Our Foods, Our Stories



Remembering O'odham Foodways Through Community

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ABOUT US



Trinity Norris is a Tohono O'odham storyteller, photographer, and journalist from Sells, Arizona on the Tohono O'odham Nation. She enjoys sitting with people, hearing their stories, and learning about the experiences that have shaped them. Whether she is writing or taking photographs, she approaches her work with care, curiosity and respect for the trust people place in her.

Writing with intention, focusing on stories that uplift Indigenous voices and reflect the people, places, and everyday experiences that hold meaning within communities. Her work is grounded in relationships and reciprocity and telling stories with people rather than simply about them. She holds a master's degree in Studies of Global Media and a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of Arizona. To see more on her work, you can check out her Instagram: **@tnorris.jpeg** or visit **www.trinitynorris.wordpress.com**



Winona Little Owl-Ignacio, Lakhota and Tohono O'odham, is committed to serving tribal nations through legal advocacy as a recent Juris Doctor graduate. One of her pieces of writing during law school focused on the University of Arizona being a land grant institution and its commitment to the students who come from the 22 federally recognized tribes in obtaining their education at the institution and how they could do better in supporting these Native students. They did this work alongside their best friend, Trinity Norris and were able to bring different pieces of the rez onto campus. When not doing legal beagle or community work, she enjoys spending time with her family and playing toka.



Aracely Rodriguez Rubio is a Graphic Designer and Illustrator based in Tucson, Arizona. Her work consists of story-telling through design and illustrations that highlight cultural aspects of her Mexican heritage, and the Indigenous & Mexican communities of Arizona. She received her Bachelor's in Studio Art from the University of Arizona. When she's not tinkering around in Adobe Illustrator, you'll find her reading a good book. You can find more of her work at **@aracelyrodriguezdesigns**.

INTRODUCTION

For us as O'odham, food can hold so many different things. It can remind us of home, family, the land, a certain season, or a memory with someone we love. It can be something we grew up with, something we are still learning about, or something we are finding our way back to. Our relationships with these foods are personal, and they are not going to look the same for everyone.

That is something I really wanted this zine to make space for.

The people featured in these pages each have their own relationship with traditional foods. Some of their stories come from **harvesting**, **preparing**, or **eating** these foods, while others come from memories and teachings that have stayed with them over time. They chose to share these moments because, in one way or another, ***these foods have meant something to them.***

Our relationships with traditional foods are shaped by **our own experiences, families, memories, and the places we come from**. The stories shared here reflect those different connections and remind us that each person carries their own understanding of what these foods mean to them.

I hope you read them with care and with an open mind. More than anything, I hope you come away understanding that our foods carry stories. They connect us to our land, our families, our communities, and to one another. ***And as our lives continue to change, so can the ways we carry those relationships forward.***

I am thankful to each person who trusted me with a piece of their story, and I hope you enjoy getting to know them through these pages as much as I did.

-Trinity Norris

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BENJAMIN DAVIS



San Xavier District - Tohono O'odham Nation

Benjamin Davis describes his relationship with O'odham traditional foods as ***one that is still growing.***

Much of what he has learned about harvesting and desert foods did not necessarily begin at home. Instead, that knowledge came through the community, from people who invited him onto the land, showed him how to harvest and shared teachings passed down to them.

"My own story with traditional foods and O'odham foods is still being written," Benjamin said.

Born and raised in Tucson, Benjamin is from the San Xavier District of the Tohono O'odham Nation. Food was an important part of his upbringing, though he makes a distinction between the foods he grew up eating and traditional foods harvested from the desert.

Squash, beans and **red chile** were staples in his household. When he thinks of a meal that reminds him of home, he thinks of a feast plate: red chile, squash and cheese, beef, beans, cemait and yeast bread.

"Anything you get at a feast house is what I would consider closest to home," he said.



Foods like **bahidaj** and **cholla buds** entered Benjamin's life differently. While his family maintained connections to O'odham language and feast traditions, many of his experiences harvesting desert foods came through community events.

