

“The Pheasant Under Glass”:
What’s wrong with the senior dining facilities and how it can be changed

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Abstract:

Today, more and more elderly are either active in local senior centers, or are living in assisted living cares and nursing homes. These locations are the new homes for many seniors; however, most of the time, senior facilities fail to incorporate a warm and friendly homestyle living atmosphere. In this paper, I approach the problem of dining services in senior centers, assisted living cares, and nursing homes throughout Knox County, Ohio. I explore the issue of local foods and what prevents certain facilities from using fresh ingredients into their meals. During my research, I follow Paul Higgins, a former chef of an assisted living care who has spent years attempting to promote local foods in senior centers. Along the side of Paul Higgins, I am able to travel to several senior facilities, speak with residents and managers, and the Area Agency of Aging. During the duration of the fall semester 2011 at Kenyon College, I collect through interviews and field observations, the knowledge of local food and I am convinced that fresh ingredients will increase the happiness and well-being of senior residents and diners. As Paul Higgins shares with me, I agree and find that simply nothing keeps a facility from using local foods other than the management. In order to have a tasteful, memorable, and social meal at a senior facility, the management needs to be well-staffed, active in using fresh foods, and emotionally connected to the residents.

Please note that some names have been changed upon request.

Chapter 1- "It's the Experience"

Paul Higgins, former chef for Maple Ridge Senior Living Community, sits across from me drinking coffee. "It's the experience" he tells me at our first meeting, "not the food." For the past several years, Paul has been researching the food service in different types of senior facilities. He tells me, as a chef himself, of the over-cooked, conventional meals being served, the lack of involvement of the seniors. He's been traveling to assisted living cares and senior centers with his pitch-- use local foods. Not only are local foods more appetizing, but could also engage the seniors. It could create an unique atmosphere positioned around meal times. "The experience," Paul Higgins insists to me that's what we remember from meals. Yet, somewhere along the lines from our grandparents to the generation now the way of traditionally preparing meals has been lost. Throughout Knox County, Ohio, Paul has tried to persuade the management of senior dining services, but still sits in front of me with his coffee, frustrated as ever. And that's when he came to me, a sophomore at Kenyon College, to hopefully change the way of food for the elderly who no longer laugh while peeling potatoes.

Growing up, Paul, a San Francisco native, was exposed to local and good food. He remembers as a child when his grandmother would take him to the farmer's market on Fridays and lines of trucks would have their trunk open, full of fresh vegetables and fruits. He grew up cooking and could never stop. During his time working in the hotel tourism business, Paul would make his way into the kitchen. He moved all the time, from hotel to hotel, from Las Vegas to Texas, and always dabbling in the kitchen and preparing a few dishes. Eventually, however, Paul moved to Ohio to live a peaceful, retired lifestyle. That's when Paul decided to pick up in his

retirement a 40 hour-a-week “part-time” job as the Maple Ridge Senior Community chef. In an interview later on, Paul raved, “This job has a lot of appeal to me... The dietary director of the time was a competition chef. She knew about institutional food... Plus there was another individual who was a CIA (Culinary Institute of America) graduate. You looked at the culinary talent in this kitchen and we could run a five star restaurant somewhere.” But when we arrive back to Maple Ridge, now owned by a national assisted living corporation, Paul Higgins sits in shame. We go inside the empty-looking building to meet with Paul’s friend and 90-year-old resident at Maple Ridge, Edna Curtis, for lunch. As one my first experiences in an assisted living care, I feel lost or disconnected from the atmosphere. Everything is clean and well presented. A living room with a grand piano, nice sofas, and fancy armchairs... but it is vacant, and the piano quietly becomes only a decoration in the room. Finally, we turn the corner and enter the dining room filled with a few elderly, uniformed nurses or dietitians, and many empty tables. Paul, Edna, and I sit together and are told the lunch options the day, either a ham and beef combination or chicken. Each option comes with a split pea soup to start, potatoes and asparagus as sides, followed by a ginger “fruit” crisp. The meal overall isn’t bad, but then again it isn’t anything to remember.

When our food arrives, Edna reminisces on the days when Paul was there, making fresh asparagus soup and using fresh eggs for her omelets in the morning. Edna exclaims to me that she could taste the difference of the fresh eggs. Then, she and Paul begin chatting enthusiastically about San Francisco food. Both had previously lived there.

