Theranos Founder Elizabeth Holmes Goes On Trial For Fraud

By Rachel Lerman

Opening statements began Wednesday in the trial of Elizabeth Holmes, the blood-testing start-up founder who allegedly failed to deliver on promises of running hundreds of tests off just a finger prick of blood.

Holmes, 37, faces criminal charges in federal court here for allegedly defrauding investors and patients by misleading them about the success of her blood-testing company Theranos. Prosecutors will try to prove that Holmes knowingly made misleading statements about how well Theranos' portable blood-testing lab worked, and how financially successful the company was.

Holmes has pleaded not guilty to the charges. The former entrepreneur started Theranos when she was 19 and a student at Stanford, eventually developing it to 800 employees before media investigations revealed a dysfunctional workplace and erratic technology.

Holmes's defense team is expected to argue, at least in part, that the former CEO suffered abuse at the hands of her previous boyfriend, Sunny Balwani.

Bloomberg photo by David Paul Morris

Elizabeth Holmes, founder of Theranos Inc., exits federal court in San Jose, Calif., on Aug. 31, 2021.

In court filings unsealed last month, it was revealed that Balwani had his trial separated from Holmes's after arguing that her plans to allege intimate partner violence would mean he could not get a fair trial. Balwani, the former president of Theranos, is charged with the same crimes as Holmes.

Balwani's legal team has disputed the allegations of abuse in court documents.

Holmes could argue that Balwani "verbally disparaged her and withdrew 'affection if she displeased him'; controlled what she ate, how she dressed, how much money she could spend, who she could interact with – essentially dominating her and erasing her capacity to make decisions," according to filings. Holmes was evaluated by a psychologist hired by her defense, and the government also received court permission to appoint a doctor to meet with her.

Holmes, who once graced the covers of Forbes and Fortune magazines, was held up as a role model to young women who were interested in the sciences and wanted to run their own company.

Theranos collapsed in September 2018, nearly three years after the Wall Street Journal began publishing investigations into the company's operations, reporting that the company's blood testing technology did not work as advertised.

In January 2016, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services issued a report finding that "the deficient practices of the laboratory pose immediate jeopardy to patient health and safety."

Theranos later agreed with CMS to stay out of the blood testing business for two years.

Just months before the company shuttered, Holmes and Balwani made a deal with the Securities and Exchange Commission to settle allegations of massive fraud. As part of the deal, Holmes would not be allowed to serve as an officer of a public company for 10 years.

In a 2018 email obtained by the Wall Street Journal, new Theranos chief executive David Taylor said the company had run out of money and options to secure more.

The trial is expected to last 13 weeks.

-The Washington Post

One Country, Endless Dishes: A Love Letter To Indian Cuisine

By Shikha Subramaniam

There is no such thing as "curry" in India. The blanket term was coined by British colonizers, possibly as an Anglicization of the Tamil word "kari," which translates directly as "a cooked vegetable or meat." And yet, in a column published recently in The Washington Post magazine, Gene Weingarten reduced the food of an entire country – with more than a billion residents, millions of expats, 28 states, eight union territories and 22 official languages – to: "If you like Indian curries, yay, you like Indian food!" He then went on to dismiss Indian food as "the only ethnic cuisine in the world insanely based entirely on one spice," by which he meant curry – a statement so incorrect that it gives away a shocking lack of knowledge about food and cooking as a whole.

Within a few days of its publication, the article had traveled thousands of miles and reached the Indian masses – and I, in turn, woke up to a barrage of texts from my friends and family living in India. They seemed disappointed … in me, for working at The Washington Post.

The thought that I stand for all of The Post – a newsroom of more than a thousand journalists – is, of course, quite reductive. But no more so than the idea of "curry" representing more than 60 spices used in Indian cooking – or standing in for the vast range of dishes those spices can create, each with a unique blend of spices, nuts and herbs, differing vastly in preparation and ingredients, and from state to state.

