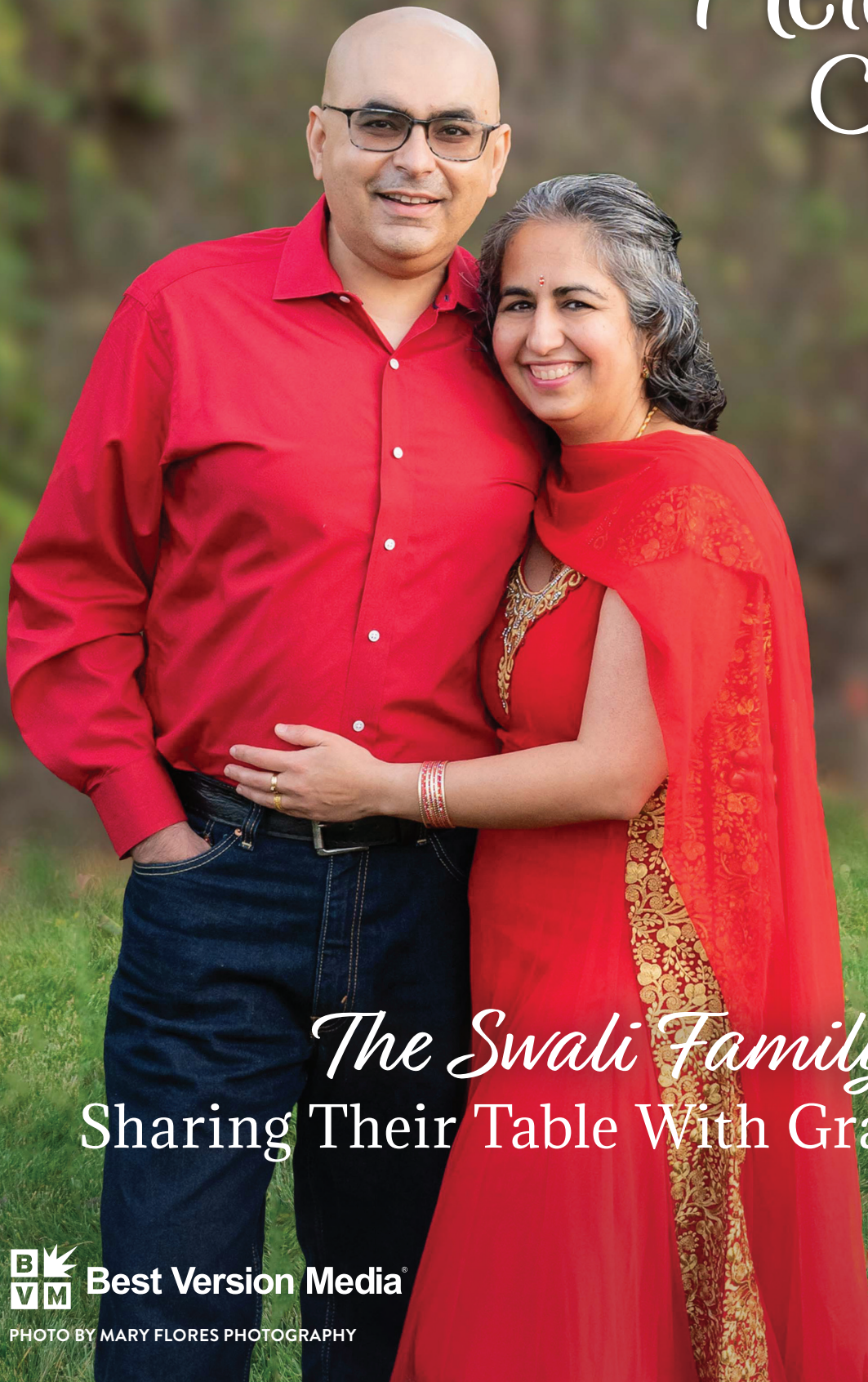


CLIFTON PARK

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Neighbors



The Swali Family
Sharing Their Table With Gratefulness



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The Swali Family Sharing Their Table With Gratefulness

By Jenna Caputo | Photos by Mary Flores Photography & Contributed by the Swali Family

The Hingwala-Swali family all love food—cooking it, eating it, and the family bonding time that comes from it as well. They now share that love with others, spreading tips, tricks, and mouth-watering pictures to reach everyone near and far. Their journey to this moment, though, started in a very different place.

