

WAS THINKING OF YOU SO I WROTE ABOUT POPCORN by David Knuckles

I may be a little late to the party, but popcorn goes perfectly with the moviegoing experience. Growing up, we would never even dream of buying popcorn at the movies – or any snacks for that matter. Too expensive. We would leave early enough to stop by the local Eckerd (now known as Rite Aid), each pick out one individual sized candy and be in our seats before the previews started. I wouldn't open mine until the movie began, as I prefer to have something throughout the whole movie. Savoring, time management, not to mention price gauging – all things my father would emphasize when seeing a movie.

Sometimes during the movie we would offer a couple of whatever candies we had in exchange for a couple of whatever the family member next to us had. I preferred gummy worms, perfect for lasting two hours. You only needed one at a time, with each worm taking a minute or so to go down. They squirm around in your mouth as the sugar-filled gelatin sloshes around your gums and into your teeth, and the rush would draw you into the story on the screen even more and last you until your next gummy. Popcorn however, was not even thought of. I'd eat it while hanging out at local baseball and softball games, where I seemed to spend most of my time. I think it costed a dollar, maybe two. But at movie theaters it was about as much as your ticket, and tickets were enough of an expense.

Years later I would work at an arthouse movie theater, where part of my job was to make sure there was enough popcorn on the shelves in comparison to the amount of customers expected that day. Popcorn was made in an old-fashioned popcorn maker. It was on wheels and the kettle was in a glass case. Each kettle would make about twelve containers and as each batch was dumped, the glass walls would steam up and turn a light yellow from the finished product. Sea salt and olive oil – no butter or anything like that. We would often make a Turmeric & Cayenne and sometimes our chef would make caramel corn. For a few years I had popcorn every day. I ate popcorn while I made it, if I skipped breakfast, or while seeing a movie after my shift. I'd eat one while I closed up the box office alone. After three days, we'd throw away any expired containers, so naturally, I would take one or two with me on my midnight trek home. We had handwritten labels, a personal touch our owner stressed. I had the best penmanship on staff and actually enjoyed the task, so I would write Sea Salt & Olive Oil in my best script over and over and over and over. Often in my natural cursive, but I would sometimes switch up the handwriting to make it seem like multiple people were a part of its creation. Still, while going to other theaters on a weekly basis, I would not buy popcorn as a viewer. Maybe because I was sick of the snack, but perhaps it was an old habit of not falling for the great swindle that is the movie theater concession stand.

I was once interviewed by the New York Times as a result of our candy store being named “one of the most Instagrammable Spots in New York City”.

“When you go to Paris, you want to check out the Eiffel Tower. When you come to Metrograph, you have to visit the candy store – it's a part of the experience.”

“Are you comparing your candy store to the Eiffel Tower?” The interviewer asked me on the other end of the phone.

I pause, then double down. “Yes.”

I was sucked in, brainwashed. They took a less polarizing quote and used a picture of me bending over to stock the shelves, doing everything they could to make sure this story didn't bring me stardom.

After I left the job, I was through with popcorn. Didn't even want to look at it, much less smell or taste the snack. It had helped keep me alive for years and I turned my back on it, just as I had done growing up. It took years to look at popcorn with the glimmer it deserves.

I prefer seeing movies in the late afternoon. Around 4-4:30, even 5pm. Once you get out, you can begin thinking about dinner and you have the rest of the night to contemplate the movie. I don't enjoy going to sleep directly after a movie... it almost seems disrespectful. The late afternoon often calls for a snack, so lately I have been buying popcorn when seeing movies. And let me tell you – it is *as advertised*.

Marlon Brando once said the job of an actor is “to stop that movement of the popcorn to the mouth”. And when you're deeply immersed in a movie, you are not conscious of what's going on around you or what face you're making. You're transfixed, and in the moment, addicted. Eating popcorn is exactly that. Your hand goes down and up over and over. You might grab one kernel or a handful. Some may fall on the ground. Your mouth may stay open the whole time for all you know. Popcorn helps you get to that immersive, almost meditative state of movie watching. What Brando is referring to is the moment in which the film and the popcorn are no longer in sync, for the film has now won your attention. This immersive experience makes it difficult to savor the popcorn. After all, quantity is the popcorn's allure, and one bite isn't nearly as powerful as a gummy worm.

Popcorn isn't cheap, but it also isn't expensive. If you take the price of the movie ticket and compare it to the contributions popcorn brings to the experience, the price of popcorn stands a reason to be half the price of the movie itself. At an AMC or Regal theater, a small popcorn can be around 10-12 dollars, but an independent theater costs you around six. The big theaters will give you a larger quantity and load up on salt and butter. But the theaters I prefer give you a smaller, more individual-sized snack. They often will use an oil instead of butter or extra flavoring, making it much easier to digest before dinner. Eat too much of a certain kind and my fragile head and sensitive tummy feel foggy for the rest of the night. As if your stomach is filled with smoke and your ears are about to pop.

I took a weed gummy last night and started writing about popcorn. It's exhilarating to see where your mind goes; a straight sprint down a particular hallway, unknowing of which-others it might lead to. I actually thought it wasn't that bad, especially that line about feeling as if your stomach is filled with smoke and your ears are about to pop. Last night I thought it was the best line I had ever written. I'm not so sure about that now. Everything is so profound when on a gummy, but it can accelerate the momentum of an idea, at least momentarily – not unlike a gummy worm during a film. Anyways, no need to respond to this. I hope you're well.