"I feel like my experience with traditional foods like bahidaj and cholla buds has always been in a greater community," Benjamin said. "It's been more rooted in the community."

"It's not necessarily something I would have gotten from my family," he continued, "but I got it from people in my community that I could turn to."

Some of those lessons came while harvesting bahidaj.
Benjamin learned that gathering the fruit involves more than picking what is ready. Teachings are carried throughout the harvest, including the relationship between bahidaj and rain.

One teaching that stayed with him was that

THE RAIN LOVES THE COLOR RED

After the pulp is removed, the opened skin of the bahidaj is left facing toward the sky, exposing its red interior.

"Everything we do associated with the bahidaj is to attract rain," Benjamin said.

With a background in environmental studies, Benjamin is familiar with conversations surrounding drought and environmental change in southern Arizona. These teachings have given him another way to understand the desert and his responsibility to it.

That responsibility also shows up in how food is gathered.



When harvesting, Benjamin said, people learn not to take everything. They learn what should be left for animals, what should remain on the land and how to avoid overharvesting.

"THERE'S A BALANCE TO EVERYTHING WE DO," he said

That balance extends to the knowledge surrounding harvesting. Good gathering places, Benjamin explained, are often kept within families and communities who know and care for those areas.

For him, caring for that knowledge also means caring for the places where these foods continue to grow.

Looking ahead, Benjamin sees a growing interest among younger O'odham people in learning language, culture and traditions. He hopes traditional foods can be part of that continued learning.

"My grandma did this, her mom did this, her grandma did this," Benjamin said. "It's really just like we're walking in their footsteps."

It is a connection Benjamin wants to strengthen in his own life, too. He hopes to spend more time harvesting, learn more about cultivating desert foods and bring more of those foods onto his own plate.

The people who have taken him harvesting and shared their knowledge with him remain an important part of that journey. For Benjamin, food carries memories of the people who taught him, the people he shares it with and the land it comes from.

"This desert has always sustained us and our people," Benjamin said.

His relationship with O'odham foods is still being written. But with each opportunity to harvest, learn and share, Benjamin is finding where he fits within that story.



MAZEY ORTEGA



Schuk Toak District - Tohono O'odham Nation

For Mazey Ortega, some of her strongest memories of bahidaj begin ***with simply following along.***

Growing up between San Pedro and her father's village, Mazey spent much of her childhood surrounded by her grandmothers, siblings and cousins. She remembers running around the village with them, getting into trouble and learning from the people around her.

When bahidaj season came around, she went too.

"Bahidaj was my core memory," Mazey said.



She remembers getting out of her grandmother's truck in San Pedro to go picking. There were not always long explanations about what to do or how to do it. Instead, she watched.

"They don't really teach you," Mazey said. "You have to watch."

Someone would demonstrate how to pick. Eventually, the harvesting pole would be handed over.

