rare, but I do make some cookies here and there.

**David Crabill:** [00:32:08] I, I just actually saw more than that on your website. Maybe you're not doing them anymore, but it looks like you're doing donuts and cakesicles

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:32:16] yes Cakes, cookies and donuts again is very rare. But it's not around a great demand as much as cakes and macarons.

**David Crabill:** [00:32:23] I actually saw it was a while ago, but I saw this brownie platter and it was funny because it was like the fanciest brownie platter I've ever seen. You know, brownies are not a very high end item, but you made them look very high end.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:32:36] Yes. Yes. With a lot of fruits and chocolate ganache and a lot of uh, sprinkles and gold and uh, rose petals. Yes, But, you know I really did not have business on that. So I'm just going to keep that as a specials, like Ramadan is coming up, so I'm going to like, make it for Ramadan for Easter and stuff like that. So I'll just keep it for specials.

**David Crabill:** [00:32:59] I did notice that you have a number of things that you make around the holidays the traditional holidays for Islam, I believe. I don't know if you're also doing the Indian holidays, but can you talk a little bit about that? And what, what are the holidays that are meaningful in your community and what kind of cakes, or what do you make for those.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:33:20] Yes. So my religion is Islam. So we just have two big holidays in a year. One is called Ramadan, which is the month of fasting. So we fast for 30 days. And then we have a big celebration day right after you know, the month of fasting. So uh, usually at that time I uh, introduced Ramadan uh, treat boxes. So last year I made some uh, cookie kits for Ramadan uh, like, you know, you give it before the holiday begins. So I introduced that and it, it went well.

I did sell quite a bit at that time. And then on a, we call it Eid uh, on the day of celebration. So for that I made like a box of cookies and macarons together. And uh, I usually decorated the, you know, the way reflecting on our religion, especially with like moons and stars and stuff like that, or like little um, mosques and stuff like that.

So that's what I usually come up with and I am still figuring out this year's colors and designs for this Ramadan. And I'm excited about that.

**David Crabill:** [00:34:30] And, and no, you hadn't made a cake when you moved here from India. And are these cakes that you're making, are they fully American cakes? Is there any Indian influence in what you're making right now?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:34:45] No, no Indian influence on cakes, but I try to incorporate some kind of flavors when I do macarons a bit some Indian flavors, but I do not do it on cakes.

**David Crabill:** [00:34:56] I'm just curious if it seems like you're probably very well connected to the Indian community in your area, but are many of them ordering your items because they're Americanized or do most of your orders come from non-Indians or.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:35:14] Yeah. Most of my clients are non-Indians. I cater to Indians on a very rare occasion because I think one is the pricing. They kind of don't understand how much work we are doing and what's going on. And it just doesn't work out so much, but my

community, so, but I don't say that I don't have any business with you know, any Indians or Pakistanis are, Uh, I do have some very good clients, but I cater more to my American clients.

**David Crabill:** [00:35:43] I want to get into, you know, your pricing and, and more things about your um, products themselves in your business. But while we're on the subject of culture, I did see a post. with the cupcakes, really beautiful design cupcakes with the hijab on them.

And you were talking about hijab awareness, and I could tell that it was an important thing to you, and I think it's not something. That I've heard, talked about a lot. Um, Can you just share your perspective about why it's important for you to wear a hijab and maybe what people don't understand about it, who aren't in your community?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:36:18] so hijab as per the Qur'an, you know, our Holy book, uh, God has actually, you know, asked us to have this, hijab on where, you know, uh, I started hijab like much later in my life after I had my daughter. So uh, it's my personal choice to, you know adorn the hijab. And I've given the freedom to my daughter that, you know, whenever you are ready and you, you feel that, you know you want to do this, you do it right.

I don't want to force you into it. So usually we don't force anybody into it. Like my, my mom is not a hijabi. Um, My sister and I are hijabis and our kids have still not started. So it's all a personal choice right now for, in our family.

**David Crabill:** [00:37:03] Do you feel like you get misunderstood sometimes when you're wearing the hijab?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:37:08] I think so. Initially my husband was a little um, he was a little apprehensive about it, with you know, all what's going on with the Muslims over here in the West, you know, with so many things which has happened in the past. So he was a little uncomfortable. But I gave him the assurance.

