

The Cookie Lady

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How is a sweet, sprinkle-topped, jelly-filled cookie, or a cannoli or a custard-filled pastry similar to a prescribed tablet, pill or capsule? Or, how are a pastry chef and his salesgirls in a bakery similar to a nursing professor and her student nurses in a health care facility? The idea that a delicious cookie and medication or a bakery and hospital can have similarities may seem far-fetched. You may wonder how a bakery filled with the sweet smells of fresh cookies and cakes being baked continuously, and a hospital filled with multiple patients with various diagnoses on each floor can be similar. Well, the connection between the two is me.

Since sophomore year of high school, I've worked at Court Pastry Shop in Brooklyn. This Italian family-owned bakery has been in my neighborhood for sixty-eight years. It is well-known for its pastries and cookies and the close-knit staff. During the holiday seasons, especially on Christmas, we have a line that goes out the door and around the block. Two years ago, the radio station 1010 WINS even came to interview us. A few customers said that they waited for an hour and a half because they couldn't go home and have Christmas dinner without Court Pastry's desserts. In the six years that I have worked at Court Pastry Shop, I have met so many people and even become friendly with the "regulars." They would tell me, "I've been coming here my whole life, I even remember the trolley that came in front." I've always been aware how well-known and popular Court Pastry was in the neighborhood through the stories from these customers, but I never would have thought that these delicious cookies and pastries would make me well-known too.

During my second semester, I was doing my clinical rotation at New York Methodist Hospital with Professor Greene. Throughout the semester, almost each week that I was assigned a patient or one of my classmates was assigned to a patient, it turned out to be a customer from the bakery. I was amazed that people recognized me from the bakery. In some way I felt it to be comforting to both myself and the patient. For example, one day I was assigned to a client who was diagnosed with dementia. When I went to my client's room to introduce myself, she was with her son who was trying to get her to eat. As she turned to look at me, she said excitedly, "You are the one who gives me my biscotti!"

"Mom, that is the nurse!" her son interrupted and then looked at me to apologize for his mom's outburst.

"No, she is correct, I do work at a bakery," I explained to her son.

My client's son looked puzzled. I told him that I was a student nurse and I was at Methodist doing my clinical rotation. I explained that I work at Court

Pastry Shop as well. He told me that he always goes to that bakery too and lives a few blocks from there. He said that he couldn't believe how his mother recognized me from the bakery. Throughout the day, on top of taking vital signs and doing patient teaching, I was also answering questions on how much per pound pignoli cookies were or if I knew how the pastries were made.

For myself, while it was funny how I was constantly being associated with the bakery, I also found it comforting because I felt as if I knew my clients. From my clients' point-of-view, I think that they found it comforting because they associated me with a bakery or being in a familiar place. At the end of that day, my client stated, "It is great to have you here, I loved talking to all you girls at the bakery." When her son left the room, she also stated, "Since we live so close, do you think you could take me back to the bakery with you today?"

Another memorable patient was the roommate of the patient that I was originally assigned to. As I was doing morning care on my patient, the other patient's family member walked in. We looked at each other surprised. She was actually one of the "regulars." "Wow, I didn't know you were a nurse. You are from Court Street, right?"

"Yes, I am also a student nurse," I explained. She then began to tell me that her father was the patient and he had a stroke. I could tell that she looked tired and she told me that she had been there almost all night. I told her if she wanted to she could go grab something to eat and I would stay with her dad, as well as my patient. She agreed and when she went to tell her father that she was going to step out she said, "Dad, you are not going to believe who is here to care for you. It is the lady that always makes you your box of cookies."

The patient squeezed my hand once as she told him. From that day, the patient's daughter always came to the bakery on the days I worked and gave me updates on her father. Unfortunately, a few months ago, she called the bakery to let me know that her father had passed. I ended up going to the wake and as soon as I walked in, she hugged me and introduced me to everyone as the "bakery nurse" that she spoke about.

During second semester, I couldn't believe how many people associated me with the bakery. I figured the only reason could have been was that I was at Methodist Hospital and it's located close to my neighborhood, but I was wrong. During third semester, as a community service project, four students and I were sent out to teach fire and burn safety to school-aged children in an after-school program. When I walked into the classroom, a student shouted, "Hey, that's not a nurse! She's my cookie lady." My classmates were amazed and we found it amusing. Since that day, some of my classmates call me "the cookie lady."

As I stated above, it may be difficult to compare a bakery and a hospital or a pastry chef and a nurse, but there are similarities that I was able to recognize in my role as a student nurse.

Florence Nightingale has said "Nursing is an art," and noted "if it is to be made an art, it requires an exclusive devotion as hard a preparation as for any painter's or sculptor's work; for what is having to do with a dead canvas or dead

marble, compared with having to do with the living body, the temple of God's spirit? It is one of the Fine Arts: I had almost said, the finest of the Fine Arts.”

Florence Nightingale compares the art of nursing to a painter's or sculptor's work; I compare the art of nursing with baking. In a bakery, the pastry chef uses his patience, careful measurements and love in each of the cookies and pastries he makes. As a student nurse, I've come to learn that nursing also requires patience, understanding, dedication, and devotion to each of my patients.

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Cite as: Esposito, K. (2009). The cookie lady. *City Tech Writer*, 4, 27-29.
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