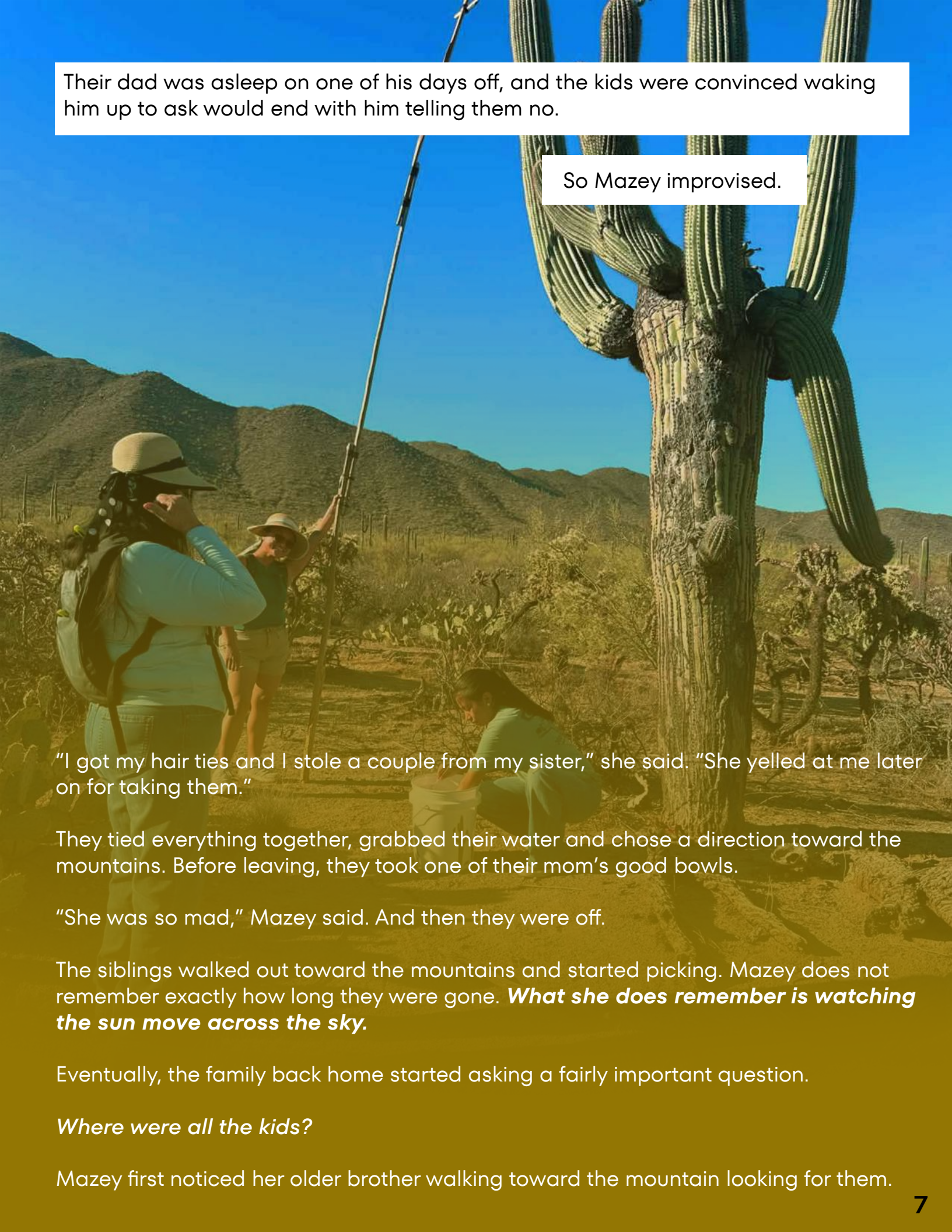
"you saw it, you watched it. okay, now it's your turn."

One of Mazey's favorite memories came when she was around 12 or 13 years old.

She and her younger brothers were outside at their family's home with not much to do when they realized it was bahidaj season. Rather than spend the day inside watching television, they came up with another plan.

"Hey, let's go," Mazey remembers them saying. "Let's go picking."

There was an old harvesting pole leaning against the house. They found what they needed and made a smaller one for her younger brother. There was only one problem. ***They could not find their dad's wire.***



Their dad was asleep on one of his days off, and the kids were convinced waking him up to ask would end with him telling them no.

So Mazey improvised.

"I got my hair ties and I stole a couple from my sister," she said. "She yelled at me later on for taking them."

They tied everything together, grabbed their water and chose a direction toward the mountains. Before leaving, they took one of their mom's good bowls.

"She was so mad," Mazey said. And then they were off.

The siblings walked out toward the mountains and started picking. Mazey does not remember exactly how long they were gone. ***What she does remember is watching the sun move across the sky.***

Eventually, the family back home started asking a fairly important question.

Where were all the kids?

Mazey first noticed her older brother walking toward the mountain looking for them.

Then, in the distance, she saw her dad's big black truck coming toward them. By that point, the kids had been gone for hours.

"We were always getting in trouble," Mazey said. "We went to go get bahidaj because we didn't tell anybody."

But they had something to show for it.

Their parents looked over what they had gathered, and the kids eventually ate most of the fruit themselves. They peeled the bahidaj open, left the peelings at the foot of the saguaro and ate the fruit fresh.

