

## Miller Family's Pickles

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Folklore semester project

Semester one

When deciding what to do my semester project over, I originally thought that interviewing my best friend on his knowledge of the University of Kentucky basketball would be a good topic, but unfortunately he did not have as much knowledge as he thought he did. So I thought long and hard on what topic would interest my professor and it finally came to me! My family and our history of pickle making. Pickling has been in my family for generations, name it and we've pickled it. But we're mainly known for our pickles that are home grown in my grandmothers' garden. The process is long and difficult but worth it. Two years ago a jar of our pickles went for 60 dollars at a family reunion auction. They are also very popular in my hometown, where all of my family still resides, and are known as "Miller Pickles". Each member of my family has a different role in the pickle making process; my Uncle Joey and Uncle Mark help my grandpa plant the cucumber seeds in the garden, then after 45-60 days the cucumbers are ready to be picked, which is also my Uncles' jobs. From there, my father "jars" them, which is a tedious process due to the fact that you must go through trial and error to see which cucumbers will fit and try to put as many in the jar as possible. You must put a good mixture of little cucumbers and big cucumbers in the jar because different sizes have different tastes. Also, the cucumbers shrink so if you don't put enough in the jar, it will look like there are not many in there. After

they are all jarred, my grandmother puts the perfect amount of mixture of garlic, dill, water, alum, salt and vinegar in each jar while boiling the lids of the jars to make them seal. It is then the grandchildren's' jobs to get the secret ingredient: go outside and pick one grape leaf off the tree for each jar. My grandmother says they are needed for the pickles to make them crunchy. Depending on who she's giving the jar to, she might add a jalapeno to make them spicy. After all the ingredients go into the jar along with the cucumbers, she places the boiling hot lids onto the jar and stores them for 21 days then distributed to family and friends. Whatever is left is sold in the local farmers market. We are still unsure as to who introduced the pickle making process into my family but nevertheless, we are very grateful for them doing so. For my project I interviewed the people that directly taught me the ways of pickling, my Grandma, Uncle Joey, Uncle Mark and my dad.

Miller Family's Pickles recipe:

3 cups water

1 cup 10% vinegar

1 teaspoon alum

½ cup pickling salt

2 red peppers (optional)

2 cloves garlic

½ cup dill

1 grape leaf

boil everything and jar cucumbers then pour mixture in jars.

Interview 1: Betty Miller (grandmother)

-Over the phone-

Emily- Hi Nanny! How are you?

Betty-Hi Minnie! Everything's well, how are you?

Emily-I'm good, alright so I have a few questions for you. I'm doing my semester project in Folklore and I wanted to do it on our families amazing pickles! But just be aware that whatever you say, I must type down word for word, so if you cuss my professor and his grad student will read it.

Betty-\*laughs\* okay let's hear it

Emily- alright so do you know who started the tradition of pickle making in our family?

Betty- pa's family did, pa's mama

Emily- do you remember how you learned to make the pickles?

Betty- how I learned it?

Emily- yes

Betty- yes, I was married into the Miller family and all the kids like all the Miller families recipe so I thought okay, well now I have to learn how because they'd always say "why can't you make them like Aunt Mary-Ann or Aunt Doris" so I watched them and I learned to make them

Emily- ok, who do you usually make the pickles with?

Betty- by myself! Well, uncle joey and mark plant them and harvests them, and I make the German dill pickles

Emily- what's done with the pickles once you make them?

Betty- you eat them!

Emily- \*laughs\* who else gets them?

Betty- well we just store them and give them to mostly family and sell them at the auction.

Emily- why did we start making pickles in the family?

Betty- I had to start making them in my immediate family because all the kids liked them so well so I thought to keep up with the tradition id have to make them myself

Emily- where do the cucumbers come from?

Betty- the cucumbers are from the garden, Uncle Joey gets the soil all ready and I get the point setter cucumbers, and they got to be the point setter because they're just perfect for the jars. I buy them in the packages and we put them in the ground

Emily- do different people do different jobs in the pickling process?

Betty- some get the jars ready, some make the brine to put over the pickles. It's a lot faster if there is more than one because it's a long process, you know they have to be washed real good first and then packed in the jars and pour the brine over it so if I have help it surely helps me out

Emily- so how long from after closing the jars are they ready?

Betty- 21 days

Emily- 21 days, ok. Well thank you Nanny that's all I got! Anything else you'd like to add?

Betty-just that everyone should know how to make German pickles

Emily-German pickles? Is that where they come home?

Betty- yes Min! It's your pa's family recipe and Emuli Miller, your pa's dad, moved here from Germany.

Emily- alright thank you for your time Nanny! Love you

Interview 2- James Miller (father)

-In person-

Emily-ok, this interview is going to be about the pickle making process in our family and just how it's changed from generation to generation and who started it and how it happened and so on, ok?

James-ok

Emily- so who started the tradition of pickle making?

James- the pickle making started with my Aunt Doris, my dad's sister. It was passed down to nanny from her

Emily- why did Aunt Doris start it?

James- they're from a farming family and you had to make your own stuff so they grew their own cucumbers and everything and they would last all year so she would make them in the summer when the cucumbers were ready and they'd last all year

Emily- do you remember when she started making them?