I I'm like, you know, it's okay. We'll see what happens, you know? Um, But so far Minnesota is a great place. I've had, I. I mean, people are very friendly generally over here and there have been some issues with when I started like going out more in the public and selling my products I've had a couple of issues, you know uh, based on how I look I've understood that, but then I have to just overlook that and just continue with my work with when I have so many other good supporters. I shouldn't just look at what that one negativity. I just overlook that and just continue with my work.

**David Crabill:** [00:38:04] Yeah, that's unfortunate. I mean, I do hear that in many different forms though, with any business, right? There's always people that are going to say something negative about something and you have to be, you know, turn a blind eye to the negative comments and know that the positive outweighs the negative and keep moving forward.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:38:24] Keep moving. Yes, that's what I do. I like, yeah, there were two or three instances, which were not so pleasant with, which happened with me, whether I'm like, that's okay. You know, you have to just carry on. So.

**David Crabill:** [00:38:36] Hmm. Well, let's talk a little bit about selling and I know you sold it a number of markets um, but you have this very customized business. You make custom items. So what were you selling at the markets and what was that experience like?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:38:51] So um, my first market was in uh, 2019. it was all like food Fest. it was called Halal food Fest. I think so. And, uh, I just sold Macron's that in that market. So I made a very small batch and I will, because I, as I told you, like, you know, the DC community is not so much would like to spend on cakes and treats.

So I was not sure I made a small batch and I went and it was, it was mind blowing that I got sold out very soon, you know, with everything. So after that incident, I came home and I started Googling to look for other markets. And then on Facebook, I found out about a holiday market, which was coming up in November.

So this wasn't just one week before the, the market, I, I found out about this particular event happening. It was a holiday market, and then I contacted the lady and I'm like, you know I would like to come here and sell my products. And then she's like, okay. Um, She went through my page and she asked me what I do and stuff like that.

And after that, she said, well uh, you can come in and sell your product. So that was my actual first big holiday market, which I did in 2019. I made the I think packs off threes and fours of macarons. And I went in there, market started at 10 o'clock and it was until four o'clock, but I was sold out by one o'clock completely sold out. I, it was like, I was like, it went crazy. It was, it was so good. And from there I, again started looking for more markets and then I found out about a greenhouse, which is not too far away from home. So I contacted them and I was like, okay, you know, I'd like to sell something in your greenhouses.

Can I come and do that? And they were so supportive and um, it's a family business. So they said, yeah, sure. Come. And it was, I think shops. Small Saturday or something like that. That was the event I went and sold for that day and I was sold out over there too.

So that's how I started getting into markets. And then I'm not sure if you know about Bachman's. So, they usually have a winter market. I got into the winter market of 2000, 19 and 20 just before COVID and I used to go and sell my products over there too.

**David Crabill:** [00:41:14] So as you were getting into these markets and you were selling out, do you remember about how much you were making at each market?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:41:22] Well, at that time it was really small. Like when I did the 2019 market I think I made about 40 bags of macarons and it was sold out. And then from there I also. uh, insight in 2020, we still had the holiday market and it was, I took more products and when I, and also the quantity was more and I was sold out again and I made some good money in that. See, I think it was the \$600.

**David Crabill:** [00:41:51] How do you manage your week in terms of baking and preparing for a market or even with the custom orders or making a cake? How, how do you manage it all to make sure it stays fresh and you know, ready for market or ready for the customer?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:42:07] So when I get an order, I when I know that, okay, on this date is the pickup. I started writing dates like four days prior to the pickup date, I started writing down the dates and what day, what I'm going to get ready. Like first thing I make is buttercream because buttercream will not go bad very soon.

So first thing is I make the buttercream uh, so supposing there is a cake pickup for a Saturday. I'll bake the cake on a Wednesday and once the cake is baked and come out of the oven and when it's still warm, I wrap it up and then I freeze it so that the moisture's all locked in. And then on Thursday night I take it out from the freezer and I let it thaw

and Friday is where I fill and frost the cake and do all the decorations and keep it ready. And Saturday morning, I take pictures. On Friday, if it's like before sunset, I, if I have good natural lighting, I take my pictures and pack it up and keep it ready for the client to pick it up. So it's all about planning.

