

Most people only see their reflection in the mirror; mine was always a few steps behind; it was my younger sister carefully copying my every move. However, when I overheard my sister justify her messiness with “but Chechi does it,” I saw that she wasn’t just imitating me but learning from my actions, strengths and flaws alike. I thought that for her to be perfect, I needed to be perfect and excel at everything, not just so my sister could be the best version of herself, but the best version of me.

So I tried to be perfect, I wouldn’t jump too high or take on an opportunity unless I was sure I’d be the best at it on the first go. I thought that she would not be able to copy my imperfections if I never showed them. Soon, my life felt like a recipe, with each decision carefully measured with the finest ingredients: leadership, caution, honesty, and resilience. But with every whisk to perfection, I started to lose my creativity, a part of myself dissolving alongside it.

My mom’s birthday was when everything changed. While baking her the perfect cake, I sifted the perfectly measured flour and browned the butter until golden, yet something felt off. I tasted the batter, and it hit me like a brick. Garlic and chives, instead of the sweet rich flavor I expected! The culprit sat before me, taunting me; it was garlic and herb cream cheese. My cheeks burned at the thought of my mistake. It was too late to restart, with the crust set, the oven preheated, and no plan B, I had to finish what I started. There was nothing I could do to prevent the inevitable; my mom’s birthday cake would taste more like dinner than a dessert.

I blinked back salty tears as my mom blew out the candles, bracing myself for the abomination coming my way. But when she fed me the first bite of that cheesecake, I was astounded. The cake was surprisingly edible; in fact, it was luscious. The savoury herbs complemented the rich cheese, resulting in a unique flavor. Although it was nowhere near perfect, it was enough. Realizing that even the most abnormal combination of ingredients could result in a decent cake left me with an aftertaste of a paradox. Had I been too focused on perfection?

Everyone’s appreciation of my effort and ‘creativity’ made me realize that mistakes didn’t mean failure; they added character and meant being human. After all, to be human is to be flawed.

The cheesecake stayed with me, serving as a reminder that imperfection is not a weakness, but a stepping-stone to growth. The same was true with my sister; she needed to see me overcome challenges and mistakes. As I taught her to learn from my failings and successes, I began to involve her in the process. It started small, but soon she could whip up brownies by herself. By trusting and giving her control, I learnt that being a role model and leader is

not about perfection, but about inclusion and empowerment. It was the last step of the baking process: frosting. I taught her whatever I could, but now it was her turn to decorate her cupcake, with her own spin.

Though my recipe is still incomplete, it doesn't need perfect instructions to be finished; in fact, there will always be missing ingredients, uneven rises, and sometimes even burnt bits. But that doesn't mean failure; it is a reminder of growth, and it comes from making mistakes. I learned that connection and authenticity are more important than flawless execution, especially when someone is looking up to you. This mindset, prioritising growth over perfection, is one that I will carry with me through new challenges. Ultimately, what matters most is not the perfect outcome, but the resilience, creativity, and growth from the journey.