



Written by Helen Mitternight

IN THE FIELD

## Keya and Co. Turning Sadness into Sugar

*Through her grief, one championship baker found comfort in the Keya and Co. kitchen*

**K**eya Wingfield was in a [Richmond, Virginia](#), hospital bed, recovering from a C-section and worried that something felt off about her newborn son, when the first ads for her appearance on Food Network's [Spring Baking Championship](#) appeared on her room's television. And then, she was racing in an ambulance with her son to a larger hospital's nursing intensive care unit when her phone began to blow up with excited texts from friends watching the first episode.

In September 2020, Wingfield arrived in LA to shoot the show. “I had just finished the first trimester, and I was feeling human again,” she says. “They knew I was pregnant, but they were really accommodating. I am so used to being on my feet as a chef, but they had a doctor on-site the whole time, and they’d bring me ginger chews and Gatorade to my station. They were very nice.”

A native of India, Wingfield came to the show’s attention after growing her farmers market cake-pop stand to the thriving [Keya and Co.](#), an online business that creates Instagram-worthy Southern pastries with Indian flavors.

Wingfield went on to win the show with her cardamom and golden milk cake—and then, sworn to secrecy, she flew home to be with her husband and two-year-old daughter, bake more photographic treats, and finish her pregnancy.

In February 2021, Wingfield gave birth to her son, Daksh, named after her mother, Daksha, meaning “godly.”

“A mother’s intuition is a pretty powerful thing,” Wingfield says. “The second he was born, his cry was different. Before I was told anything, I just had a feeling something was off. When they brought him to me, he had a nasal canula on for oxygen and then they rushed him to the NICU and it confirmed my unsettled feeling.”

Doctors weren’t able to figure out why Daksh wasn’t breathing properly, and Wingfield recalls trying to cradle her son around all the cords and wires attaching him to an oxygen machine.

When physicians said Daksh needed the specialists at a larger hospital, Wingfield rode in the ambulance with her tiny son.

“It took the expert doctors five weeks to diagnose him,” she says. “He had a very rare genetic mutation that was literally just one gene out of place, but it was the gene responsible for breathing on his own. It wouldn’t let his lungs expand all the way. They kept deflating.”

By March 31, Daksh had died after just 55 days.

More than a year later, Wingfield’s grief felt worse. “I think grief does a really good job of numbing you for a while with shock and disbelief, but then, as time passes, you feel everything without that anesthesia of numbness.”

And so, she turned sadness into sugar, and baking for Keya and Co. became her therapy.

“It’s more than honoring him. It’s just so painful; you have to find some kind of outlet to deal with it, and cooking and baking has always been that for me. When I was down and dark, I would bake. One end product was madeleines, but I was so sad when I was making them that I called them Sadeleines.”

Baking, she says, is “a salve, a balm; you sort of dim the lights down on grief for a while. I guess you are building a wall, brick by brick, laying down a brick each time you bake and building a wall between you and the grief.”





From grief came Wingfield's recipes for Sadeleines, Bad News Brownies, and Sadness Shortcake. The sweet treats are available only by special order from her shop in Richmond, but she is launching what she calls a "multicultural snack brand," starting with [Masala-spiced potato chips](#) that she sells in local grocery stores and nationwide through her website. Wingfield also is working on a cookbook sharing recipes that helped her with grief and hopes it will be out in 2024.

"I want to help people with the book. I want to hand it to my daughter to show her how she saved my life," Wingfield says. "I will always have Daksh. I personally have his cells I still carry, and I will carry them for the rest of my life. I don't have to talk about him; I am him."

## Keya and Co.'s Recipes



## Sadeleines (Candied Fennel White Chocolate Madeleines)

## Sadness Shortcake with Mango

## Bad News Brownies

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