“You remember Fisherman’s Wharf?” Paul asks Edna. He explains to me that Fisherman’s Wharf was an area in San Francisco known for its diverse, seafood restaurants.

Edna nods, thinking. “Alioto’s was my favorite, an Italian seafood joint.” Then we all three look down at the ginger fruit crisp in front of us, more apple slices than cinnamon.

When Paul worked at Maple Ridge, he and the dining staff would do whatever the residents asked for on their birthday. For Edna’s birthday, she requested home-cooked lamb chops that required a different oven from the typically used commercial oven at Maple Ridge. But sure enough, Paul Higgins and his crew cooked those lamb chops the way Edna had remembered.

“We had another interesting birthday request.” Paul later tells me in an interview. “We had someone who wanted pheasant under glass.” A rarely prepared dinner nowadays, the pheasant is traditionally roasted, stuffed with mushrooms and wild rice, and served under a glass dome to keep in the moisture and protect the flavor. Although the old, fine-dining dish is a hard to come by, Maple Ridge prepared a pheasant under glass for the requesting resident. Presently, I look around the dining room and notice other seniors quietly eating or asking for ice cream instead of the fruit crisp. I wonder where visiting family members are. In fact, the whole assisted living center, although well-kept and decorated, just seems too *quiet*. Edna had mentioned that her granddaughter used to come for Bingo. Perhaps if Maple Ridge started putting on events during dining hours, perhaps if the dinner itself became the event. Lunch, dinner, breakfast, it should have social engagement. It should have laughter. It should have people busily moving in and out, and visitors being greeted. This could change. I imagine the pheasant under glass rolling down the space between tables filled with seniors and family visitors singing “Happy Birthday”. If excitement was returned back to meal times. Not just overcooked asparagus, but a spiced homemade local asparagus soup.

As Paul and I leave Maple Ridge, walking out the front entrance, he turns to me. “If even they just had a ‘Welcome’ banner hanging when you came in...” I nodded-- it’s the experience.

It was just as my summer of 2011 was ending when Kenyon College Sociology Professor Howard Sacks emailed me. I had been working at a certified Naturally Grown small family farm for the past three months, and mastered the art of how food should grow; moreover, how it should taste. Paul had contacted Professor Sacks, who is known for his efforts to bring local foods to Kenyon College. He wanted Howard to help him achieve his goal-- “how can I get the senior centers to care? How can I get them to improve their food?” So Professor Sacks tagged me in to write a report on just why local and fresh foods are vital to the lifestyle of senior facilities. I didn’t know much about nursing homes or assisted living cares, or what even was the difference between the two. But Paul Higgins pulled me along from centers to cares to Senior Activity Days all throughout Knox County, Ohio. I sat and observed the food that was eaten, the stories that were shared. And as always I ate, from the too creamy potatoes to homemade French silk pie.

In the early 1900’s, Dr. William Thomas from upstate New York developed a plan to create a better living environment within nursing homes and assisted living cares. The Eden Alternative, the name of his project, claims that the “three plagues” of institutionalized elderly facilities are “loneliness, helplessness, and boredom” (www.edenalt.org). Dr. William Thomas originally began his Eden Alternative program by placing birds into nursing homes. The response of the having living animals in the nursing home was overwhelmingly positive from the residents (Harris 238). From then on, Dr. Thomas had dedicated his career to revolutionizing nursing homes and assisted living cares to be more like a home than a place to put seniors, as Paul Higgins once said, “out to pasture.”

I search the Eden Alternative on YouTube, and find videos that show what the facilities are like inside. One in Upstate New York, Tioga Nursing Facility, in the video “Eden Alternative

Featurette” has animals from cats and dogs to pigs and ponies walking around the nursing home. The residents act ecstatic. With the new companionship of animals and kindergarteners, Dr. William Thomas finds that the lifespan of the residents in his nursing homes versus others was 25% longer (*Food for Thought: How Choices Enhance Memory and Pleasure in Dining on Vimeo.*). I then watch another video, “The Model for St. John’s Greenhouse Project” which is in Rochester, New York. The facility is so pleasant that I wouldn’t even mind living there myself. While viewing the nursing home, they flash the camera towards the kitchen which is open to the dining room. The tables are smaller and family-sized. There are vast amounts of countertops for cooking space.

One of the residents smiles, exclaiming “there’s always someone cooking.”