Gayatri Hingwala was born in Mumbai, India and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba in Canada. She classifies herself as an introverted kid who loved reading and Bollywood movies. A lifelong vegetarian, Gayatri grew up eating primarily Indian cuisine. Her mother was an excellent cook and never followed a recipe, using the “a bit of this, a bit of that” method. Dinners were an important time—they always ate together as a family, and visitors were always welcome, greeted with an instant seat at the table and generous portions.

Gayatri had an interest in the medical field and zeroed in on Physical Therapy (PT) after taking her aunt to her PT appointments. She took a part-time job at a PT clinic to learn more about the field, then went on to receive her degree in

Medical Rehabilitation–Physical Therapy from the University of Manitoba. At the time, there was a slew of healthcare jobs available in the US, so she came to Lima, OH for her first job as a PT. She is now a per diem PT at Sunnyview Rehab and is a Certified Lymphedema Therapist, in addition to being a consultant with Pampered Chef.

Rahul Swali was born and raised in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Also an introverted child, Rahul enjoyed reading, listening to Indian classical music and Ghazals (Urdu poetry set to music), and cooking. His father passed away after an accident while working a job for his construction business, so Rahul’s mother took over the business after his death at a time when working women were looked down upon. She had to work very hard to provide for their family and fight for a chance for Rahul to attend school in the United States. Rahul took over the responsibility of helping to raise his younger siblings and preparing the meals. He enjoyed cooking for his family, and the habit stayed with him his whole life. He did manage to get to the United States and received his degree in Chemistry and Mathematics from Hamilton

College in Clinton, NY. He started out working in finance at GE, concentrating in the transportation, aviation, and power infrastructure industries. But during the pandemic lockdown, he rediscovered his passion for helping others grow into better leaders. This eventually led him to a new role as the Chief of Finance and Operations at The NeuroLeadership Institute.

Neuroleadership is an emerging field that connects neuroscience with leadership development, management training, and coaching. The Institute works with well-known companies throughout the world to develop brain-friendly talent strategies and to educate employees at all levels about the brain and how to improve decision-making, conversion, and outcomes. Rahul now also has his own management consulting practice, UpRaising Strategies, where he can pursue his passion of transforming company outcomes by mentoring employees and growing their businesses through management and financial consulting.

Rahul and Gayatri were originally set up by their families, who decided to get together so they could meet; however, things did not go as planned. "It was a bit of a disastrous meeting," says Gayatri. Rahul was working in the Netherlands at the time and had traveled back to the United States to meet Gayatri. "His family was supposed to come over for lunch. They were almost three hours late, and I was very hangry with their tardiness. Overall, it was an awkward encounter. It wasn't until he returned to the Netherlands and sent me flowers as a thank you for suffering through the whole chaos that we started talking. We soon realized that we had a lot in common and maybe we could make this work." Rahul decided to return to the US for his job so they could get to know each other some more. Realizing they were right for each other, they married in December 2000 in India, so their grandparents and extended families could celebrate with them. However, getting to the wedding turned into an adventure as well. They had to make two emergency landings on the way over—one due to engine failure and another due to a bird



strike that filled their plane with smoke.

Gayatri's love for cooking started after she met Rahul. "He introduced me to different cuisines, taught me that there are lots of vegetarian options, and how to enjoy cooking," says Gayatri. "I have tons of fond memories of spending much of our time together cooking up a freezer full of meals in the little kitchen of my first apartment. I knew how to cook the basics, but it was too much work, and it felt like a chore until he taught me how to make cooking fun!"

They now have two children—Sahil (20) and Ishan (17)—and cooking remains a major focus in their lives. Even the kids have turned into foodies. The kitchen quickly became the heart of their





home. “In our kitchen, we have a sign that says, ‘Sit long, Talk much, Laugh often,’ and at our home, the kitchen is the place where all that happens. Around the table is where we talk about our day, laugh at jokes, dream our dreams, cry our tears, and give thanks for all we have. It’s where we gather together and make a lifetime of memories!” says Gayatri.

As the boys were growing up, Gayatri and Rahul prepared the week’s meals and prepped ingredients on the weekends to better prepare for the busy week



ahead. Rahul took charge of the holiday meals and special weekend breakfasts (and still does) to help get meals on the table fast. Being vegetarians, they knew their “quick” options were limited, so they learned on their own how to cook delicious, fast, and easy meals. Rahul enjoys coming up with his own recipes and leans towards making skillet meals. His favorite go-to quickie meals for during the week are one-skillet pastas loaded with veggies or homemade spinach enchilada casserole. Gayatri likes to limit dishes and cleanup work, so she specializes in one-pot meals and pressure cooker recipes done in about 40 minutes.

