

## FEARLESS

"Nawaz is truly savvy in the real sense of the term - being a woman who is knowing, shrewd, understanding and wise. Through thick and thin, I have found my daughter to be:

"A perfect woman, nobly planned, To warn, to comfort and command; And yet a spirit still and bright, With something of angelic light.

"Nawaz has always been and continues to be God's prime blessing for me."

- Nadir Modi, lawyer and Nawaz's father





"If I've known any woman who is strong-willed, tough, righteous, loyal, a fighter to the end, a friend for life, it's Nawaz. I've known her well for over a decade, and seen her bring out her inner strengths and blossom in the most beautiful of ways. Nawaz is my go-to person, as she exudes positivity and it's so easy to sit down and actually sort your life out with her."

- Raveena Tandon Thadani, actress

"A devoted daughter, mother, wife and daughter-in-law; to each part Nawaz brings her own warmth and strength. She excels in her chosen field of wellness, sharing her knowledge with thousands of her patrons. An accomplished artist, a qualified lawyer, a nutritionist as well, I've known her as a warm and spirited friend for about 18 years now. She is so beautiful and has a unique sense of fashion that has her standing apart from any crowd. A dependable, loyal, trustworthy friend, she's so much fun to be with!"

- Dr Swati Piramal, scientist and industrialist





"Here's a little secret that all of Nawaz's close friends know. If you want an ego massage, do not go to Nawaz. Really. If that's what you need, run far away. Because you will get the unadulterated truth, no holds barred. This is exactly what I absolutely love about her. She's also a loyal, supportive, insightful friend."

Shibani Bhatija,
Bollywood scriptwriter

"Whoever said that beauty and brains don't go together, has clearly never met Nawaz. In her, you can find a friend forever. She has this trademark way of speaking her mind, no matter the audience. She is always bubbling with positivity and ever smiling. Don't be fooled by her size zero frame: Those petite shoulders can take on a lot of challenges. She leads with tact and wisdom, and even in the most difficult of situations, reacts with her charismatic confidence and wittiness. It's nerve-racking to see her in the driver's seat of a car, making the roads unsafe! If she were to fly, I'm sure the sky would be unsafe too. A heart of gold and the mind of a lawyer, I have seen her scale many mountains with ease and finesse, all the while wearing a pair of stilettos!"

> Ananya Goenka, educator and author





"Nawaz is the epitome of class and dignity. Besides the fact that she can give a lot of pretty models a run for their money, she has an even more beautiful heart. She is a unique blend of a loyal friend, a ferocious fighter, a tender, humble and simple wife; an impeccably knowledgeable fitness trainer - and all of these packaged with the most outstanding sense of humour. During my six months of bed rest due to my leg surgery, she played a major role in helping me cope. I shall never forget that care and concern. She undoubtedly is an inspiration."

- Sonu Nigam, musician



Fitness expert, businesswoman, artist, daughter, sister, wife and mother... I am Nawaz Modi Singhania and I believe in staying positive and juggling all my roles with grace, giving each my very best.

#### **HELLO WORLD**

I was told that many years ago, my mother said she wouldn't stop having kids until and unless she had a daughter. One son, eight years and three miscarriages later, I finally arrived; born in the Parsi Lying In Hospital, Mumbai (defunct for many years now). Tiny, white as a sheet, with the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck multiple times over, I couldn't take my first breath or move. They thought I was still-born but thank God for the angels in the hospital who didn't give up on me and saw me into this world.

Later the same day, my father saw a cockroach inside my hospital crib and got furious with the hospital staff and management over it. Ever since, he's been my greatest hero and the deepest love of my life by leaps and bounds.

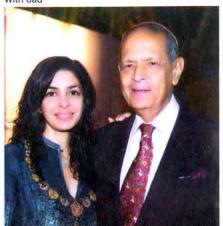
#### MY SUPER DAD

My father, Nadir Modi, was an upcoming lawyer back then. A brilliant student, he was double promoted twice over as a young student. So at a very young age, I believe it was 17, he left Ahmedabad - where his family lived - and came to Mumbai to make a life for himself with nothing but ₹100. Sleeping overnight during the train journey on the upper bunker with his shoes left on the floor of the train, he awoke to find his shoes stolen and walked into the city barefoot. He took up a job as an English Literature professor at Jai Hind College in Mumbai while he pursued his career in law, and did extremely well for himself.