James- no but way before my time, she's quite a bit older. I'd say she probably started in the 1940's

Emily- when did she pass the recipe down to Nanny though?

James- I'd say probably around the early 60's

Emily- where did YOU learn to make pickles? Like when?

James- when I was a teenager or maybe even before then, like 10 or 11. Nanny needed a lot of help making them because everyone liked them so well. So we (my dad and his two brothers) helped plant the cucumbers, water them, pick em and the day that it was time to make the pickles, we'd go out and pick em, wash the jars, and help her with the pickle making process. She said we had to help or we got no pickles

Emily- how did you learn how to make them?

James- just from watching Nanny and eventually she just gave me the recipe

Emily- who do you usually make the pickles with?

James- mostly with her, but the last few years on trying to make my own, I've been doing it by myself. A lot of trial and error

Emily-oh yeah, a lot of error \*laughs\*

James- \*laughs\* hey! I've been working on it

Emily- what is usually done with the pickles?

James- as far as how their made or where do they go?

Emily- where do they go

James- they are distributed throughout the entire family, she makes sure her kids and siblings get some first, and then a lot of times she'll take them to the family reunion and one time sold a single jar for 60 dollars

Emily- alright well that completes our interview, thank you Mr. Miller for your time

James- anytime sweetie

Interview 3- Joey Miller (uncle)

-Over the phone-

Emily- hey uncle joey! Ok so I'm doing a project in my folklore class and I need to interview you on the process of pickling in our family

Joey- got any money?

Emily- no ha-ha this is a free interview

Joey- nah I don't do free interviews, I'm a very important person

Emily- ha-ha ok I'll give you the check later but as for now I have a few questions for you. Are you ready to start?

Joey- let me have 'em

Emily- what is your job in the process of making the pickles?

Joey- I eat them

Emily- \*laughs\* ok what else?

Joey- uh I'm in charge of growing the cucumbers to make the pickles

Emily- so you grow them? Is that it? Do you pick them?

Joey- yeah I help sometimes

Emily- have you ever used pickles for bartering?

Joey- uh maybe once or twice but you don't need to know about that

Emily- do you remember where you learned to do your job in the pickle making process?

Joey- Texas A&M \*laughs\* no I'm just joking, I learned from you grandma

Emily- do you know what is usually done with the pickles once you guys have completed making them?

Joey- you eat them!

Emily- \*laughs\* everyone keeps saying that! How long are the pickles good for?

Joey- I'd say about two or three years



Emily- alright that's the end of the interview, thank you uncle joey

Joey- I'll be waiting for that check!

Interview 4- Mark Miller (uncle)

-Over the phone-

Emily- hey uncle mark! I'm doing a project in my Folklore class and I need your help.

Mark- anything for you, Minnie

Emily- I need you to give me all your knowledge on how we make our pickles. I've already asked Dad, Nanny and Uncle Joey so I'm hoping to squeeze out any additional information from you. Also, I'm recording you and in my project I have to type down exactly what you say, so if you cuss my professor will read it! Just be aware

Mark- I'll be on my best behavior, let's hear these questions

Emily- ok, um so what is your job in the pickle making process?

Mark- well when I was little I used to help Nanny out my planting the cucumbers and picking them, but now that I have my own garden I do everything myself, though they have better pickles than me so sometimes I go over and steal some of their pickles but don't tell your grandma that

Emily- \*laughs\* I won't, your secret is safe with me.

Mark- I raise my own dill, and my own garlic

Emily- do you know who started pickle making?

Mark- the earliest I know of is Aunt Gladys, though she just passed this April. But she gave the recipe to Nanny because we all loved her pickles so much

Emily- have you ever eaten so many pickles you've gotten sick?

Mark- \*laughs\* what kind of question is that?! Actually yes I have because the amount of acid in them, they could really tear up your stomach if you eat too many.

Emily- \*laughs\* I have to make questions to fit the person I'm interviewing! Have you ever made a meal of just pickles?

Mark- plenty of times! Back in college when I was too broke to buy food, I knew I always had jars of pickles that Nanny made for me and your dad. They always tasted better when I had the munchies.

Emily- uncle mark! Oh my gosh. How did you learn how to make pickles?

Mark- from making them with Nanny

Emily- do you know why we started making pickles in our family?

Mark- I don't know, I guess it's a German thing

Emily- do different people have different jobs for pickling?

Mark-yeah, it's not fun to do by yourself. It's fun to have someone help you stuff them because once you pick them you have to go through the sizes because there are big cucumbers and little cucumbers and you put the big ones in the jar first and cram the little ones in between that so

you can get as many in the jar as you can, it's kind of a challenge so if someone is good at it then it's usually their job like me and your dad are usually the ones to do it. Two people can do it easily but any more than that and you start getting in peoples way.

Emily- mm, how long is it from the day you seal the pickles until their ready to open?

Mark- I usually wait a month but most of the family only waits 21 days.

Emily- ok that completes our interview, anything else you'd like to add?

Mark- Miller pickles are the best!

Emily- I'd believe it.