On the Eden Alternative website, I type in locations for the Knox County area. I am surprised to find that there isn’t a single location, and moreover I am surprised that Autumn HealthCare did not make the list. With only eleven live-in patients, Autumn HealthCare in Mt. Vernon, Ohio is the angel of assisted-living cares. Paul and I decide to meet with Deb Curran, the director at Autumn. When we walk into the facility, which resembles a warm home, it is busy with residents watching television by the front window. Deb is sitting in a nurse uniform, sorting her patients’ medications into plastic Halloween bags. Right in front of us, across from the front door, is an open kitchen. The chef on staff is preparing a chicken Coeur de blue dinner. I can smell the delicious, warm cooking and my stomach growls.

Deb tells me of a daughter who brought her mother to Autumn after having visited her grandmother there as a child. When Deb asked her why she wanted to have her mother living in Autumn HealthCare, the daughter responded, “I remembered you had good food.”

“They love going to the orchard.” Deb explains to me as we sit on couches by a window. “And they don’t want tomatoes from Kroger.” Every week, she travels to the Mt. Vernon Farmer’s Market and goes to produce auctions for fresh, local ingredients. Deb shakes her head, “Only way they like their burger is with fresh tomato and fresh onion.... We spoil them.” Paul and Deb laugh knowingly, both having had cooked for the elderly. I ask Deb about state regulations on food, and Autumn HealthCare because of its small size is exempt from most food inspection standards. Unlike Maple Ridge, they do not need three complete sinks to clean vegetables. Deb tells us the wait list to live in Autumn is extremely long, and most people wanting to switch locations are from Maple Ridge. I wish we could stay for dinner, but Deb has to finish sorting through the medication.

“They don’t care about me.” Deb jokes as Paul and I are leaving. “They care about right there,” she points to the kitchen. “It’s the smells they smell every day.”

Chapter 2- No Excuses: The Lies of Food Safety

Title III Funding: The federal funding for state agencies on aging which also decides if certain facilities are eligible for funding

Passport Funding: A waiver for the Medicaid program.

During the Johnson’s administration, the Older Americans Act and the Social Security Act of 1965 which included the Medicare program were passed. The Medicare program would help seniors 65 and over with either nursing home finances or access to food. Facilities that accept people with Medicare, Medicaid, Title 3, and Passport, and are federally funded must now follow safety regulations of the state. Quite regularly each facility is inspected by AAA, Area Agency on Aging, in order to check that these codes of sanitation are being followed.

At an old train station stopping location in the middle of Mt. Vernon is the most popular Knox County senior center, the Station Break. Jennifer Bishop, the AAA Ohio district 5, whom Paul and I meet with later tells that the Station Break is one of their better facilities.

Paul and I arrive to the Station Break right before lunch time. The moment we walk through the kitchen door, Shirley Ward shoves hair nets into our palms. My hair sweats with the net up in a ponytail. The kitchen is sweltering with truck drivers dishing out of heaters the meals for each of their drop-off customers. These drivers each have a truck with a heating and cooling system to deliver home meals from the Station Break every day. This day, 275 jambalaya meals will be home-served. The kitchen space is tiny for the amount of meals prepared daily and since the Station Break is a historic site, it cannot be expanded. But Shirley makes the most of it. The truck drivers are in assembly lines, the other employers are moving in and out, checking on the stove, cleaning the limited countertop space. People have plastic gloves on, and the sinks are constantly being used to wash hands. The dining space, however, is rather empty but Paul says it's because of the jambalaya. Yesterday was meatloaf and mashed potatoes and the Station Break was packed.

Aside from Medicare, the Knox County senior levy allows anyone over the age of sixty to eat at the Station Break. Paul as a 60-year-old himself finds this unnecessary, and believes the age limit should be raised. That way they might be able to adjust to local ingredients or even more cooking space.

I ask Shirley about using local foods, but it is difficult because they need to be rinsed and there is only one sink.

Jennifer Bishop tells me during our interview that the Station Break once had a garden that the senior used to help maintain. They would use these vegetables in some of the meals. But the garden is no longer there, and fresh produce is no longer used, due to the lack of “sink space”.

The trucks, filled with hot meals, are then ready to leave. Shirley tells me that they keep the meals heated at 180 degrees during the ride. Paul says that it should only be cooked to about 140 degrees to keep it from getting mushy. The last meal is delivered around 1:00 pm, and it is around 10:00 am now. Paul tells me to do the math-- if you're receiving them at 1:00 pm, these meals have been cooking for 3 hours at 180 degrees. By then, that meal will have turned into applesauce.