With my mother and Gautam at our wedding



With dad



I was about 10 years old when my mother left my father, my two brothers and me. I chose to stay behind with my dad and brothers.

#### MUM'S LITTLE SHADOW

My mother Homai was a housewife and a stunning beauty. Friends, family members and others alike thought my parents made the most dashing and ideal couple. I was so close to my mother that people would call me her shadow. They would say that if anyone wanted to find me, all they had to do was look behind Homai's skirt and I'd always be right there!

#### **UNSETTLING CHANGES**

I was about 10 when my mother left my father, my two brothers and me. In a strange twist of circumstances, though it had been planned otherwise by my mother, I chose to stay behind with my dad and brothers.

The next few years were really hard on us. People didn't separate or divorce back then, making us kids stick out that much more amongst our friends and in school. It made us feel all the more scathingly raw over it. When my mother left, my father who was otherwise only involved with his work, ensured that he got more involved with us as kids. To me, he more than made up for a mother and father.

#### A BLESSING CALLED FAMILY

Having my uncle, aunt, cousins and grandparents living in the same building, made growing up much easier during those dark years. **My grandfather was an army man, and** 

> having been born in the late 1800s, was one of the unusual men who participated in both the First and the Second World Wars. My father



I was an average student in school, whose grades began taking a deep dive when my mother left us.

inherited his rifles and a pistol and recently had them all transferred to me. So I am now the very proud owner of these family heirlooms.

My grandfather was great with his hands and had a tool room in his flat across from ours in which I spent

With Gautam

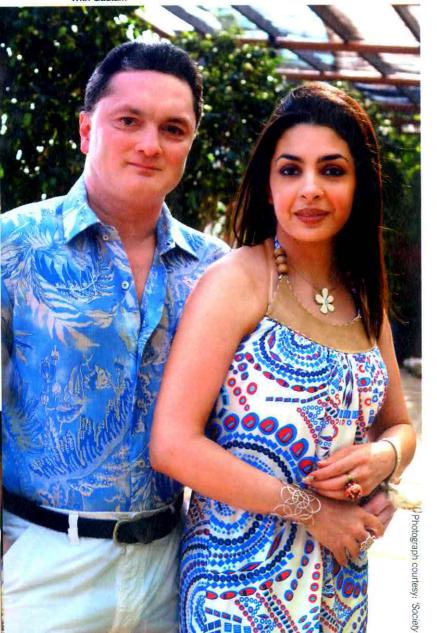
many hours with him learning carpentry. He patiently taught me how to make little wooden sculptures, small wooden tables and stools, and how to repair certain items - even shoes!

Post my mother leaving us, my family brought my then sad, inwardly lonesome, 'black and white' existence into 3-D colour, for which I will forever be grateful to them and the powers that be. We were all close and spent much time together—including meeting at my grandparents' place every night to have dinner and to pray together.

#### STRUGGLING THROUGH SCHOOL

I was an average student in school, whose grades began taking a deep dive when my mother left us. Aside from the fact that there was no one to supervise my studies and homework anymore, I'd become a manic depressant of sorts as a result of my emotional upheaval at home, and couldn't keep my mind on my studies anymore. To make matters worse, the school authorities sent me to the school counsellor to try to reverse my deep diving grades and lift my sunken spirits and sullenness. However, to add salt to my wounds, the counsellor turned out to be my mother's cousin - and so now to my great embarrassment, my mother got to know all about this! And to make matters even worse, she ran IQ tests on a very indignant me, which I scored exceedingly high in and felt greatly upset about and insulted over.

As a child, I was physically tiny and weak. I recall as a young child of eight or nine, my school Physical Education Trainer would make us do summersaults one after the other but when it came to my turn, he would just look at me doubtingly and cock his head to say, forget about the summersault and just go! Ouch! From as far back as then, I always felt the burning need to be stronger, fitter and more physically capable, which is a large part of why I got into fitness years later.





