

Open Face

by Tim Young

Sitting with an extra large red and black styrofoam coffee cup, filled to the brim, I am wondering what to do about lunch. My belly is telling me to think quicker and get out of this chair and to the kitchen so a satisfying lunch may be prepared. I couldn't agree more, its just the menu in my head still remains blank.

Belly finally convinces me to pick up my bones and move them into kitchen. I open the fridge door and staring me in the face is the culinary answer to my empty gut. There sits a hearty slab of creamy Swiss cheese in its sky blue wrapper. Immediately my menu head (also perhaps menu transmission) slips into gear and the lunch idea is born. Before I become totally engrossed in the idea, however, I have to check the cupboard for a can of tuna fish and look back in the fridge to check on the availability of mayo. Check marks in both areas. Tuna melt with Swiss cheese and Lay's lightly salted potato chips. The bread was also in the fridge. My girlfriend is constantly retiring the bread to the fridge. It's one of those things.

I toast the bread, cut up the cheese and mix the tuna in a bowl with the mayo. I add pepper and salt to the mix. After getting the spread on the bread and the cheese on top of the spread, I place my plate into the microwave. It has an automatic 30 second button; I end up pushing it 3 times.

While it's true the bread does get a tad soggy on the bottom from the microwave, the rest of the sandwich is perfect. The cheese is melted but not runny and the tuna is heated all the way through. As I cut through the bread and tuna with a steak knife and lift the first bite to my mouth with my fork, I have to gently blow on it. It's delicious and it remains warm until the very last bite. I keep complimenting myself on a tuna melt job well done. And the potato

chips are large and fresh, not crumbly and stale.

All the time I'm eating I can't help but think of the many different tuna melts I have ordered in diners and coffee shops and how each of them disappointed me in one way or another. The usual unacceptable feature falls on the cheese. The temperatures ranging from a very slightly warm to downright stinking cold. Of course this has little good to say about the temperature of the tuna salad. And I know, or can surmise pretty good that the sandwich was stuck in the broiler to melt the cheese. I mean the cheese is melted but so what because it's cold again and I learned over the years to deal with the cold cheese and tuna mostly because in the diner or coffee shop the sandwich comes with french fries and they always come out too hot to eat.

But the disappointment that haunts my dreams and even sends me to fetch my server so I can complain is if my beloved tuna melt is not served open face. Yeah, they melt the cheese over the tuna then slice it and put the pieces on top of one another just like a typical sandwich. Damn, now that's disappointment, a situation which might lead to unwanted stress and even extra time waiting for the food if indeed I choose to have them take it back and fix it the way I was anticipating it to arrive. But I don't always send it back. I recognize this flaw in my personality and often beat myself up because of it. I should never crawl back into my shell and eat the preposterously ill prepared tuna melt. Instead I want to teach them my way. The way I was served tuna melts since before Noah and the Ark, or at least since the early 60's.

So in my book, or on my plate, the Open Face Tuna Melt rules and hopefully disappears. Another thing, in those horrible places that choose to serve my tuna melt like a typical sandwich, I never remember seeing in the menu the announcement that said tuna melt will NOT be served open face, or that it would be served like a regular boring sandwich. I never saw that stuff. And so I guess I've

learned to ask the server in advance exactly how they intend to serve me my tuna melt. Correct or incorrect (as if they'd know the difference).

So before I melt completely into my sandwich I've decided to never more order my tuna melt from some foreign kitchen. I'll be careful to have all the ingredients on hand here at home and make sure the microwave is capable of firing up. I'll have a plate and chips at the ready. I'll have a tall cold glass of milk or my steaming styrofoam cup of coffee. I'll be prepared. No one walking up to my kitchen table would make the mistake of noticing the sandwich on my plate was anything but open face.