Back in the AAA interview, I ask Jennifer about the heating temperatures. “That’s one of the complaints we do get is overcooked mushy vegetables,” she responds.

Most centers receive their ingredients and produce from big providers like Gordon or Kroger, which is easy, presumably cheap, and a one stop place for all needed parts of any recipe. Many centers are stuck in the habit of simply ordering online. At the Danville’s senior center, The Sanctuary, director Barb Mickley orders her food at 7:30 in the morning on the Food Assistance Agency website. But in addition, she receives a large amount of produce from the Mid-Ohio Food Bank each week. I also notice that Station break and another senior center, Centerburg Senior Services did as well. In fact most senior centers receive produce from Mid-Ohio Food Bank weekly. But as to if this produce is actually used is left up in the air. As for Centerburg Senior Services, the produce when I visited was left in a cardboard box outside the room for anyone to take. It had fresh squash, zucchini, green peppers. But as people exited the room, the box was left untouched.

What many centers, assisted living cares, and nursing homes typically do not understand is the simplicity of finding registered food sources.

“Local farmers, markets, and roadside stands...” Jennifer lists the variety of approved sites for providers. “Since there’s no approval process, they just need to be registered.” In fact, Paul tells me he is a registered provider himself. To become a registered provider, all it requires is filling out a form online. Paul, Jennifer, and I discuss how great it would be if we could get a whole farmer’s market registered and the center’s director could then pick out foods just like in Kroger. But the problem seems to be as Scott Komitau, the Dietary Director/Chef at the Laurels in Mt. Vernon, puts it, “we have to have our meals planned out three months in advance.”

Scott Komitau agrees to meet with Paul and I one afternoon at his senior facility and rehabilitation center to discuss if he wanted to join in on the project-- bring the local produce into the dining area. As a talented chef, Scott is thrilled with the idea to use farm fresh items on his menu; however, he is still hesitant. His initial reaction turns to how difficult it would be to plan a menu three months ahead without knowing the season. Paul and I hand over a crop map to Scott which details what produce would be available during which weeks out of the summer months. We explain that if a certain vegetable crop happens to be weak that season, Kroger could always be relied on for replacements. But regardless of our advice, Scott still shakes his head-- he feels like he needs proof to show his advisors at the Laurels. He needs to have an official, signature form that local, fresh foods are “approved.” Jennifer of AAA during our interview earlier however repeatedly encouraged the use of local foods. Local foods in terms of food regulations are labeled as “unprocessed” and according to Charles L Kitchener, RS Chief of Ohio Department of Agriculture Food Safety Division, says as quoted in one of Paul Higgin’s presentations, “unprocessed fruits and vegetables are exempt in Ohio.”

Dr. Judah Ronch, a friend of the Eden Alternative Dr. William Thomas, has coined the term “surplus safety”. Surplus safety is when others start to see a group of people, whether rather young or old, as inadequate to make proper daily decisions. Thus people that are viewed as too old or too young will be unable to make choices for themselves. Eventually, the inability to exercise free choice will dull that person’s life, making the overly-helped individual feel pointless. The elderly who are prevented from deciding day-to-day what they would like for dinner may lose their sense of self and a reason to live. Shortly, meals can become forgotten and memories will dwindle as the residents at these facilities can no longer act on free will.

Variety should be open in these menus planned. It does require more time to go to the farmer’s market and to write substitutes for each meal, but if the center truly cares about the well-being of their residents, then they will try to make the food work.

People commonly misinterpret that the food safety regulations are limits to fresh ingredients. In response, Paul says shaking his head, “Government intervention... is what you have rather than this is what you want.”

Chapter 3- Respect Your Elders

A study was conducted by an industrial designer, Pat Moore, at the age of 26. She decided to dress as a 85-year-old woman to feel the differences in the social treatment of age. Her results showed a dramatic contrast. In one particular case, Pat went to the same store twice once as her 26-year-old self and the other as her elderly woman costume. She was received by the same store clerk to purchase ribbon for her typewriter. Pat made the same little mistakes such as fumbling with her coin purse and confusing the brand of the ribbon, repeating the exact same lines both times. Aside from her age difference, the interaction on her part was identical in each instance. The store clerk, however, treated her completely differently. He was patient and enthusiastic

when Pat appeared as the young woman, but when she arrived as 85-years-old, the store clerk reacted negatively towards her (Harris 16-19). The two excerpts below are from Pat's Moore account. During each instance, she is trying to open her purse until she leaves the store.