Candid moments





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#### COLLEGE CAPERS

Post finishing my ICSE exam from Cathedral and John Connon School, I was pursuing Arts at St Xavier's College in Mumbai. It was the maddest and happiest time of my life. I met some of my now dearest, oldest, closest friends there. I was free, finding myself, discovering the world at large and was in a very good space.

I first dated a boy when I was in my FYJC. Then on, I began noticing a strange behavioural pattern. With each academic year that came to a close, as one moved up a class, the books changed, the classroom changed and oddly enough, I'd promptly rid myself off my then boyfriend and replace him with a new one! I realised even back then that this was the reminiscence of my mother's leaving me.

A strange defence mechanism had kicked in where I had the need to drop the guy I was then with, well before (God forbid) he should drop me! Additionally, I realised there was a sort of vicarious pleasure I got from hurting someone the way I'd been hurt. But the minute I realised what I was doing, that was it! The spell was broken and I absolutely stopped.

#### BITTEN BY THE FITNESS BUG

By the last year of college, I decided that I wanted to be in the fitness industry. I was a member of an aerobics class at Gamadia Road in Mumbai and felt strongly that being in fitness is what I wanted to do. I wanted to

have my own centre. Straight after my TYBA exams I went to the US, where I trained, got certified and taught to gain experience. I came back to India thereafter and started my foray into fitness under the brand name 'Body Art' back in 1991.

Simultaneously, I joined the Government Law College in Mumbai and completed my LLB examination. Though a law graduate, I never practised and truly never intended to. Coming from a family of lawyers, I just wanted to keep the door open anyway, should I ever change my mind. My training in law has helped me in every single area of my life. It has helped me think straight, clear through the fog of situations, articulate well, apply both IQ and EQ, appropriateness, timing, skill and more.

Coming back to my journey in fitness, I initially started with a couple of varieties of cardio classes and over a period of time, I built on that. Today, my studios run about 25 different varieties of cardio and resistance training classes, with each routine also having a wide variety to offer within itself. In 1998, I started a gym and shortly thereafter, I started the first full-fledged equipment-based pilates studio in India. Aside from the myriad other benefits that pilates has to offer, rehabilitation is one of the greatest benefits. Many of our members come to us to reverse health problems related to their knees, back, cervical problems, shoulder

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dislocation cases, balance and control-related issues, correcting postural alignment, strengthening post surgery and so on. Pilates is also a fantastic workout regime for pregnant women.

Thereafter, I opened another centre with these and still wider offerings than the first centre had, such as an aqua aerobics pool and an indoor biking studio. I recently launched an aerial arts studio which has offerings such as TRX training, anti-gravity training, suspension fitness and aerial yoga.

#### RISING TO THE TOP

It was actually a great time to break into the market as there was virtually no competition around to speak of back then. By God's kindness and grace, my challenges were limited to building my centres block by block, developing and introducing new genres of fitness, putting my systems and processes in place, and getting my team together. I was the proud pioneer of many a first in the fitness space in the country such as full-fledged equipment-based pilates studios, gyrotonics, gyrokinesis, anti-ageing facial fitness workouts, choreographed trampoline workouts, certain aerial arts, callanetics and so on.

I can proudly say that I have been the change that I wanted to see in the industry. Over the past 25 years, the market has really grown and expanded.

With my daugthers Niharika and Nisa







by their names, unlike the, "Hey, you in the yellow t-shirt" sort of an approach, which sadly some commercial gyms out there seem to resort to. Having completed 25 years of 'Body Art' in 2016, I'm deeply grateful to my wonderful staff, my 'Body Art' family as I call them, and our 'Body Art' members, whom it has been a joy and privilege to work with through the years. None of it would have been possible without them.

#### **BRANCHING OUT**

Actor Suneil Shetty's initiative, the first fitness TV channel in India, by Brilliant Wellness, aired on Tata Sky's active fitness default Channel # 113, has a handful of the country's niche, top fitness experts signed on. I am one of them.

Apart from that, I've been associated with the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon and Procam as a fitness expert and trainer. I play various supportive roles to them - be it warming up the runners, having training sessions with them, giving marathoners *gyaan* on ideal training, injury prevention, an ideal nutritional plan,

was in my last year of college. I was dating someone back then that I anyway needed to rid myself off.

participating in press conferences and other related activities.

