

Women Who Say Yes to the Spark

A Story Series by Angie Thompson

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# Chef Marjorie: Sparking Flavor & Finding Her Fire

COVID changed the world — and for Chef Marjorie Hackler, it changed everything she thought she knew about herself.

“Our restaurant shut down,” she says. “Unemployment benefits were slow to come, and for the first time in my adult life, I wasn’t in a kitchen.”

For years, she had worked in one of Kansas City’s respected restaurant groups — a place known for craft-made, high-quality food and the kind of kitchens where precision and pressure shape every shift. But even before the shutdown, the burnout was creeping in.

“I was contributing to someone else’s dream, pounding the hours away,” she recalls. “We served the same menu every day, and I’d stopped creating. I was exhausted — physically, creatively, spiritually.”

When the pandemic forced everything into stillness, the absence of noise revealed a truth she had been pushing past for years. Alcohol softened

the edges. Repetition kept her moving. But life had drifted into survival, not joy.

Returning home to Bartlesville to visit her sister gave her something she didn’t know she needed — a landing pad. Space to breathe. Clarity. And eventually, a reason to begin again.

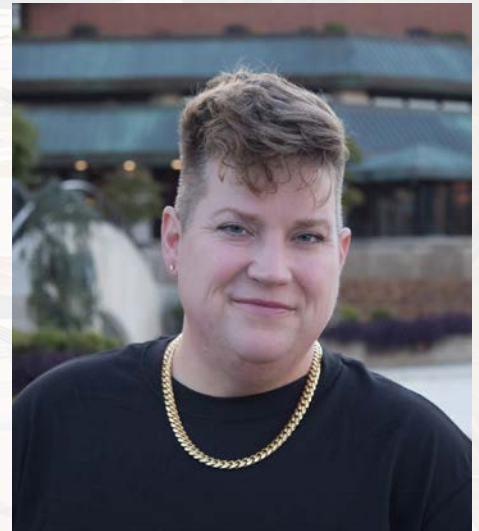
## Food as Comfort and Connection

Marjorie’s earliest memories live at her mother’s kitchen table — the center of warmth, ritual, and belonging.

Every evening, her mom set it with intention: plates arranged, food passed around, conversation flowing naturally.

“My mom believed dinner wasn’t just about eating. It was about caring for people,” she says. “She showed love through food.”

Some mornings, she woke to the comforting smell of donuts or her mother’s farmer’s breakfast — eggs, potatoes,



Chef Marjorie Hackler

sausage sizzling in the pan.

“That smell meant love,” she says. “It meant belonging.”

Today, that same flavor combination appears in the breakfast burritos at *The Eatery* — a quiet tribute to the roots that formed her.

Her mother’s table taught her early that hospitality is emotional work. It’s why she was instantly drawn to *Dinner at the Long Table*, a cookbook celebrating communal meals and conversation.

“That book captured everything I believe,” she says. “Hospitality is love made visible — it feeds the body and the soul.”

### Art on the Plate

Food soon became Marjorie’s creative language — a blend of comfort, curiosity, and art.

At twenty-two, before her years in Kansas City, a single dish opened her eyes to what food could be.

“My mom took me on a little date to Bodean’s,” she recalls. “I had this seared scallop dish with a fried beet-root ‘nest.’ It blew my mind.”

It wasn’t the luxury that struck her — it was the beauty, the precision, the feeling of tasting something completely new. That moment became a compass for her imagination.

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**“I want guests to feel what I felt growing up — that sense of comfort and belonging.”**

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“Now, when I cook, I’m always layering colors and textures,” she says. “Before a dish leaves the kitchen, I think about how it will look, smell, sound, and feel.”

She often reimagines childhood favorites through an elevated lens.

“We didn’t have fancy food growing up,” she says. “So I take something simple — like fried chicken — and rework it. Same roots, new life.”

### The Pivot Pulse™ — Coming Home

While visiting Bartlesville, her sister mentioned her to Annie Saltsman, owner of *The Eatery by Three Kids & A Cake*. Annie invited her to create a few dishes — a small assignment that lit something inside her.