For Mazey, there is nothing quite like it.
"It's very sweet," she said. "It's just like you're eating a candy – a very sweet candy." Then she put it more simply. "It tastes like heaven."

Bahidaj remains Mazey's favorite O'odham food. Part of what makes it meaningful to her is everything that happens before the first bite.
"You really put in the work when it comes to getting bahidaj," she said.

There is the heat and rough terrain. There is watching where you step and trying not to fall into something covered in thorns. There is working with whoever is catching below you and hoping they do not drop the really good fruit you just managed to pick. And if they do, Mazey knows exactly what comes next.

"Why did you drop that? That was a good one," she remembers hearing. "Now the ants are going to get it. Hurry up, grab it."

Her siblings and cousins were some of her first teachers. Her uncle and other relatives taught her along the way too. Much of that knowledge was passed through watching and doing. And sometimes through making mistakes.

As Mazey grew older, she began to recognize that those days in the desert were teaching her more than how to harvest.

Bahidaj taught her patience.

It taught her to pay attention to the ground beneath her, to the people around her and to the land she was gathering from.

It also taught her that not every family does things the same way. “One family can do it differently. Another family can do it this way,” Mazey said. “No way is the correct way.”

For Mazey, being open to those differences is part of learning. ***Families may harvest differently or prepare foods differently, but the knowledge continues to move from one generation to another.***

“To appreciate your surroundings because that’s home,” she said. “That’s really what it’s taught me.”

Now, Mazey is beginning to see that cycle from another place. She was unable to go harvesting with her family this year, but her niece went with them for one of her first bahidaj pickings. “That was pretty cool,” Mazey said.

The moment is small, but it represents something Mazey thinks about often: whether the next generation will have opportunities to know these traditions and decide for themselves what place those traditions will have in their lives.

Her grandfather played a large role in shaping how she thinks about that choice. Before he passed away, Mazey remembers him making a point to teach his grandchildren about Indigenous history and what previous generations experienced. For Mazey, knowing that history makes having a choice today significant.

She wants younger O’odham people to know they can choose to learn their traditions, participate in them and carry them forward. And if they choose differently, she believes they should have that choice too.

“That's what our ancestors fought for,” Mazey said, “for you to have that choice and that option to practice your traditions.”

Still, she finds herself excited when bahidaj season returns. She sees families posting their harvests, community gatherings and bahidaj camps. Another summer comes, people head back into the desert, and another O’odham New Year begins.

For Mazey, harvesting carries patience, discipline and responsibility. But it also creates time to be together. Those are the memories she carries from being a kid, the siblings and cousins beside her, watching the people who knew what they were doing and eventually being handed the pole herself. Now, another generation is beginning to watch.

“All these things are going to come, pass by you,” Mazey said. “But those cactus and that bahidaj, that’s always going to be there every year.”
The people beside her may change. The younger ones eventually become the ones showing someone else what to do.

But each season offers another chance to return.

To Watch. To Learn. And when it is your turn, to pick.

JULIAN JUAN



Chukut Kuk District - Tohono O'odham Nation

Julian Juan remembers ***the first time his grandmother opened a small piece of foil and pulled out something that looked like candy.***

It was amber-colored, almost like the little root beer barrel candies he had seen before.

But this did not come from a store. **It came from a mesquite tree.**

"She called it O'odham candy," Julian said.

Growing up in Tucson, Julian's earliest memories were shaped by the people and places immediately around him. At that age, he said, he did not give much thought to his identity or where his family came from.

Some of that began to shift during one of his first trips back to the Tohono O'odham Nation.

His mother told him they were going on a trip, and as a kid, the drive from Tucson felt like it took forever. They were headed to Santa Rosa, where his mother was playing softball.
While Julian was off playing with other kids, she called him over to meet some of the family gathered there.

"She was like, 'This is your grandma. These are your cousins. This is your aunt,'" Julian recalled.