Lmet Gautam when I

'Body Art' and I partnered and supported marathoner Michelle Kakade in her dream run to enter the 'Guinness Book of World Records' for the Great Indian Golden Quadrilateral Run across 14 major metros in India. Michelle started this 6-month run on October 21, 2015, and won her place in the 'Guinness Book of World Records' in 2016.

I was also the designated fitness trainer for the finalists of the singing reality TV show 'Indian Idol'. And conducted a one-day training workshop for the finalists of the reality show 'Super Dancer'.

#### With Gulshan Grover and Gautam



Amitabh Bachchan and Nita Ambani with Niharika





#### GOING CORPORATE

About five years ago, I got involved with Gautam's company. I'm a Director on the Raymond Ltd Board, and on some of the subsidiary company boards. I'm also on the Sulochanadevi Singhania School Board of Governors and on the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) committee. It gives me immense and deep satisfaction, joy and fulfilment to deploy funds to such worthy and needy causes. Amongst others, we support the Sahachari Foundation, the Apex Kidney Foundation and the St Jude's Child Care Centres. We have been supporting the Apex Kidney Foundation for the past three years, which is a voluntary non-profit organisation launched in 2008. The more one wants to do in life, the more one has to juggle and diarize. But I totally love it and wouldn't have it any other way.

I called Gautam back to thank him, I got his answering machine. I was stumped and mortified!

#### MY AFFAIR WITH ART

I have always been fascinated by art and have been creatively inclined since a young age. I started painting more seriously after my daughter was born. One thing led to another and here I am today! My more recent work has been portraits. Faces fascinate me. I'm currently working on developing a new theme, but don't want to speak of the same till I'm ready to unveil it. I appreciate many aspects of many artists. For instance, I love Raja Ravi Varma's portraits, Bikash Bhattacharya's play of shadows, Bose Krishnamachari's sense of colour and fluidity, much about Prosanto Roy, and so on...

When it comes to collecting pieces, I like to collect what I absolutely love in the moment in whichever way. It might be soothing, pleasing, have a strong message, might resonate with me, whatever... The point is I have to be innately, strongly drawn to it. Almost like I can't live without it. It may happen to be the work of a great master, or some unknown, upcoming artist. It doesn't matter.

Well-known jewellery designer Poonam Soni is a fan of my art. Having come for

> Photograph: Vickky Idnaani; Makeup: Billy Manik; Hair: Bina Rai; Clothes and accessories: Nawaz's personal collection



one of my art previews, she approached me to do small canvases for her around which she would then design her jewellery. I loved the idea and we came together on this venture. Her designs are just gorgeous and so unique. We came up with collections of delightfully beautiful sautoirs and hand cuffs. The subject was always speed or motion, which is not only very hard to capture on such a small scale, but also in the medium I was working with, that is oils on canvas. But it was magic and it all came together really well.

#### LIVIN' AND LOVIN'

Back to my personal life, I met Gautam when I was in my last year of college. I was dating someone back then that I anyway needed to rid myself off. One night I was with a bunch of friends at this nightclub named RG's in the old Natraj Hotel (now the Hotel Intercontinental) on Marine Drive. Gautam took one look at me sitting at the bar from a distance, wearing a navy blue blazer and a short white skirt, and told his friend while pointing at me, 'I'm going to marry that girl'. He had no idea who I was, he didn't even know my name, but during the course of the evening, got introduced to me through a very dear common friend, singer Jasmine Bharucha.

He hung out with us for the rest of the evening and then drove me and some friends home - which included a friend who lived in Chembur in six minutes flat - to impress me. But the only effect that had on me was for me to fling the car door open and decorate the pavement with the insides of my stomach. The next day, I received flowers from

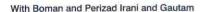
### When he proposed, I took my own sweet time to say yes - nearly a year actually.

him with multiple errors in the accompanying card and I laughed to think how his nervousness showed even on paper. Anyway, when I called him back to thank him, I got his answering machine. I was stumped and mortified! I'd never come across an answering machine before! This was way back in 1991! I hung up in a great hurry, practised and repractised my 'thank you' speech, called back and left what I thought to be a clumsy, awkward thank you message.

#### TYING THE KNOT

We became friends over the next few months... before we then got together. When he proposed, I took my own sweet time to say yes - nearly a year actually. I had many apprehensions that I cleared up with him ahead of saying yes.