For me, the extraordinary diversity of Indian cuisine is intrinsically tied to memory, family and identity. Half of my family is from the north: Imagine white-topped hills and sapphire lakes that freeze over, kites drifting over a mustard field, road trips where camels and elephants pass you decked in gold, and celebrations marked for weeks with intricate henna on your hands. The other half is from the south: land of magnificent temples, hot blistering beach towns, lotuses, coconut trees, Kanjeevaram silk sarees, and bunches of jasmine woven through your hair.

I was born in New Delhi to parents who met in Bombay (now Mumbai); we moved briefly to Orissa when I was 5, then to Maharashtra when I was 6. After my brother was born, we settled back in New Delhi, where we finished our schooling and I attended university.

Our paternal grandmother (Paati) lived with us growing up, and every morning for breakfast, she would make freshly crisped dosas – flat and crepe-like, made with a fermented rice and urad dal batter – along with sambhar, a hearty tamarind soup, and a light mint coconut chutney. I haven't tried to re-create this combination in my kitchen in Brooklyn yet for fear of ruining it. (Don't worry; I get my fix every once in a while from a delightful restaurant in Fort Greene called Dosa Royale.)

Photo by Deb Lindsey for The Washington Post

Dosas such as these were a breakfast staple in the author's family when she was growing up.

Paati's love language is food, as is true for many Indian mothers and grandmothers. At 84, she still, for every festival, cooks our favorite sweets and savory treats – such as Mysore pak, vadai and a South Indian savory snack that is so flexible in its preparation that it tastes different in every household, and is quite literally called "mixture."

Lunch and dinner would bring a steady rotation of my mom's aloo parathas, a North Indian staple: a flaky potato flatbread, which we typically ate along with some variation of a sabzi (any vegetable dish), a daal (any lentil dish) and rice – in numerous permutations. Mama would satisfy her sweet tooth with a recipe from her mother for a halwa: a semolina milk dessert infused with cardamom and saffron, and topped with whole cashews.

New Delhi is a sacred destination for street food. The local chaat stall had tangy fillings that trained your stomach bacteria for battles they never knew they were going to have to fight. But as Anthony Bourdain said: Street food in India "won't kill you. It won't poison you. You are far more likely, in my long experience on the road, to get ill at the hotel buffet."

One of the first things I do when I go back is visit the gol gappa stall near my house with my brother and my childhood best friend – the same one we have been going to since we were 12. Gol gappa as it's known in New Delhi (or paani puri in Maharashtra, or fuchka in Kolkata) is a thin and light spherical flatbread – imagine a thin bread bowl the size of a golf ball – filled with a cooked mix of chopped potato, onion and chickpeas, which is then dunked in spicy herb water and sprinkled with a tamarind chutney.

Another regular haunt is the local momo stall. A staple from northeast India, as well as Tibet and Nepal, these dumplings filled with meat or vegetables taste best when doused in a special tomato chili sauce. In 2011, when I was 17, my cousin and I decided to eat a hundred momos across New Delhi over the course of the summer. We ate chicken momos, veggie momos, paneer momos, tandoori momos and cheese momos. I believe we reached 78.

My favorite comfort food, and a top contender for my favorite Indian dish, is sabudana, as prepared in Mumbai. It is the one I find myself missing the most, as it's relatively unknown outside of India, and in turn is rarely seen on any menu in America. You soak pearled tapioca overnight, saute it with cumin seeds, salt, red chili powder and green chiles, and add cooked diced potatoes and toasted peanuts, finishing it off with a garnish of coriander and a squeeze of lemon.

Imagine a billion such individualized experiences across 1,269,219 square miles – where the livelihood of so many depends on the food industry, from farmers to fishermen to street vendors to chefs and even to parents who pack their children's tiffins every morning – reduced to a denigration of "curry." For those who would adopt such a perspective, it's quite simply their loss – and their misunderstanding of an entire culture. Meanwhile, masalas will continue to get toasted, meats will continue to sizzle on the tandoors, and ghee will continue to glaze rotis in kitchens all over the world.

-The Washington Post