Until then, he had not thought much about the family connections he had outside of the people he grew up around. That trip became one of his earliest memories of beginning to see the larger family and community he was connected to.

Not long after, Julian and his mother moved back to the Nation. As he spent more time around family and living in different communities, those connections became a larger part of how he understood where he came from and his identity as O'odham.

Food was another part of how Julian came to understand those connections.

Growing up, when his family talked about traditional foods, Julian thought of the foods he saw and ate around him, including



Popovers

Red Chile

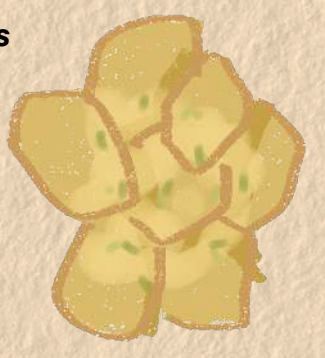




Beans



Squash & cheese



Potato salad

"In my mind, that was our traditional foods," he said.

As he got older, his understanding of traditional foods began to expand. He started learning more about foods grown and gathered from the land, the seasons they follow and the knowledge connected to them.

Looking back, though, Julian realized some of those relationships had already been present in his childhood. He just did not think of them that way at the time.

One of them was something his grandmother called "O'odham candy." Julian remembers her carrying pieces of mesquite sap wrapped in foil. During the summer, she would gather the amber-colored pieces from mesquite trees and keep them with her.

"She always had it on her," Julian said.

When she first offered him some, he expected something much sweeter. His grandmother was known to have the usual "grandma candies," like butterscotch and the strawberry candies wrapped to look like strawberries.

Mesquite sap was different. It was chewy, lightly sweet and carried the taste of mesquite.

"It's not gonna taste like candy," Julian said. "But I think when you think about traditionally our ancestors, they didn't have diets that were overloaded, overly processed or had a lot of sugar. So to them, it might've been like, 'Oh, this is sweet. It's a sweet treat.'"

Once his grandmother showed him what to look for, Julian started noticing it himself.

Growing up, he and the other kids were often sent outside when they visited their grandparents.

"Go outside," he remembers being told.

Part of him jokes that his grandparents probably did not want them running up the air conditioning bill. Whatever the reason, being outside gave him time to wander.

There were mesquite trees behind his grandmother's house, and once Julian knew what the sap looked like, he began noticing its amber color against the trees.

"I don't think I ever noticed it prior to being told what it was," he said. After that, he knew exactly where to look.

During the summer, he would find the hardened pieces, pull them from the tree and pop them into his mouth.

"I always used to look forward to summers when I was younger because I would just be out there picking them," Julian said.

At the time, there was not much more to it. His grandmother had shown him O'odham candy, and now he knew where to find it.

As an adult, Julian looks at that memory differently.
The more he has learned about O'odham foodways, the more he has thought about the amount of knowledge his grandparents and the generations before them carried. They knew the seasons, what could grow in the desert and how to live with the land.

It has also made him think about the questions he never thought to ask as a kid.

> "Even just something as simple as going out and picking mesquite sap, like how much more could I have learned from that?" Julian said. "Or are there stories connected to that? Where did my grandma learn from, or who did she learn from?"

Those questions stay with him now.

As a child, mesquite sap was simply something his grandmother showed him. He was not thinking about where she learned to gather it or how that knowledge reached her. But that small memory has become a reminder for Julian to listen while the people carrying those stories are still here.

"I wish I would have asked more questions or I should have sat down with them and listened to the stories and learned more about what they had to share," he said.

That does not mean Julian believes the opportunity to learn has passed.

Today, he sees more organizations, schools and community spaces creating opportunities for O'odham people to learn about foods, planting and relationships with the land. It is something he wishes he had more access to when he was younger, but he also recognizes that learning can begin at any age."Knowing it's not too late," he said.

For Julian, traditional foods have also become a way to think about the knowledge O'odham people have carried through generations. He thinks about tepary beans growing in a desert climate and the generations who understood when to plant, when to work and how to provide food in an environment outsiders might consider harsh.

"Our people really knew about the land," Julian said.

