

## The Menu

(\*Prices adjusted for inflation)

Traditional Grilled Cheese (\$7.89) — My favorite thing on the menu. Many a break I spent engorging myself with its fresh-off-the-truck melted American cheese. Jay and Carl would often prank me by putting the bread on backwards.

Toasted Chicken Sandwich (\$9.19) — While ordering this, one customer asked me if the black pepper focaccia bread the sandwich came on contained black pepper. I told him yes, and he went on his way, pumping his fist as if he just won the lottery. I hope that guy enjoyed his sandwich.

Smoked Turkey + Avocado BLT (\$12.39) — Contrary to its name, our specific location almost never had the avocado for this, much to the ire of many customers. And to be fair, I don't completely blame them. I mean, it was one of the two most expensive sandwiches on the menu. Constantly serving it at such a high price while not having one of its namesake ingredients present 95% of the time was always going to ruin someone's day. When I relayed this usual news to one such man, he took a Sharpie out of his coat pocket and handed it to me. I asked him why he gave me this, and he said "So that you can cross out the '& Avocado' from its spot on

your menu.” I don’t know if he genuinely expected me to do that, but he eventually settled for the tomato soup.

Tuna Salad Sandwich (\$9.79) — My dad’s sandwich of choice back when he visited the place. He’d always intensely watch the food line workers to make sure they made it just the way he liked it: tuna salad on the right side, the two slices of the aforementioned black pepper focaccia bread on the other side, and the rest of the ingredients (the lettuce, onions, and tomato) arranged on the top of the plate. Meanwhile, I’d to profusely apologize to all my coworkers for him holding up the line.

Veggie Lover’s Sandwich (\$7.49) — Cheap and easy to make compared to most other sandwiches on the menu, the line workers always breathed a sigh of relief when this popped up on the order screen. Although this was NOT the case on the day when a delivery order came through for eight of them under the name “D. Siminski”. Being a cashier, I wasn’t there at the exact moment the order popped up on their screen, but I remember the audible “what the *FUCK?!?*”, that came through my headset just as the mom who’s order I was currently taking asked her two-year-old whether he wanted milk or apple juice with his kid’s meal. After putting out *that* fire, I was told to let any incoming customers at the register know

of our sudden 30 minute wait for any food they ordered. With my line now entirely cleared, the kitchen was free to get Siminski's order together without interruption. When it was finally finished, we sent out our resident delivery driver, Mason, to get the many sandwiches out to him.

As we all waited for Mason to return, we all spent the quiet moments in between completing orders to speculate on what this Siminski character was like. What kind of man or woman needed so many veggie sandwiches on such short notice on a Thursday evening? Were they a person of power? Were veggie sandwiches the way to go to impress important houseguests nowadays? Or were they just the parent of some group of vegetarian teenagers? The more absurd suggestions we threw out, the more we had turned this completely random customer into a kind of myth. Siminski became the random stranger who'd give you CPR in the event you suffered cardiac arrest in a public area. The person who'd charge into a burning building to save your trapped baby. The person who'd lift up the car you were trapped under in the aftermath of an accident, and all with their bare hands. Then, they'd go back to their family after a hard day's work, kiss their significant other, tuck their children into bed, and sit down to enjoy their Veggie Lover's sandwich, their duties for the day accomplished. Such was the life of our fictionalized D. Siminski.

As Mason's Toyota pulled back into the parking lot, its delivery sign bearing our logo on top, we all dropped everything to meet him at the door. We *needed* to know the identity of our revered D. Siminski. Who were they? What did they look like? What kind of house did they live in? We needed so many answers right then and there. We needed *some* kind of detail about them, and we needed it damn quick. Any kind of glimpse into the life of a person who orders eight veggie sandwiches during rush hour. Mason, unfortunately, had to hit us with an ice cold bucket of reality by revealing to us that Siminski's door was locked and no one answered the door when he knocked.

Chicken & Avocado Panini (\$10.19) — Refer back to the Smoked Turkey + Avocado BLT listing

Chicken Salad Sandwich (\$9.59) — One time when I was taking out the trash, I found a whole family of opossums chewing on one of these in the bag. It was kinda cute once I got past the smell. Had to spend the next ten minutes luring them all out of the bag with slices of bread.

