



Pop-up restaurant winner

MALLORY MUNIEN

EVERY person has an individual way of coping with loss, but for Sandesh Rampersad, grief led him to fulfil his dreams and, in the process, become his own boss.

Rampersad runs Roti & Chai, a pop-up restaurant that combines Indian, Oriental, Nepalese and Persian influences.

The concept is modelled on the tea and roti walis on the streets of Dehli and Mumbai, India.

In 2014, after 20 years of running his graphic blinds company, he suddenly found himself without work and with a wife and two children to support.

That year his mother died and financial pressure caused his marriage to fall apart.

Now a single father, Rampersad, 45, was desperate to succeed. "You start to dream big when you don't have anything," he says.

He landed a job with a travelling medical service company based in Musgrave. "It was my first real job after being self-employed. I was the brand and marketing manager."

While there, he came up with the Roti & Chai concept. "I used the resources at work to develop the brand. I did everything myself. I didn't have money to outsource.

"I needed to do something to supplement my income to survive.

"For the start-up, I borrowed money from work colleagues to buy ingredients. We started selling at the night market in Morningside and on the first night sold 300 wraps."

He says a lack of food drove the idea. "I was hardly eating. I longed for the food I had growing up, the rotis prepared by my grandmother and mother, so I thought maybe I



Sandesh Rampersad, top, with his pop-up restaurant Roti & Chai. People queue at a market set-up, above, and the food that has them coming back for more, right.

should try to make them myself."

Rampersad and his daughters experimented with flavours in the kitchen, using recipes passed down over generations.

"People come from all over because the food is special and customers can taste it," he says.

With his graphic design background and knowledge of running a business, he was able to develop and create the brand identity himself.

"I put a page together on Facebook and in three weeks had a following of 1 500.

"The start-up cost R5 000, which I used to get the branding printed on a small gazebo. I knew people from that industry and so was able to negotiate a better price."

With the branding done, he and his daughters began selling



at the Bellevue Market and the I Heart Market in Durban. "The big break came when we showcased our food at Durban Street Food. Representatives of franchises were among the customers who

enjoyed it," he says.

"We also trade at the night market in Kloof, Shongweni market and the Royal Show, the Good Food and Wine Show, the Garden Show and the Pietermaritzburg night market.

"We have immense support in Pietermaritzburg, for which I'm grateful. It's our favourite destination. The locals are always keen to buy our wraps," he says.

Roti & Chai is at the Musgrave Rooftop Night Market on the first Friday of each month, the Greyville Night Market at the racecourse on the last Friday of each month and Smarket flea market on Durban's beachfront fortnightly.

They are busiest at the Shongweni Farmers Market every Saturday, where they serve a tandoori breakfast feast.

With a Facebook following of almost 5 000, the future looks bright for Rampersad.

"We're also partnering with Urban Line, Florida Road, where we are based throughout the week. Every Sunday our pop-up shop can be found at 233 Florida Road, from 9am to 3.30pm."

HIS SUCCESS TIPS

- 1 You need passion and dedication to hone your craft. Have one drive and focus, where you put all your energy into achieving a specific goal. Try not to do too many things at once.
- 2 Be humble and kind in business. Aim to be the best, but remain humble while doing so.
- 3 Make the most of social media - use it to its full advantage to promote yourself and your brand and get your name out there.