As an 85-year-old:

As I wrestled with the change-purse, he heaved such an exasperated sigh that I felt a need to apologize for the delay.

"Darn thing always gives me trouble!"

No response but the same dull glare.

Having successfully opened the purse, I gave him a five-dollar bill.

Without speaking, he placed the change in my hand and put my purchase into a paper bag.

I waited for a moment to see if he intended to hand me the package or address me further. He did neither. Instead, he left the counter.

As a 26-year-old:

I placed my handbag on the counter. Fumbling with the latch, I repeated my performance from the day before.

"Darn thing always gives me trouble."

"Well better for it to be nice and tight and take longer to open than to make it easy for the muggers and pick-pockets," he bantered

I handed him a five-dollar bill and waited for the change. He counted it out carefully, "That's four and one makes five! Now we'll get you a bag here and you're all set."

He was so nice. I had to fight the urge to scream. Without a word I turned away from the counter and headed toward the door. He scurried behind me.

"Let me get that door for you," he offered. "It sticks sometimes." (Moore & Conn, 1985).

As with issues of sexism and racism, ageism is becoming more prevalent in the media of the US society. The young are thought to be irresponsible and the old are thought to be clueless.

“In a study published by the American Psychological Association, Yale School of Public Health professor Becca Levy and her colleagues concluded that old people with positive perceptions of aging lived an average of 7.5 years longer than those with negative images of growing older” (Ageism in America Becomes Hot Topic - Health - Aging - Msnbc.com).

After visiting the Station Break, Paul and I drive to another senior center about a fifteen minutes away. The Centerburg Senior Services is about a quarter of the size of the Station Break, and located in an old school along with other Centerburg community groups. This morning, Paul is preparing to give his presentation “Eating Right” to the senior center on the importance of local foods. We arrive to the center rather early, and chat with a few others in the classroom beforehand. The conversation shifts towards discussing Station Break. Out of the few seniors present, all have negative reactions. Although the negativity may have been stemmed from a long rivalry between the communities, the comments are still striking.

One senior tells of a time he went to the Station Break alone. He saw the manager and asked her to chat for a bit over a cup of coffee. However, the manager denied his request.

French novelist Marcel Proust was the first to identify the experience of eating is more powerful in memory than in the meal itself. Today, Dr. Judah Ronch along with other psychologists have found that part of our tastes are generated on how we felt about a particular dining experience (Dobson).

Now the senior at Centerburg Senior Services does not remember what the coffee exactly tasted like or what the meal was that day. But he does remember not being able to talk to the manager. And because of that, he feels much resentment towards the senior center.

I think back to the Maple Ridge lunch with Edna. How the impression of the food was negative, not only because of taste, but also because of atmosphere.

The elderly who are beginning to lose taste-buds are now subjected to foods with little taste that are overcooked as a result of surplus safety. It's no wonder people typically deem the elderly as particular. The food in the average nursing home is awful, and each day the residents are restricted to eating only these served meals. Overall, seniors develop a poor impression of the nursing home food experiences. Eating poor, non-interactive meals three times a day, year after year, the elderly begin to become victims of a negative self-image. Aside from the possibilities of visitors, residents in senior facilities generally have very little to look forward to the next day.

The director at Centerburg Senior Services says to me, "things have changed." Instead of preparing meals tailored towards the consumers, Robin Strayer tells me they "do everything for title 3."

But title 3, as stated before, does not prevent the use of local and good foods. And actually, Jennifer Bishop believes the new regulations for 2012 on meals such as the lowered sodium content allowed in each meal will encourage local foods. Since non-fresh foods require preservatives, foods found on the shelf of a grocery store typically have a higher sodium content than local, fresh foods. The waiver recipient locations, although must follow certain guidelines, are by no means completely limited.

"The minimum guidelines," Paul defines. "...would suggest that you have to have so much protein, carbohydrates, and whatever dairy... It doesn't speak at all to the quality of it." In places

like the Station Break and Maple Ridge, perhaps the people in management are then to be blamed for the tasteless meals. Perhaps, ageism inflicts those in charge of senior facilities.

That's what Paul thinks in his interview. It's the people in charge that are the main reason for the poorly-prepared meals.

“We need people in charge who care.”

