

A Proper Cup of Tea

Volunteer Ombudsmen make the little things count.

The job description for JABA's Volunteer, Long-term Care Ombudsmen states that they "work with residents, their families and facility staff to ensure that residents' rights are being protected." Ombudsmen, however, provide much more and often in small surprising ways. The following story from Volunteer Ombudsman Eleanor Kroeger reveals one such special moment.

Eleanor's Story

On a visit to my nursing home, I found that the wife of a resident was having a particularly difficult day. Her husband had recently suffered yet another stroke and the doctor informed her that his condition had definitely declined. She sat in his darkened room and was crying. I sat with her awhile then asked her if there was something I could do for her. I asked her, "How about a cup of tea? That always helps me when I am upset. I like it with a slice of lemon, how about you?"

The lady, a British war bride of many years ago, looked at me and said, "You Yanks don't know how to make a proper cup of tea." I excused myself and headed toward the nursing supervisor's office. I told her that his lovely woman would really like a "proper cup of tea." I suggested that a plastic-foam cup and a tea bag were not what I had in mind. The nurse stood right up and said to follow her downstairs to the kitchen storage room. There she produced a lovely china tea service, which we quickly assembled complete with a charming cup, saucer, milk pitcher, sugar and a small plate of cookies, along with boiling (not merely hot) water.

I took the tray back to the room and asked the lady if she would be so kind as to teach me how to make a "proper cup of English tea." She took the service and proceeded to show me how to make and serve the tea. We drank two cups and had a nice chat. She mentioned where her home was in England and it so happened my husband and I had visited that town while we were on a tour of England. It gave her great pleasure and for just a few moments she was home again.

I thanked her for her kindness and left. As I walked away from her room I had the feeling that even if I could not help him, I had helped her that day.

To learn more about the Volunteer Ombudsman program contact Beth Hochstetler, Volunteer Ombudsman Specialist, at 817-5271 or email her at bhochstetler@jabacares.org.