
Picking Corn

My dad wanted it fresh. Very fresh.

By Harvey Silverman



One of the things I miss most about my dad is his wonderful and slightly quirky sense of humor. I often think of my dad when I eat sweet corn.

You see, Dad enjoyed sweet corn, but he insisted it be fresh. Given the opportunity, he would happily explain that as soon as the corn was picked the sugar in the kernels began to be converted to starch and that this conversion continued until the corn was cooked and the enzyme responsible for the conversion deactivated. (This is less true of many varieties today.)

When I was a boy, we had a small vegetable garden in the backyard. We grew all the usual things—radishes, cucumbers, tomatoes, and the like. We also grew sweet corn.

We normally picked our vegetables and gave them to my mom to prepare for dinner—but not with sweet corn. When it was time to get some sweet corn, my dad would first place a large pot of water on the stove and heat it to boiling. Then he and I would go out to the garden, pick and peel the corn, and head straight back into the kitchen to place it in the boiling water so that it was

cooked as fresh as possible.

After I grew up, my folks moved to a new home where they had no garden. My dad still enjoyed sweet corn, so he bought it at a local farm stand where it would be fresher than in the grocery store.

One afternoon on the way home from work, he stopped at the local farm stand and asked for fresh sweet corn.

*“Picked this morning?”
Dad said.
“Have anything fresher?”*

"I have some right here. It was just picked this morning," said the farmer.

"This morning?" Dad said. "Have anything fresher?"

"Well, I have some here that I haven't put out yet. You can



have some of that. It was just picked an hour ago."

"An hour ago? Don't you have anything fresher?"

By then the farmer was becoming just a bit annoyed with my dad. He took him out into the field just behind his farm stand. He picked some corn, handed it to my dad and said, "Okay, is this fresh enough for you?"

My dad looked at him, paused, and said, "I don't know. You're picking kind of slow." ❖