These instances though are nothing in comparison to the majority of nursing homes which with a hidden camera have found regular abuse from employees. In one case, according to Atlanta Legal Aid, a resident received a pressure sore likely caused by a previous abuse and was sent to the hospital. The hospital gave specific instructions how to care for the wound to the center's nurses. Yet, when family came to visit, they could smell a strange odor coming from the wound and when the bandage was removed, flies were living inside ("Abuse in Nursing Homes"). Also equally disturbing, another case from Atlanta Legal Aid shows how the nursing home failed to properly care for a diabetic resident who because of these lost twenty pounds a month and began to forget her own daughters. The list of horrendous encounters of elderly care abuse goes on.

People living in nursing homes, assisted living cares, although perhaps incapable of caring for themselves, still deserve to be treated as humans. Yes, food is not as grave a trouble as physical abuse, but it arises from the same problem-- poor management.

Management should care like Paul and his coworkers did. During my visits, I began to see trends with corporately owned assisted-living cares, and ones that were recipients of title 3 and passport users. When Paul had stopped working at Maple Ridge, it was bought over by the nationwide company.

Paul tells me in an interview, “When Maple Ridge was an independent facility all the management would interact with the residents.”

The national company that now owns Maple Ridge claims to be interactive with family-style living. But as much as the directors wish all locations were pleasantly comfortable, the scale is too large to employ all sincerely caring managers. As a result, Maple Ridge which once had a “five-star” cooking staff, now serves meals that remind me of a mediocre salad bar.

On the other hand, the management in places like Autumn HealthCare, which has several branches localized in Ohio, is better staffed. Although I am biased after the one visit with Deb in Mt. Vernon, I feel the seniors are treated better in these kinds of local facilities. Autumn’s slogan “Care that is Anything but Ordinary” holds truth (*Autumn Health Care - Care That Is Anything but Ordinary*). With only eleven locations, the care emphasizes on their highly-trained staff and their centers that all resemble homes. Because each care is specifically designed for a low number of residents, the facilities do not need to comply with unnecessary food safety precautions.

The problem then comes from the places that allow the employees to be unqualified, unmotivated, and under-staffed-- the places that allow the regulations to overrule the meal-- these places which Paul terms as “the corporate machine.” But there is a plus side.

It doesn’t have to be this way.

Chapter 4- Bring Back Good Food

It’s Thursday November 17, 2011, 75 local seniors arrive to St. Luke Community Center for the Danville Area Senior Citizens lunch. I am clearly the youngest person to attend. Paul and his wife, Peggy, drive me to the pre-Thanksgiving feast as their guest. When we arrive, I am pleased to see long communal tables and lots of seniors already sitting and chatting away. But moreover

I am pleased to see at each plate is a different pie. The choices range from pumpkin, French silk, pecan, apple cream, lemon, to custard pie. Needless to say, after a few trades, everyone is satisfied with their dessert option. The rest of the lunch is the typical turkey, gravy, beets, sweet potatoes, stuffing, and cranberry or applesauce. Across from me sits a retired clown who has a whole album of pictures in her costume to show me . Afterwards, a senior demonstrates her art of stain glass. Overall the lunch satisfies everyone, and I even win a candle for being the youngest in the room.

That's the importance of food. As Marcel Proust would have theorized, it's the memory of eating that creates the experience.

I visit the Fredericktown Senior Activity Center a couple weeks after the Danville lunch. It is another Thanksgiving potluck get together. Yet again, there is a wide range of desserts to choose from There is cinnamon pie, pumpkin pie, brownies, pumpkin brownies, cream pie, coconut lime pie, and each pie is homemade. I have a small slice of each.

With the great food and a small, close-knit atmosphere, the seniors are busily chatting. I hear stories about homemade root beer back in the day, how mom and dad used to can all their food.

"They did everything by hand." Shirley Orsborn, one Fredericktown senior, recalls about her grandparents. Each Sunday night, her family would go to her grandmother's house for homemade walnut cakes and ice cream.

Another woman, Mary Braddock, chats about homemade butter. "I never churned but my mom did." I learn from these ladies about the natural cooling system-- how it was simply a hut on top of a spring. The system was built out of wooden poles that sat just above the spring. The bowl of food was then placed on top of these poles in order to be refrigerated.

I think about my own grandfather born in the year 1925. He must have also refrigerated food that same way. Then, I think about the way my grandmother and him eat now--how their choices of soda and small salads share no resemblance with the fresh walnut cakes that Mary Braddock's grandmother used to make.