As part of her Pampered Chef business, Gayatri partners with her hosts to do cooking demos, sharing tips to make mealtimes less painful. She expanded to demonstrating recipes on Facebook for her business. This eventually led to more cooking classes after requests for Indian cuisine lessons kept coming in. Gayatri then offered more in-person and virtual cooking classes with various community partners. During the pandemic, she hosted virtual Cook With Me classes through Facebook and Zoom and now also offers classes through local libraries and other community organizations. Her Facebook Pages—Gayatri’s World Kitchen



and Eating Healthy With Gayatri—offer information about her upcoming classes as well as quick-cooking tips and meal ideas for healthy and hearty meals that are done in about 30 minutes. Rahul shares his love of one-pot skillet meals on his Instagram page at @the_skillet_snob and Sahil posts smoothie bowl deliciousness at @sahilswalicious. Gayatri’s World Kitchen also has a YouTube Channel. Gayatri continues to offer classes and events. Over the few months, she’s offering Holiday Charcuteries, Indian Feasts, Salads in a Jar, Healthy Swaps, Naan Pizzas, and Samosa & Chutney. These events are a mix of Zoom and in-person options. She also offers private or group setting classes right in the comfort of your own home or office.

Ishan is now a senior at Shen and is involved in robotics, chamber orchestra, and the track team. He plays both cello and piano. Sahil is a second year Engineering Science student at the University of Toronto, also a runner and cello player. They are both members of Civil Air Patrol, working toward their private pilot’s license. Ishan recently achieved the highest award (Spatz) and rank of Cadet Colonel. Sahil is also working towards the Spatz while currently serving on the National Marketing and Strategic Communications



Team, recently authoring the fall 2022 cover story for the organization-wide magazine. He also founded and designed the curriculum for the Northeast Region's Advanced Leadership Course and assisted with the planning of the NY Wing's encampment for three years. He's now on the University of Toronto Aerospace Team, serving as the Director of Leadership Development and working with the UAS division on the Flight Operations team.

On the first day of the pandemic lockdowns, Sahil created the *#WriteToAppreciate* campaign to bring smiles and kindness to residents and healthcare professionals. He partnered with St. Peter's Health Partners, and 70+ facilities around the country received over 600 digital letters and art from all over the world. He won the President's Gold Volunteer Service Award in 2021 from the White House, commemorating his work having "special hope, lighting the future, and helping others."

The Swali family all love to travel worldwide, but when they're at home here in the Capital Region, they frequent Nora's Grocery for Mediterranean dishes and support local farms through their CSA and the farmers markets, get local ice cream, and attend concerts at SPAC and Tanglewood.

When they're not in the kitchen, Rahul writes gratitude essays and poetry and helps others professionally through free coaching and career guidance. He collects Indian classical music, and, along with Sahil, has a passion for taking pictures and listening to Ghazals. Like her mother, Gayatri is a henna artist and offers classes

in the community. She also loves to grow and nurture her many plants. Ishan spends his time mentoring and tutoring other kids while managing a hectic senior-year schedule.

Their family continues to meal prep and cook together, even with Sahil in Toronto. "My favorite time of the week is our FaceTime cooking sessions with Sahil. We will meal prep together and stock up our fridges with healthy and delicious meals for the week. He's learning to cook, and I'm again reminded that my cooking style is just like my mom's—a pinch of this and a dash of that—when he asks me measurements while he's cooking," says Gayatri. "At least once a week, we will eat dinner together over FaceTime with Sahil. He's learned to prep his meals for the week to make it easier to eat healthy after a busy day at school."

They like to always look for the good in people—especially since so many have helped them throughout their lives both as youngsters themselves and in raising their own children. "It is family, friends, and complete strangers along the way that have helped us in our journey and in time of need and became our village," says Gayatri. Rahul adds, "Our kids are who we live for, who we work for, and who inspire us to be better people. Many have been part of the village that has helped raise our boys and contributed to their growth as leaders. We are grateful for each and every one!"

They want to always pay forward all the kindness they have received over the years and urge others to do the same. "Kindness and generosity make

Clifton Park one of the best places to live. A lot of people are still hurting. We may never know who they are or the reasons why. Please uplift whoever you may interact with a smile and a touch of grace. Kindness has ripple effects. If we are kind to someone, they might extend that kindness to others, and kindness then touches many in our community through those ripples. None of us are, or become, of any significance without each other's help. Each one of us stands on another's shoulders. As neighbors, we hope we have broad shoulders for each other. We thank everyone in Clifton Park who's helped us. We'll be here with our shoulders, waiting for you."

