

A LOVE LETTER

The first time I stumbled into Sneaky Dee's in the mid-90s, it was after a night of sucking every last drop of Budweiser from every last bottle at the Dance Cave and dancing hard enough to somehow only be half drunk. Everything about the place spoke to teen me—the booths, not just marked with excessive graffiti, but etched with it, a pocket knife's punk rock response to even the permanence of a pocket Sharpie. The washrooms were a disaster and to be used only if absolutely necessary and the décor can best be described as kids-paint-every-available-surface-with-the-same-kind-of-imagery-tattooed-on-17-year-olds-in-the-nineties.

It's the type of place that you either grew up in or didn't, that you either get or don't, and it's an excellent litmus test for who the cool 40 year olds of Toronto are, not that you can be 40 and cool.

The smell hits you right away, and it is still the exact same smell, a potent blend of fajita sizzle, the intoxicating scent of deep, golden-fried chicken skin so specific to wings, and the distinctive tang of their house nacho sauce. As teens, naturally we had spent almost all our money on beer but managed to pool our funds and had just enough for a platter of plain nachos (the austere purity of tomato, cheese and chips), which cost something like \$9, that the three of us could share. What simple perfection! A single layer of chips on a huge platter with just the right ratio of cheese to sauce and no naked chips, cooked to a paragon of melty and crispy.

(In a piled situation, I prefer some chips to be free of toppings and bring the crunch necessary for a complete nacho experience, but piled was out of our budget.) I was the one using my thumbnail to scrape up errant bits of Monterey Jack

A HOT MESS OF BEEF

eventually, after getting a job... I could go to work

JA + VV



the smell hits you right away and its still the exact same smell



the dance cave

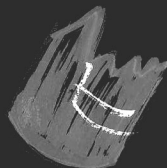
PILE

TO GOOFY KIDZ



ALUNK

ROCK RESPONSE



to SNEAKY DEE'S

that had splashed onto the metal platter and cooked to a texture that was soft and yielding in the middle and edged with lacy crispness, which gave me a snack idea that has settled into permanence, to just skip the vehicle for cheese and fry it up in a non-stick pan if I ever found myself in the kind of mood that demanded cheese, and cheese alone.

Eventually, after getting a job, I didn't have to scrimp and save when dining at the Sneaky Disease (as we all called it). I could go lux. I tried the King's Crown, a hot mess of beef, beans and all the usual toppings, but always found it too soggy, and kept returning to plain nachos, until one day, with a vegetarian, we ordered the veggie nachos to share. And I fell in love. I have indulged in veggie nachos at Sneaky Dee's many, many times. I have had them at their worst (over- or under-baked, too little cheese or too much sauce) and I have had them at their best, ratios and baking times in perfect balance. They come topped with crisp, cold iceberg lettuce and a generous gloop of sour cream. The biggest complaint I hear is about the lettuce. People are very divided on whether it belongs on a hot, gooey pile of nachos. It does. It absolutely does. The perfect bite is a chip full with toppings and cheese, underpinned with a partly naked chip for support and texture, dipped into sour cream, topped with chopped jalapeños (ALWAYS REMEMBER TO GET THEM ON THE SIDE, TRUST ME) and a tangle of lettuce for a delightful temperature contrast.

I still get cravings every so often and will go in (mostly by myself, but sometimes with pals) and put back most of an order, and it always makes me feel very, very good.

ERRANT BITS OF MONTEREY JACK THAT HAD SPOLOOSHED ONTO THE METAL PLATTER

NAKED CHIPS

IT'S STILL A FANTASTIC

PARAGON OF MELTY & CRISPY

1 1/2 DRUNK