Fortunately, many places are already incorporating a better dining program in their senior facilities. Sally Hopkins, the business development manager of Eden in Australia and New Zealand elaborates on the importance of seniors and food. One location Sally oversees is the Eat Well Tasmania program that "recognises that preparing what they eat can improve levels of wellness in older people... Eat Well Tasmania offers cooking demonstrations for senior members of the community who still live at home" (Wever).

An article, "A Bite of Life" on the AgedCare InSite mentions the limits governmental funding can have on food expenses, but in reality, these "limits" are only a call for more "creativity" as Sally Hopkins says.

Another location already in the works is the Mandurah Care Facility south of Perth. Here, residents can attend cooking lessons each week. Christina Venables, the facility managers, claims, "cooking sessions also reduce feelings of helplessness among residents" (Wever).

I decide to send a message to The Eden Alternative Facebook Group and find many responses that encourage my study in the subject of aging and local food. Rayne Stroebel from South Africa responds with a link to an elderly care website. Rayne commented, "My company (in South Africa) specialises in fresh, seasonal, well prepared for Elders in long-term care. We use no artificial flavourants or courants or MSG." I check the website, *Geratecza*, and find photos of beautiful dining arrangements. It wasn't a meal that Rayne's care was serving, but an *exquisite cuisine*.

I then receive a response from a nurse in a senior community, Christi Green, who has been utilizing a better dining experience.

A few months ago we began having "family style dining". This has been such a blessing to be involved with. The gift of sitting at the table with your family and friends and sharing good food should always be honored. Eating is more than taste, it is presentation. The wonderful smells as the dishes are passed around the table entice us to eat. The beauty of brightly colored vegetables tempt us to take a bite. Having condiments on the table like butter, salt/pepper, hot sauce help us make the food on the plate our own. In my opinion, as more seniors living in nursing homes & assisted living are offered the opportunity to prepare their own meals, we will see more fresh & local foods.

Chapter 5- What Now?

Now that the garlic has been cured, it's time for the roast.

We need to change what is happening in the senior dining world. As baby boomers age, more people will be living in nursing homes, assisted living cares, and will be relying on senior centers for meals. In Knox County, Ohio alone, 21% of the population is 60 or older and 14% of the population is between 45 to 65 years (2010 US Census Bureau). With the influx of residents, senior facilities will need to adopt a new dining regime. Incorporating local foods not only benefits the local farming economy, but also the facilities themselves. The residents would be happier and more engaged in their daily lives if the dining experience became more social and the food better quality. The ratings of the senior cares would rise. Children care for their parents and want them to enjoy the food that they are eating. I could not imagine what it would be like for my parents to eat tasteless food every day, and not have the ability to option out.

After examining state and governmental food regulations in senior facilities, I found nothing that prevents the embrace of better food and dining experiences. In fact, the food safety inspectors actually encourage the use of local foods. The incorporation of cooking lessons and even an open, homestyle kitchen improves the well-being of the residents.

In terms of price, it may be a bit more costly, but only slightly. At one Amish roadside stand, the Mohican Valley Produce, each lettuce head is \$2.00 whereas a conventional, non-local lettuce is usually around \$1.75. But with this one quarter increase, flavor is saved and savored. Local food tends to be more tasteful and thus added unnecessary ingredients which originally brought flavor to the meals can be deleted from the budget. In the long-run, this could save more than what the quarter's worth.

The only major concern holding back any management in the senior world is a lack of motivation. This can only be changed through a shift in management. Either having people who care in charge, or having more employees to watch after the possibility of abuse cases. It does require extra work to drive to the farmer's market, but in return the quality and rating of the facility will increase, the residents will be happier, and even the staff's work-life will become more enjoyable.

I return to the first time I met Paul at the Middle Ground coffee shop in Gambier, Ohio.

The words he said still ring in my ears. "It's the experience, not the food."

As of fall of 2011, Paul Higgins, Professor Howard Sacks, and I have discussed the possibilities of an internship in Knox County, Ohio. The student in this internship position would boost the motivation for local food within a cooperating senior facility. Perhaps an anxious Kenyon College intern that will work with the senior care during the summer and will help

purchase food at local destinations. Eventually this internship could spread to other facilities and could become yearlong. Not only does this student acquire new hands-on skills, but the facility receives an enthusiastic member to increase the happiness of the seniors. Young, passionate adults, just like fresh food, can bring happiness too.

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