My grandmother Tootsie’s recipe for corn on the cob

Ingredients:

Several ears of corn in a sack
A large, empty bowl (for the shucked ears)
A small soup pot
An old country house with clapboard siding and gas stove
Porch steps or an outside stoop
Two little girls about six or seven (as helpers)

Directions:

Settle onto the back porch steps with the bag of corn ears and large bowl placed nearby on the step beside or just below you. Have the girls sit along the edge of the porch with their skinny legs dangling over. Take an ear firmly in one hand, gnarled and calloused from garden work and sewing, then grab ahold of the tassel at the top. Pull firmly downward to one side, using the tassel to rip through and remove the outer green husk. Let the husk and tassel fall into a pile on the yard beside the porch steps, tucked behind the house next to the chicken coop and a tall, old maple tree. Pull any remaining tassel down on the opposite side to remove that side of the husk. Use your hands to strip away the remainder of the husk and let your eyes wander over the green Kentucky hills, plowed and planted generations before and since the Civil War. Pick away any tassel strings left on the ear, unhurried in the early summer evening. Drop the shucked ear in the bowl and listen to its dull thump echo into the quiet song of humming bugs. Repeat as necessary with each ear of corn (and show your helpers along when you’ve mastered it.) After you’ve finished husking all the corn ears, stand and use both hands to brush off your polyester pants and cotton shirt. Have the girls scatter the corn husks back behind the fence in the pasture. Pick up the bowl of corn and carry it into the small kitchen, shuffling across the uneven linoleum floor. Fill a small soup pot with water and set it to boil on a gas stove top, whose old metal features are dotted with rust spots. While the water is cooking, place the bowl of corn in the deep basin of the kitchen sink and hear the floor creak beneath your feet as you move around the tiny space, then thunk under the pounding of little girls’ feet as they come running in through the screen door. Wash the ears and leave them in the bowl in the sink. Tell the girls to set out plates at the table. When the water is a boiling, add the corn ears and let cook until tender. Serve with homemade canned pickles, slices of tomato with salt and white onion, pinto beans and cornbread.

As I sit shucking corn for dinner on my own front porch steps, in a slightly more residential area rather than a farm, I see two little girls ride by on their bikes and I remember watching my grandmother’s hands peel those ears of corn, and I smile.