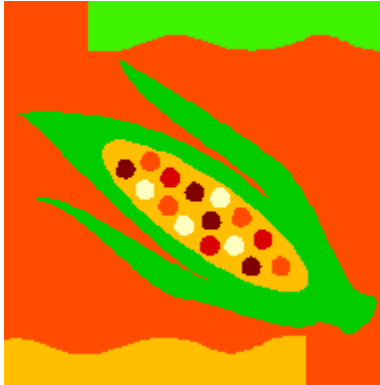


Signs



By Mort Laitner

I'm sitting on a shellacked wooden bench, typographically pecking away on my butter laden corn-on-the-cob. My wannabe-nutritionist spouse has just mentioned, for the third time, "that corn is soaked in butter!" I give her my award-winning smile of melted-butter-on-fresh-corn-bliss, and I nod in agreement. Her latest comment about the butter made me realize that it was missing a little something. Then I had an epiphany -- to get to corn quintessence; I must sprinkle three shakes of salt for good measure. As some of the salt bounces off and some sinks into the butter, I only faintly hear my wife warning "You don't need to add salt to that corn!" As I closed in on the cob, my mouth watered in greedy anticipation. The bite was everything I had hoped for... and more! Pure bliss. I was instantly transformed to another, younger, more carefree time, a time full of Indian summers.

When I took my second bite, I thought about Kafka who allegedly chewed his food thirty times before swallowing. (Try it you'll surprise your taste buds). He believed it aided his digestion. After ten chews, the kernels liquefy and crawl down my throat. I wash them down with a glass of ice cold water in which a slice of lemon floats. (The lemon aids my digestion) I've promised my doctor I would stop drinking soda to lose weight.

Taking my eyes off my plate, I scan Shorty's décor – lots of old stuff stuck to the walls, like the Jack Daniel's "White Rabbit Saloon" sign (subliminal message to encourage beer drinking) and a Marilyn Monroe tray advertising shampoo. Then a baked enamel sign catches my eye.

No spitting.
Fines \$5 to \$100
By Order of the Health Department

This sign a reproduction of an early 1900's railway station posting for the prevention of consumption (TB). The scientists of that day thought that saliva on the ground some how entered the body causing the dreaded disease.

I proudly announce to the wife, "That sign seems to be working no one is spitting on the floor. The health department in action."

She glares at me and responds, "From what planet did you get you sense of humor?"

My waitress cradles my plate of baby back ribs and a sweet potato wrapped in tin foil. I remove the foil slicing the potato in half and inserting a glob of butter. I watch the butter convert into steam and float into the air. I smell the rich aroma rising from the ribs. I hear, "You know those ribs will clog your arteries!"

While wrapping my lips onto the meaty bones, I mumble, "Tell me something I don't know."

I take a second look at the spitting sign. I think about how the Department markets our health message in restaurants. There is no enamel sign which reads:

Cut your salt intake.
Eat less butter.
Eliminate soft drinks.
Recommended by your Health Department.
We care about you.

Standing in line to pay the cashier, I remember Simon and Garfunkel's lyrics from the *Sounds of Silence*.

"The message of the prophets is written on the subway walls."

I visualize the health message signs hanging on restaurant walls through out the state.

Flipping a nickel into tin bucket, I retrieve a mini-chocolate mint from the glass jar and hear, "You don't need dessert after that meal!"

As the mint melts in my mouth I say to myself, "Sweet idea!" I wonder if I will ever see such signs on eatery walls and whether the message will ever sink in.