When we got married, I told him that marriages tended not to work when people treated one another as spouses. Friends treat each other with sensitivity, respect, kindness, consideration, loyalty, thoughtfulness and trust. These are exactly the qualities that are so vital in nurturing a close relationship. All too often these qualities are found missing in marriages. Often we give the best of ourselves to our friends, and the rest of ourselves to our spouses. Couples take each other entirely for granted. No wonder marriages don't work then! Instead, if we treated one another as friends, we'd be in a good space. And that's just what we did.





With Poonam Soni





Post marriage, I had to find a balance between being true to who I really was, not losing myself, but still fitting into Gautam's family.

Post marriage, I had to find a balance between being true to who I really was, not losing myself, but still fitting into his family. I'm pleased with the way I found a happy path between the two, and I feel the family really appreciated that as well.

#### **BUILDING A LIFE TOGETHER**

Gautam and I got married at a time when the family business seemed to be sinking fast financially. The cement, steel and filament yarn businesses of the group were seriously bleeding the company and it was a particularly tough time. But by God's grace, the storm did pass and shortly after we got married, Gautam was appointed the Managing Director of Raymond Ltd in 1999. In 2000, that changed to Chairman Managing Director. From then on, things kept improving and building.

I have to add that he is very passionate about the business and involves himself in every aspect of the same, while still giving his senior management and team a free hand in running the group's businesses. He particularly takes deep pride and a special interest in product development, quality, innovation, growth and expansion.

They say the only 'normal' people are the ones you don't know very well. Everybody has their own set of quirks; Gautam and I are no different! I live and let live. He's free to follow his dreams and passions, and I'm free to follow mine. Gautam and I have a very unique relationship which frankly I don't see any other couple having. One of the things I really like about him - and have always liked about him - is that the way he feels about me is unconditional. I always have that safe, secure feeling. No matter how I look, behave, what I say, do or don't, I know his feelings for me just don't change. And I'm sure he'll attest to the fact that I do have a little devil residing within me (a good one though!) that rears its horns and twitches its tail from time to time! I don't feel that I always have to look good, sound great, be wonderful etc to earn his feelings for me. That means the world to me. You can't live in peace if you always feel you're walking on eggshells around your spouse. It's not a good feeling knowing you're always on display and have to be perfectly perfect, or else...

#### MY FABULOUS KIDS

We took a long time to start a family. Initially, I didn't want to, then he didn't want to. So we finally had Niharika seven years into our marriage and Nisa six years after Niharika. Niharika is 11 and Nisa, four. I was bowled over when I first became a mom. Still am, actually. My home is full; my heart is full. Like they say, when you don't have kids, you're scared of nothing; but when you have kids, you're scared of everything. Having a kid is like having your heart bounce around outside of your body. Kids are the Achilles' heel of many a parent. It's

Kids are the Achilles' heel of many a parent. It's the most beautiful experience and journey. I feel so blessed, honoured and privileged to have them in my life.

the most beautiful experience and journey. I feel so blessed, honoured and privileged to have them in my life, that they chose to come to me of all people, and I tell them this ever so often. I'm blessed with fantastic staff that I trust completely with my kids, and so work and a full life outside of the home is very possible. I have a very deep bond with both my kids. We hug and kiss a lot, and 'I love yous' fly around freely and frequently. Niharika is a superb gymnast and artistic skater and has won a few competitions as a result. A doting sister to Nisa, she considers herself to be Nisa's first mother, so I am actually made to get in line!

Gautam's a great dad. He takes a lot of time out for our kids, connects with them in ways that are important to them, instills the right values in them, humours and entertains them, while still being a good disciplinarian.

#### STAYING GROUNDED

If I'm grounded, it comes entirely from my father and his side of the family; they have made and kept me so. My soul will be eternally grateful to all their souls - most of whom have moved on into the other world by now - for this and for much more.