“Just putting that menu together flipped a switch,” Marjorie says. “I felt alive again.”

They began with almost nothing: one panini press, one induction burner, a handful of loyal customers. But it was creative — and it was theirs.

“We literally built a kitchen from scratch,” she says with a smile.

As months passed, *The Eatery* expanded — a new kitchen, an evolving menu, partnerships with bakers and cookie artists, and the boldness to take on large-scale catering. Marjorie’s private dinners became her hallmark: beautifully plated, deeply intentional, rooted in story and memory.

Six years later, the café is a lively, welcoming space filled with familiar faces and fresh ideas.

“Annie is a force,” Marjorie says. “She believed in me before I believed in myself.”

## BEHIND THE SCENES

**Where the magic happens.**

The long table is where Marjorie’s private dinners come to life — evenings filled with warmth and the slow unfolding of a meal meant to be savored. It’s more than a dining space; it’s where conversation gathers, flavors linger, and guests experience the heart of her hospitality.



**A canvas made of flavor.**

Every plate begins long before it reaches the table — imagined in Marjorie’s mind, layered with color, texture, and intention. Here, she’s captured in her element: focused, creative, and fully alive in the quiet artistry of bringing a dish to life.

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## Private Dinners and the Joy of Creation

Of everything she does, the private dinners remain her favorite part of the craft.

“Every dinner is a new canvas,” she says. “I spend days imagining how each course will look and taste together.”

But the magic doesn’t end in the kitchen.

“My favorite moment is walking the dish out to the table,” she says. “I watch their faces when they take that first bite. If their eyes light up — that’s everything.”

## Recovery, Creativity, and Belonging

In December 2025, Marjorie celebrated two years of sobriety — a milestone she describes as both steady and sacred.

“Sobriety gave me back my

# “Hospitality is love made visible — it feeds the body and the soul.”

creativity,” she says. “I can see flavors and ideas again. I have patience — with myself and others.”

Her recovery mirrors her food: layered, intentional, and rooted in gratitude.

Today, *The Eatery* feels more like a community table — home to bakers, cookie decorators, and young apprentices who bring their heart to the work.

“We’ve all come here from different stories,” she says. “But we share the same purpose — to make people feel cared for.”

When asked what she hopes people feel when they taste her food, she doesn’t hesitate:

“That it was made with care — that nothing was an afterthought. Even the last cherry tomato gets a flake of Maldon salt.”

And if her life were a recipe card?

“Butter. Salt. And community — always community.”



Read the full web story

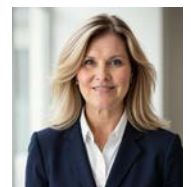
### About Chef Marjorie Hackler

Chef Marjorie Hackler leads the kitchen at *The Eatery by Three Kids & A Cake* in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. She began her culinary journey in Oklahoma City and later sharpened her skills in Kansas City’s fast-paced restaurant world, building the creativity and grit that define her work today. Now back home, she creates dishes that reflect comfort, connection, and the joy of feeding a community she loves. Marjorie shares her life with her partner, Lisa, and their son, Ian — her greatest source of support and inspiration.

### About the Writer and Permissions

I’m Angie Thompson—a fundraising strategist, storyteller, and creative consultant who believes words and images can truly spark transformation. I partner with nonprofits, organizations, and purpose-driven individuals to move beyond generic messaging and into communication that inspires trust, generosity, and meaningful action.

My work as a writer, composer, and brand consultant has earned recognition in film, television, philanthropy, and community development. Through Angie Thompson Consulting LLC and my Pivot Pulse™ storytelling approach, I help people and organizations elevate their message, strengthen their impact, and share stories that build connection and change lives.



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### Disclaimer

The narrative presented in this story is based on personal interviews and reflections of Marjorie Hackler. The views and memories shared are her own and are included with permission. This feature is part of the *Women Who Say Yes to the Spark* series and is intended to celebrate the subject’s influence and leadership.

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