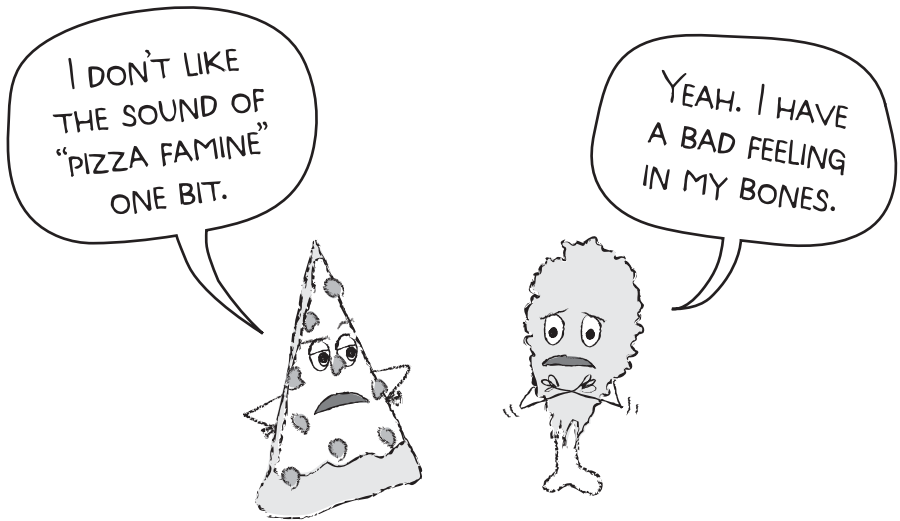


# PIZZA FAMINE\*?



Ahhh. There's nothing like a slice of sausage pizza to put a big greasy smile on your face and a warm lump of bliss in your belly.

Today's Monday, so it was pizza lunch at Dana Elementary. The cafeteria serves pizza every Monday, which means on Sunday nights you have something to look forward to even though your weekend is, sadly, ancient history.



Even Jack likes pizza! I mean, there aren't many foods in this universe that my best friend will eat, but cheese pizza is one of them. He's so finicky\* that he pretty much lives on peanut-butter sandwiches, plain bagels, noodles with butter, and cheese pizza. Our friend Bee says he's a beige-atarian.

So Jack and I were sitting there in the cafeteria enjoying Monday pizza. Bee was eating a salad she'd brought from home—green and red and orange and yellow all mixed together in a plastic bowl. It looked more like a Crayola shrub than a food, if you ask me.

That's when Mr. Fodder—he's a lunch lady who's a guy—walked up to us with a funny look on his face. He glanced both ways then leaned in close to whisper to me. His hairnetted beard was practically touching my cheek.



“Whaaa?” I choked. I can never tell whether Mr. Fodder is kidding or serious, but he had me seriously worried. “We have pizza every Monday!”

“There’s talk of a new school menu,” he shrugged. “Food that’s healthier.” He air-quoted around the word “healthier.”

WHEN YOU “DRAW” QUOTATION MARKS IN THE AIR WITH YOUR FINGERS, IT MEANS YOU DON’T AGREE WITH THE WORDS YOU’RE PUTTING THE QUOTES AROUND. WEIRD.

(ALSO, JUST SO YOU KNOW, MR. FODDER THE LUNCH MAN IS NOT AS CRAZY OR AS CREEPY AS HE LOOKS.)



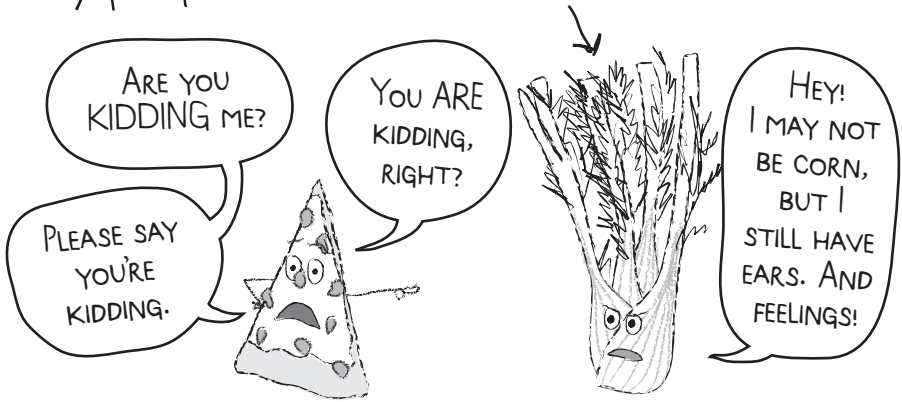
“But cheese pizza is one of my 4 food groups,” mumbled Jack.

“Sorry kid,” said Mr. Fodder. “Hate to be the bearer of foul news.” And he and his beard wobbled away.



Jack and I turned to glare at Bee and her veggie-lovers' salad.

"What?" she said. "I didn't have anything to do with this! Although I just know you will adore vegetables once you get used to them. Oh! I hope they put fennel on the menu! Fennel rocks."