Tomato Soup (\$8.39) — One day, we ran out of our signature croutons that we typically put in this, and one of our regulars (a senior who's name was Larry, I

think?) who *always* demanded extra croutons, came in just before closing time.

Desperately wanting to avoid his wrath right at the end of all our shifts, we tore up some stale bread pieces to try and pass off as croutons. Of course this didn't work, and we got a stern talking to from him, as we always did when even the slightest thing was wrong with soup of all things. Hell, I got chewed out, and I didn't even make it for him. He swore he'd never eat at the place again, and stormed out. We closed down as usual. About a month later, we find out from Larry's wife coming in that he died a few days after the whole incident. Looking back on that day now, I just feel like shit. We conned one of our regulars during his last days on Earth. And I can't even remember his name.

Chicken Noodle Soup (\$8.29) — The favorite of one of our most valued customers, a little girl named Alison, who'd always stop by the restaurant with her mom and dad after one of her soccer games. Soup in hand (along with an apple juice that we'd save especially for her), she'd always sit in the back booth with her parents and start drawing in her coloring books. Serving her was always a welcome change of pace from the kids who either couldn't make up their minds about what they wanted or just asked for random things we didn't have. I swear, if I had to tell one more mom's little bundle of joy that we don't serve chicken nuggets, I was going to snap.

Clam Chowder (\$9.59) — I still remember the one time we took *this* off the menu.

Lord, did we ever anger some senior citizens. Ever since the next menu rotation after it was removed started, we received multiple complaints, pained gasps, and moments of sadness from blindsided seniors who were unaware of their favorite menu item being suddenly wiped from existence:

“But...you’ve ALWAYS had the clam chowder!”

“What the hell do you mean ‘you don’t sell it anymore?’”

“How?! You were just selling it last week!”

“If you don’t have the clam chowder, you don’t have ME as a customer!”

These reactions always confused me, because I hardly EVER had people ask for it in my working career. I’d always heard it was a popular item, hence why it was kept around for so long, but I guess the people who ordered it just never came during my shift. They *certainly* came when it was removed. So day after day of these complaints arriving en masse, the clam chowder was restored to the menu for the next rotation. And like always, I barely got any orders for it. To this day, I still question the claims of clam chowder popularity.

Cream of Mushroom Soup (\$8.79) — Not satisfied with just putting my grilled cheese’s bread on backwards, Jay and Carl took their pranks one step further when

I decided to get the cream of mushroom soup for the first time on one of my off days. Ordering delivery rather than going to the restaurant itself to pick it up proved to be a fatal error, as when I opened my delivery bag, I found only a can of Campbell's Cream of Mushroom soup, along with a note on the receipt reading “Can opener not included!”. I later found out that Carl got fired that same day, for reasons I never fully figured out. I *really* hope that prank had nothing to do with it.

Classic Caesar Salad (\$8.99) — I remember when Alison’s dad first came to hang up her Missing posters around the premises, this is what he ordered when he came inside. He never ate salads. Apparently, he’d been hanging posters up all over town. I saw him going from table to table asking customers if they had information about her. Of course, they didn’t. A couple hours after he left, I sold the apple juice we were saving for her to some other kid. I never saw Alison or her mom ever again.

Greek Salad (\$8.99) — The last thing anyone ever ordered from me before I quit. The girl who ordered it didn’t want any onions on it.

Steak ‘n Swiss Melt (\$12.99) — I’d occasionally order one of these from the place after I quit. It sort of became my new usual after the grilled cheese got removed from the menu, but I never ate there often.

Strawberry Smoothie (\$6.59) — Some guy got arrested in the restaurant while drinking this. Although I never figured out exactly what for, the fact that I never saw any kids dining in from that point onward gave me all the information I needed. I remember seeing Alison’s dad outside the window as the man was getting put into the police car. I saw the look in his eyes. He knew this was going to happen.

Freshly Squeezed Lemonade (\$3.29) — The drink I held in my hand as I stared at the restaurant, now closed down. It had been about a few months since the place finally shut its doors. Enough time for windows to be broken, walls to be covered in graffiti, and an order for demolition to be approved by the county. As I watched the construction tear the place down from the parking lot, I looked to my left and saw Alison’s dad in the lot as well. We both watched on as the building was reduced little by little. We talked about a lot of things. About Alison, about sports, about politics, and eventually, his co-worker named Daniel Siminski, a man who always had a craving for veggie sandwiches.



