



# THE PLAIN DEALER

**BACK BURNER**

## **The Nacho Queen**

Sunday, October 30, 2005

**Cinda Williams Chima**

It must have been a moment of hoo-rah madness that caused me to volunteer to staff the concession stand at a high school sporting event.

It was a good cause. My son is in the marching band, and the new uniforms had to be paid for somehow. The Instrumental Music Boosters are heavily into merchandising, but by far the largest fund-raiser is the concession stand.

Two days before the game, Barb, the concession chairwoman, called. She was friendly and enthusiastic, and I felt better -- until she said, "Would you mind making nachos?"

Nachos! That sounded like a key position. Something that could make or break concession-stand profits. Nachos actually required preparation as well as assembly. I envisioned chopped onion and tomato, black olives and peppers, chili and sour cream. I'm a good cook, but I'm not used to cooking under pressure in front of a crowd.

"Will someone show me what to do?" I asked tremulously.

"Sure!" Barb replied. "There'll be another woman working with you. Her name is Surekha."

Surekha! I knew Surekha. We had carpooled to tennis and marching band camp. She's a capable person. Everything would be all right with Surekha there.

Surekha called the day of the game. "I was so happy when I heard you'd be there!" she exclaimed. "Barb promised she would put me with a very experienced person."

Uh oh.

The night of the game, Barb shepherded us to the less busy concession stand and introduced us to Lois, the mom in charge. The nacho prep area consisted of a cheese dispenser, bags of chips and little plastic trays to put them in. There were no black olives, no chopped onion or tomato. Not a vegetable in sight.

OK ... I surely could handle this.

Surekha and I began to load the plastic trays with taco chips, preparing for our first customers.

Lois stopped by with a foam cup of sliced jalapenos. "Don't work too far ahead," she advised. "And wait until you get an order to add the cheese."

Tricks of the trade. Just then the counterwoman turned and called, "Nachos!"

Surekha and I were both so anxious to do well that we fought over the cheese machine. "Plain or peppers?" I shouted.

"Assume it's plain unless we say peppers," the counterwoman replied patiently.

In addition to making nachos, we were expected to dish up pizza and put the slices under the hot lights. We also had to field a stream of complaints from fans who had lost their money in the soft-drink machine just outside the stand.

"It's empty," I explained, for the 10th time, pointing to the large cardboard sign taped to the front. The sign read "Empty."

The most arduous task was wringing out the last of the cheese. We had to yank the bag from the nacho machine and wield it like a pastry bag, squirting cheese into the wells with great flatulent noises.

Surekha and I survived the rush of halftime, the influx of band members during the third quarter, the transition to hot chocolate when nacho sales plummeted during a sudden downpour. And, finally, our shift over, we sauntered away from the concession stand, clutching our free bottles of orange soda, our reward for a job well done.

I'd mastered nachos -- jalapeno and plain. I thought perhaps it was time to move up to hoagies. I hope you'll buy nachos and hoagies from your band boosters, but when those aren't available, try these dressed-up versions at home.

Cinda Williams Chima believes that the percussion section is the heartbeat of a marching band. She may be reached through [magmail@plaind.com](mailto:magmail@plaind.com).

#### Fajita Nachos

This dish goes beyond regular nachos -- it's a meal.

#### Marinade

1/2 cup fresh or bottled lime juice

1 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro

1 tsp. freshly ground pepper

2 Tbsps. soy sauce

#### Steak

1 lb. lean steak, such as skirt or flank, cut into 1/2-inch strips

#### Nachos

4 cups baked (low-fat) tortilla chips (Tostitos brand preferred)

4 cups fat-free or 3 1-lb. cans Old El Paso refried beans

12 oz. (3 cups) shredded Monterey Jack cheese

1 cup low-fat sour cream

1 cup med. salsa (Pace chipotle salsa preferred; See Note)

1/2 cup mild red or sweet onion, thinly sliced

1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro

1. Combine marinade ingredients in resealable plastic bag. Add steak strips and refrigerate for 4 to 6 hours. Drain and discard marinade.
2. Grill steak strips over high heat 2 to 3 minutes, or saute quickly in nonstick skillet until cooked through.
3. Spread tortilla chips on large baking sheet. Spoon beans on chips. Top with grilled steak and cheese. Bake in 425-degree oven for 3 to 5 minutes, or until cheese melts. Add sour cream, salsa, onion and cilantro. Serve immediately.

Yield: 4 entree servings, 10 as an appetizer.

Note: Giant Eagle carries Pace products, although not all stores have the chipotle flavor.

#### Toasted Club Sub

I admit it: I like my subs toasted. Here's a gourmet version that's easy, especially if you buy pre-cooked bacon.

1/2 cup light mayonnaise (Hellmann's Light preferred)

2 Tbsps. chopped fresh basil

12 slices smoked turkey breast

8 slices Swiss cheese

8 oz. thick-cut bacon, cooked and drained

8 slices tomato

4 sm. French submarine rolls, split

1. Combine mayonnaise and basil. Set aside.

2. Divide turkey, cheese, bacon and tomato among the four sandwich bottoms. Spread other halves of loaves with mayo mixture and place on top, mayo side down.

3. Place sandwiches in preheated 350-degree oven until bread is toasted and cheese melts. Serve immediately.

Yield: 4 servings.

© 2005 The Plain Dealer

© 2005 cleveland.com All Rights Reserved.