Prompt #3: What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

My discovery of baking had begun when I first joined a cupcake decorating contest back in first grade during my family’s first restaurant grand opening. My mom pulled me out of bed at 8 a.m. and got me fitted into the white flowy dress with a bunch of flowers stamped across.

While my cousins left their working area to go get cotton candy and face painting, I was wasting fondants sculpting detailed body structures and scaly fins. Which resulted in me making merman instead of mermaids (didn't have enough fondant for the hair) so I gathered my confidence to ask the girl next to me. Which I felt guilty about cuz I ended up beating her to first place (but I always thought it's because I was related to the owner and they were being biased). I shared the winning price tho, box of cupcakes.

Days after that were spent with me waking up at 6 to help butter each pan, pouring rainbow cake batter, and piping buttercream making dozens of rainbow cake jars. My childhood days of disastrous decorating and burnt cakes in my aunt’s bakery eventually transformed into my own small baking business, selling Valrhona eclair topped with orange zest, all the way to creamy Pasteis de Nata (Portuguese egg tarts, my fav!). Burnt fingertips from flimsy gloves became the norm as a rush of hot air erupted.

Fast forward 10 years later: Making my first attempt on pineapple cookies, my whole family loved it and told me to sell it during cny and so I did. I took in so many orders (200 cookies) without realizing I only had a week to complete it.

I only succeeded 2 attempts before opening a preorder. I did 8 more attempts then all fail

3 weeks prior to the delivery dates, everything failed. My cookies were crumbling, dry. I spend my days weighing ingredients, piping batters, mentally mixed and matching ingredients like a professional shopper choosing clothes. On the verge of giving up and refunding, I lost motivation and didn't bake for a couple days, then tried again I succeeded (like overworking yourself = bad results).

Waking up at 5 and sleeping at 1, juggling between school and baking, using my ninja-stealth hands to do the mixing to avoid the heavy noise from the mixers became a routine for days. In the end, I completed all the others. All the hard work eventually paid off when some asked when’s my next preorder.

Beurre noisette (sth that makes everything taste 100000x richer, brown butter) → used it in cookies. Like in life, we have to be careful. If you brown butter for too long just by a second it'll get burnt. Just like us, if we keep pushing ourselves too much, we’ll get burnt out, and it’ll be no use.

Hi Kayleen,

What a great essay! You’ve written a compelling story that really shows your passion and hard work over the years. I know you’re not done with the essay yet, but I’ve just written a few suggestions that might help tighten the structure and timeline so that it reads more clearly. Don’t worry about the word count yet. Overall, it’s a really good start and with some revision, it can be a strong essay.

I wish you luck on your revision!

Chiara