With Maheep Kapoor, Bhavna Pandey, Raveena Tandon Thadani and Gauri Khan



With Ananya Goenka and Sangita Jindal



# You can't live in peace if you always feel you're walking on eggshells around your spouse.

With the late Murli and Hema Deora at our wedding







About my kids, I make it a point to cultivate the fire in their belly. I don't give them everything for the asking. Essentials yes, of course. Beyond that, I often make them strive for it, think of how to get whatever it is that they want, work towards it, be dedicated and systematic. In this direction, I make them plan their work, and then work their plan. This sense of lack makes them want to even make some money, so their wants can be fulfilled. For instance, I tell my elder daughter Niharika that I have to buy gifts for Niharika's and Nisa's friends through the year for all of their birthdays, and also the return gifts of their own birthday parties. However, if Niharika makes these gifts, I will pay her for them instead of paying shopkeepers. They have to look very professional and presentable though. So last year, Niharika painted a pair of small canvases in acrylic as each child's gift. These had the Disney characters Mickey, Minnie and Donald on them. I paid her ₹ 1,500/- for each pair.

I'm very particular about inculcating various qualities and values in them - good manners, kindness, correct speech, fairness, honesty, clear thinking, religious beliefs and more.

#### **BONDING WITH MY FAMILY**

Every family has their fair share of ups and downs. I don't get involved in any family member's personal drama or politics. I get along with everyone. I don't have to make an effort to do this - it just comes naturally to me. When I can see that someone's hurting, I don't know what happens to me, but I seem to jump out of my skin. I have this deep urge to just be kind and somehow make things better for them. That's just my personality, I guess.

I've become far closer to my elder brother over the past few years than I've ever been before. He's eight years older than me, so that in itself was a distancing factor when we were growing. I used to be very close to my younger brother who is about two-and-a-half years younger than me. That's all in the past, however. In 2009 and onward, my relationship with my younger brother soured and has gone steadily downhill since. However, the happy fallout of that was that I grew very close to my elder brother. They say that when



When we observe ourselves closely, and change ourselves for the better, our whole environment changes for the greater good.

God closes a door, He opens a window. I say, in this case, He closed a window and opened a door. I'm deeply blessed.

As for my mother, I never really got closure with her. By the time closure became a possibility, it also became irrelevant to me. I had no need for it by then. What I did need was closure with myself over the whole matter, which I got once I got married. I suppose that was because by then I'd moved into a new phase of my life and so could move on emotionally, psychologically and mentally, closing the doors to old chapters. Yes, I have a relationship with her now. We both prefer not to talk about the past though. Sometimes, it's best to let the past bury it's dead.

Gautam's parents are lovely people and have always been more than kind, loving and very supportive towards me. I'm extremely blessed to have them.

#### MY CONNECTION WITH GOD

From as far back as I can remember, I've always been deeply spiritually connected with my Maker, without needing tools such as rituals, idols, temples and formal religion. I have always strongly felt a very large hand over my head at all times, protecting me. As a young child and then a young adolescent, I have done many reckless, crazy, even highly dangerous things, as specially unsupervised kids tend to do. By the grace of the Big Man above, miraculously nothing negative has ever happened to me, and I have never come to any harm.

In fact, seeing how religious beliefs often divide people, causing tragedy, death and destruction in its wake, I preferred to quietly stay away from formal religion. I'm a born Parsi Zoroastrian and I love that my religion focuses on one's own good thoughts, good words and good deeds. It doesn't focus on wanting and asking for things. When we observe ourselves closely, and change ourselves for the better, our whole environment changes for the greater good.

#### WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR ME?

...Who knows! The past is history and tomorrow's a mystery. Of course, one has certain plans and goals for the future, but I'm a bit superstitious about talking about them ahead of time. Let's wait and watch.

#### BE POSITIVE!

In my psyche, I've always divided all people and things in one of two groups - positive or negative. Even in the most negative of situations, I'm hugely positive. My dark clouds have the fattest and brightest of silver linings. I'm happy, I'm positive, I reach for the light. I really owe this quality to my father. He's been my greatest guide, philosopher, friend and fan. Of all the critical life lessons he's taught me - and these are countless - being positive, by far, is of the greatest value to me. I don't think life's worth living any other way. When you're positive, you attract only positive people, positive experiences and good things into your life. Sadly, the converse is also just as true. No matter what, BE POSITIVE. Funnily, that's also both my and my father's blood group - i.e. B+!

Nawax Modi Singhania/.

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