

HOSPITALITY LEADER

Online Newsletter

A Pumpkin Soup Memory



Can a memory of a lost loved one, the warmth of a childhood home, and the nostalgia of holidays past all be found in a bowl of pumpkin soup?

Yes, it can. When we watch and listen to what is going on in the hearts of our residents, we can find that something so small can mean so much.

A story that is representative of so many we hear in our communities begins in a dining room where one of our associates, Jason noticed that a resident in her 80s named Rachel was hardly touching her Thanksgiving meal. Rachel's face was downcast, and her shoulders slumped forward.

Jason asked, "Is there something wrong? Do you not like our Thanksgiving menu? Can we get you something else?"

Rachel replied "No, dear. I'm sure it's all perfectly fine. I was just thinking of the Thanksgivings I had as a little girl in my mother's house in Wisconsin. She started off the meal with something she called pumpkin soup. She pureed fresh pumpkin and whipped it with cream, brown sugar, and pumpkin spices, then heated it in a saucepan over our gas stove."



With a far off look in her eyes, Rachel reminisced, "She called it a soup, but my two sisters and I considered it a dessert that we got to have first. And we didn't bother to use our spoons. We just lifted our bowls and drank from them." Rachel then lamented, "But nowadays, no one has ever heard of pumpkin soup. And anyway, my doctor has said I can't have dairy or sugar. So...my pumpkin soup is gone, my childhood is gone, my mother is gone, and for me - Thanksgiving is gone."

Jason patted Rachel's shoulder and said, "Let me bring you some of that roast beef you liked that we still have from yesterday. And I'll talk to our chef. He's a pretty creative wizard in the kitchen."

Jason talked to the head chef Spencer, who pondered Rachel's sad dilemma as a challenge. Chef Spencer spent about half an hour over Black Friday weekend Googling pumpkin soup recipes and thinking of substitutes for the cream and sugar restricted from Rachel's diet.

Back at the kitchen on Monday, he condensed almond milk over low heat until it thickened, then added a brown sugar substitute, followed by pumpkin and spices.



At noon, Chef Spencer entered the dining room to personally deliver his surprise creation to Rachel's table. "I have a chef's special soup order by request for you" he proclaimed. "I hope it's to your liking."

"But I can't have dairy or sugar" Rachel replied. The chef winked, "I know. See what you think about my special substitutions."

As Rachel took a sip with her spoon, her eyes widened. "It's just like what my mother used to make" she exclaimed as a single tear rolled down her left cheek. Rachel then put down her spoon, picked up the bowl, and began to drink from it, just as she had as a little girl. She paused to glance up at Chef Spencer to ask, "Is there any more?"

He replied, "Absolutely. I have a whole saucepan just for you. I'll bring you seconds, and I'll put some in a container so your aide can heat it for you to drink before bedtime. You can drift off to sleep and have some warm dreams about holidays with your mother and your sisters on these cold winter nights."

By watching and listening to our residents, we can discover heartfelt needs. We can put the resident first by working around regimented menus, exercising creativity, and going the extra mile. There are many stories like Rachel's in which our associates give our residents personalized customer experiences (like pumpkin soup) that turn a retirement community into a home.