I looked down at my last bite of pizza. I'd saved one flawless\* pearl of sausage atop one perfect pillow of tomato-sauce-dotted crust. It glistened in the fluorescent\* light shining down from the cafeteria ceiling. I placed it on my tongue, closed my eyes, and chewed.

Somehow it wasn't as awesome as always, which is what can happen with some of your favorite things when you make the mistake of examining them too closely.



# A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS



Sausage on pizza and 9-layer Slushies.

Doughnuts, taquitos, and pies that aren't mushy.  
Thanksgiving turkey and fried onion strings.

These are a few of my favorite things...



Bacon on everything, kit and caboodle.

Deviled eggs, Dagwoods, and cheesy-warm noodles.  
Nachos with queso and buffalo wings.

These are a few of my favorite things!



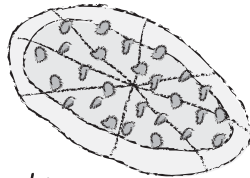
When my school stinks...

When my mood swings...

When I'm feeling sa-a-a-d...

I simply remember my favorite things

And then I don't fe-e-e-l so-o-o ba-a-a-d!



# MOVING DAY



After school today, I met up at the tree fort with Jack and Bee. But neither of them really seemed in a fort frame of mind.\*



Then it started snowing.



“That’s it,” sighed Jack. “We’re gonna have to close up our fort for the winter, Aldo.”

“Nah, it’s just flurries.\* Besides, we need a kids-only place to chillax, right? It’s where we do our best thinking!”

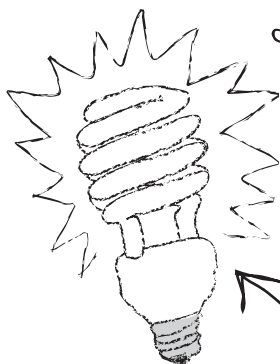
“We can go to my house,” suggested Bee, whose lips were turning an eerie shade of blue.

“Do you have Fritos at your house?”

“No.”

“I didn’t think so.”

By now you could see everyone’s breath. And OK, I’d lost some feeling in my toes. That’s when I remembered the spare bag of Fritos I’d stashed in my bedroom closet—my colossal bedroom closet—and how my mom had been bugging me to clean it out...



BINGO! (I’M SO CAREFUL ABOUT MY CARBON FOOTPRINT\* THESE DAYS, EVEN MY GREAT-IDEA LIGHTBULB IS THIS SQUIGGLY FLUORESCENT KIND.)

“Eureka!” I cried. “My bedroom closet is a behemoth. I think it’s even bigger than this fort. We’ll just move our fort to my closet for the winter!”

“B-b-b-bueno,” shivered Jack. “¡Vamos!”

“If your parents give us permission...,” said Bee with eyebrows raised for annoying emphasis, “it sounds perfect.”

So we grabbed our fort furnishings\* and hurried down the street to my casa. As soon as we pulled open the front door, an irresistible fragrance\* lured us straight into the kitchen. There was my dad, frying up a batch of his famous fit-for-a-king\* French fries, sprinkled with Parmesan cheese and chopped parsley.

“You kids look like you could use some hot food,” he said. “Pull up a stool!”

“Thank you, Mr. Zelnick!” gushed Bee. “We were freezing. And these are the best fries I’ve ever tasted!”

“Could I have some without the white and green stuff, Mr. Z?” asked Jack, and Dad passed him his own plate of fries with plain salt.

“Would you share this recipe with my parents?” asked Bee. “Maybe they’ll put it on the menu at our restaurant!”

With my mouth full of ketchup and fries, I asked Bee, “Zhew myav ha nyestuyan?”



Her expression told me she didn't comprehend, so I swallowed, burped, and tried again. "You have a restaurant? How come I didn't I know about this?"

"Because it's just getting started, silly. My parents and some friends are opening a restaurant called Fare\*. It's going to have vegetarian dishes and other things that are organic and yummy."

"So you're saying it's a vegetable restaurant," I summarized.

"Not really. There will also be locally raised meat, amazing pizza, and lots of other choices."

"Can we please stop talking about food?" moaned Jack. Sometimes he gets as grossed out about food words as he does about actual food.

"Well, the Zelnicks want to be standing in line when your restaurant doors open!" exclaimed Dad. "When can we make reservations?"

"Right after Thanksgiving," said Bee.

"I'm fired up\* to try it," said Dad. "Aren't you fired up, Aldo?"

“Um, maybe, but I’ll tell you what I am fired up about,” I said, changing the subject. “We’re moving our fort into my closet for the winter.”

“If it’s OK with you and Mrs. Zelnick,” added Bee.

“Fine by me!” said Dad. Then, leaning over to whisper in my ear, he added, “Have they ever seen the inside of your closet, sport?”

“They’re about to,” I whispered back.





So with full, warm bellies and festive\* spirits,  
Jack and Bee followed me upstairs to feast their  
eyes on our new winter quarters...