We have to plan our work. Otherwise it gets hard like this uh, next week I have a wedding order as well as another graduation order. So I have to get started from tomorrow to do little, little things to get, you know, it's not only cake. I have to make cupcakes. I have to make macarons and cookies as well as two different cakes.

So a lot is going on. So I've already listed out what I'm going to do with on which day.

**David Crabill:** [00:43:33] Wow. It sounds busy, So what is um, a cake or an order that was particularly memorable for you?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:43:42] Ah, I think the three tiered cake which I, I recently posted a cake with a big macaron tower. That would be my most memorable order I had got it was um, so the bride was. So sweet. And she just spoke to me over the phone. We had not even met. She did not do any cake tasting. She just said, okay.

I would like to get this flavor cake. And then I want so many macarons with these flavors. And I made donuts for her wedding as well. I think 80 donuts. And 80 macarons and a two tier cake, but she wanted the macaron tower on top of the cake. So that was challenging and it was my first time doing it.

So I did it and also had to deliver the cake to her residence. She had a small backyard wedding. The, I think her place was a, her house was about 45 to 50 minutes away from where I live. And that drive is something which is, I will never forget, you know, I was so tense and I had already assembled the whole cake.

I just laid a yoga mat and a lot of towels around it to protect the box from moving. And then we drove so slowly and went to her. We reached the destination, got the cake out, laid it on the table, and then I could, you know, have a sigh of relief. So that is my most memorable cake I can say.

**David Crabill:** [00:45:08] I saw that cake and it had the macaron, like the cake was the tower. And did you have the macrons already on the cake when you were there driving it?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:45:17] Yes. Already on it. Yes.

**David Crabill:** [00:45:19] If you, is that something that you would repeat? Did you think it worked better that way than trying to assemble it onsite?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:45:27] I think, yeah, this is more easier. and I think for just to be on the safer side, I should carry some extra macarons, but that day I did not even carry anything extra. And there were no damages. Nothing happened like, you know, it was, everything went well that day, but I should always be prepared for anything worse. So that was a good experience and something to learn about. Yep.

**David Crabill:** [00:45:50] Well, so do you feel like the do you feel like your home kitchen has become a little bit too crowded? Like has it become, has it started limiting your business?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:46:01] It is a crowded. And my pantry is also, I have a smaller pantry because we opted for um, an additional room and main level. So we had to sacrifice the pantry size. So it's sometimes it gets really crowded and busy and I, we have an unfinished basement. So uh, next plan is where we, you know, we can finish it and I can move my business, you know, to my basement.

So whenever that happens, but then it is busy and, but I manage it somehow. So it's still going fine.

**David Crabill:** [00:46:34] And what about pricing? Are you um, are you charging more today than you were a few years ago?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:46:41] Yes, definitely. Sometimes I still feel I'm like undercharging, but that's okay. Every time, every time I make a cake, it's a, it's a learning experience. But what I was charging so many years ago. Those are not my prices anymore. And, uh, I know that everybody he has a budget.

So my cake is not meant for all, so whoever can get it. We'll get it. And that's how it is otherwise. Yeah, we have to just say it's okay. So, yeah, one thing I've learned is that don't go low on pricing, even if you're a new person in the business that, you know, you are, make sure you are charging for what you're worth, especially your time.

It's a lot of time and effort and washing dishes and everything is not easy. So yeah,

**David Crabill:** [00:47:28] And what are you currently charging for your cakes?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:47:31] well for a six inch cake, which is usually a regular size, which serves about 12 to 15 servings I charge about \$120 to \$150 for a cake.

**David Crabill:** [00:47:46] That sounds quite a lot. That sounds like quite pretty good pricing for you.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:47:51] Yeah. I um, whatever I make is more than a hundred dollars for sure. I don't go less than that.

