

***NAMI NJ Dara Axelrod Expressive Arts Mental Health Poetry Contest 2021 - 1st Place***

**Labor of Love**  
**By Jyoti Singh**

Yet another day  
One more in the many that I've lost count of  
Has it really been a year  
Since life had come to a stop  
Or so it seemed

The simmering pot screams for attention  
And I give it another stir  
As I absentmindedly watch over the spices  
Being roasted to bring out their best  
Much like life's challenges...

The tantalizing aroma spreads out its wings  
And gathers to the table our scattered family  
As would a mother hen  
Food has become their escape  
And cooking my refuge

The smiles and praise are generous  
Breaking the monotony of our day  
And as I scoop a spoonful  
I remember another hand serving us  
In her special loving way...

Her delicate homemade cottage cheese  
In a rich red gravy  
Of tomatoes carefully picked  
The perfect blend of garlic and ginger  
And spices perfectly mixed

Her long delicate fingers  
plucking out the parsley  
To add the just right flair  
The generous dash of cream

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Like her love pure and deep

Every bite an offering of comfort and indulgence

Like the woman creating this bliss

Never a frown or a sigh

As she endlessly toils

Every meal a labor of her love

The happy chatter draws me back to the present

“This is the best Butter Paneer ever!”, they pronounce

With a nostalgic smile I reach for the phone

To give credit where it’s due

“Mom,” I say, ‘there still isn’t anyone who makes it like you do!’”