**David Crabill:** [00:47:57] Do you find a lot of people reach out to you and then they just turn away when they hear your pricing.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:48:04] Yes. Some of them do that, but not, not a lot. Most of them come back. Yep.

**David Crabill:** [00:48:09] Like I said, your, your stuff does look impressive and is clearly very high quality. So obviously someone reaching out to you knows that they're going to get something really good. So they're probably willing to pay a good price for it.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:48:23] Yes, as you can see you know I have to charge as well, all the ingredients I'm using because I'm not using cheap stuff, so I have to price as per that, because I only use swiss meringue buttercream and it's, it just takes a one, full hour just to prepare a batch of buttercream.

So, I have to price everything accordingly, you know, and especially even with when you're using chocolate, I'm using good quality chocolate, which is not available in the stores.

We have to order it online. So yeah, with all these ingredients, even sprinkles is not cheap. So, and gold leaf is not cheap. So uh, decorations is something where we have to really charge as per what you're doing on the cake. And each cake is unique and different. So yeah.

**David Crabill:** [00:49:07] Yeah, well, it sounds like things are going super well for you. And you know, now that your Instagram account is taking off and it's over 10K followers and, you know, you're, you're doing uh, what it was like about five orders a week. Where do you see this business going in the future and where would you like it to go?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:49:27] I would like to have my own little cafe where I'm just serving some beautiful macarons and little treats with some nice coffee or tea that is uh, what I'm looking at. But if that does not work out I would like to get into teaching and uh, start teaching what I have learned in my journey. So that's what I'm thinking of.

**David Crabill:** [00:49:51] Have you done any teaching already? Like through lives on social media or online?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:49:58] Yes. I had an opportunity with a brand called Noor and Zafir. They're a UK based brand. They just launching their new business. It's going to be like an E-bay for Muslim businesses, you know, so when they contacted me uh, that if I could like demonstrate decorating a cake uh, live I was like, okay, that's a nice opportunity.

And I, we just had that a couple of weeks ago. And then where I'm right now in the works of Maybe starting something, you know um, uh, decorating classes in Minnesota. So just today I sent them a sample video of me talking and decorating. So I'm not sure where that will lead, but it, it can happen. It may not happen. I'm I still don't know the answers yet.

but I'm so thankful to God for all these opportunities, because I'm actually mostly going to be on a TV channel the next week. So just yesterday I got this message from, um, the TV host. And, uh, she's like, I talked to you on Monday, but we want to see you on Friday. So I'm like why? And like all these little, little things, you know, every day is something I'm learning something new or I'm getting a new opportunity and I'm so grateful for that.

**David Crabill:** [00:51:11] Well, it sounds very exciting and I'm looking forward to seeing where this takes you. It sounds, it seems like you're on an upward projection for sure. Thanks so much for jumping on the podcast today. If people want to reach out to you, where can they find you?

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:51:26] So my business is on Instagram and Facebook. So, and I have a website called uh, [sugardustandsprinkles.com](http://sugardustandsprinkles.com). So yeah, these are the three places they can always look and reach out to me.

**David Crabill:** [00:51:40] Yeah. And I'll include links to all those. Um, I assume your handles are [sugardustandsprinkles](https://www.instagram.com/sugardustandsprinkles) as well.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:51:46] Yes.

**David Crabill:** [00:51:46] Yeah. Great. Well, thank you so much for jumping on the call today and uh, it's very cool to see how far your business has come in. Just a few short years.

**Safeera Inayath:** [00:51:56] Thank you, David. Thanks for having me.

**David Crabill:** [00:51:59] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. Like I said, Safeera's photography is super impressive. So I encourage you to check her out on Instagram and it was very cool to hear how her social media following is now leading to new money-making opportunities, like being an ambassador or tastemaker for larger brands.

for more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/33](http://forrager.com/podcast/33). And if you enjoyed this episode, please head over to Apple podcasts and leave me a review. A review is the best way to support the show and will help others find it as well.

I'd also really appreciate if you could share this show with any bakers or home cooks that you know, who might be interested in it. And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini course, where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to [cottagefoodcourse.com](http://cottagefoodcourse.com).

Thanks for listening. And I'll see you in the next episode.