That knowledge is part of why he believes traditional foods cannot be separated from the people and places they come from. "Our foodways are an extension of us," he said. And with that comes responsibility.

Julian hopes future generations have the opportunity to learn about O'odham foods and continue the knowledge connected to them. He also hopes there is enough balance in the environment for those foods to continue growing for the people who come next.

"Our foodways, they carry our people," Julian said. "They carry our knowledge." They carry the work that sustained communities before him. They carry stories and traditions. Sometimes, they also carry the memory of a grandmother opening a piece of foil and showing her grandson something growing on a tree he had walked past countless times before.

After that, Julian knew to look for the amber pieces catching the summer light.

JASMINE LOPEZ



Sells District - Tohono O'odham Nation

Some of Jasmine's earliest experiences with O'odham foods came from ***those trips home, spending time with family and being around community.***

For Jasmine, those memories are often tied to the small details of being there.

She remembers grandmothers and aunties gathered together making **cemait.** She remembers the smell of fresh dough and mesquite wood burning, and watching the dough cook over the fire. ***Her favorite part was the bubbles.***



As they formed, parts of the cemait would darken with the heat, leaving behind the texture and the slightly burnt flavor she loved.

"You could really taste it," Jasmine said.

Sometimes her grandmother kept things simple. Growing up, Jasmine remembers eating cemait with peanut butter and jelly, an easy meal that became one of those familiar combinations she still thinks about.

Other foods bring back memories of gathering with community. She remembers a stew she called ***gardawash.*** She remembers white tepary beans with short ribs, ham or bacon, and eating them with popovers, cemait or yeast bread.

As Jasmine got older, her curiosity about O'odham foods began to grow too. She started thinking more about what could be gathered from the desert, how those foods were prepared and the knowledge that came with knowing what was around her.

Some of that knowledge had already been finding its way to her since she was young.

One of Jasmine's favorite experiences is harvesting bahidaj.

She remembers the process through the sounds that come with it. The ***scraping*** of the cactus rib against the ha:sañ. The sound of the fruit finally ***falling*** and ***hitting*** the ground. Then comes ***opening*** the fruit and getting to ***eat*** what you worked to bring down.

"I love the sound of the cactus rib scratching against the thorns on the ha:sañ," Jasmine said. "I love that sound."

The taste of the fruit itself is something she has a harder time putting into words. Sometimes bahidaj can be bitter, but Jasmine remembers it mostly for its sweetness and the crunch of its many seeds. She compares the flavor to a really juicy strawberry or raspberry, but even that does not quite describe it.

"It's a sweetness that you can't really capture in words," she said, "because you're meant to just eat it."

She loves it fresh, but she also loves when the fruit has dried and becomes chewy, almost like candy.
Jasmine remembers being a young girl and somewhere out on the Nation when her grandmother reached for something on a mesquite tree. It looked waxy and almost candy-like.

Then her grandmother ate it. Jasmine remembers wondering what her grandmother was doing.

Her grandmother gave her some to try too, and Jasmine immediately hated it.

The mesquite sap was tart and bitter. Even worse to her at the time, it stuck to her teeth.

Her grandmother had a much longer relationship with it. She told Jasmine stories about gathering the sap with her sister when she was young. They would collect it and sell it in bags or small jars, sometimes adding sugar or honey.

As a kid, Jasmine could not understand the appeal. ***Now, she does.***

As she got older, her taste changed and she began enjoying some of the bitterness she disliked as a child. She has even tried finding her own ways to eat it.



One experiment involved Tajín, chile and lime. It sounded good in theory.

It was not.

“That did not work out well,” Jasmine said.

Wanting to experiment has become part of Jasmine’s relationship with O’odham foods. She is interested in learning older ways of preparing foods while also seeing what else can be done with them.

She has found new recipes for beans that she had never thought about making before. She wants to learn how to harvest cholla buds herself.

At the same time, Jasmine thinks there are certain skills that should continue to be passed down. One of them takes her back to those early memories of watching her grandmothers and aunties around the fire.

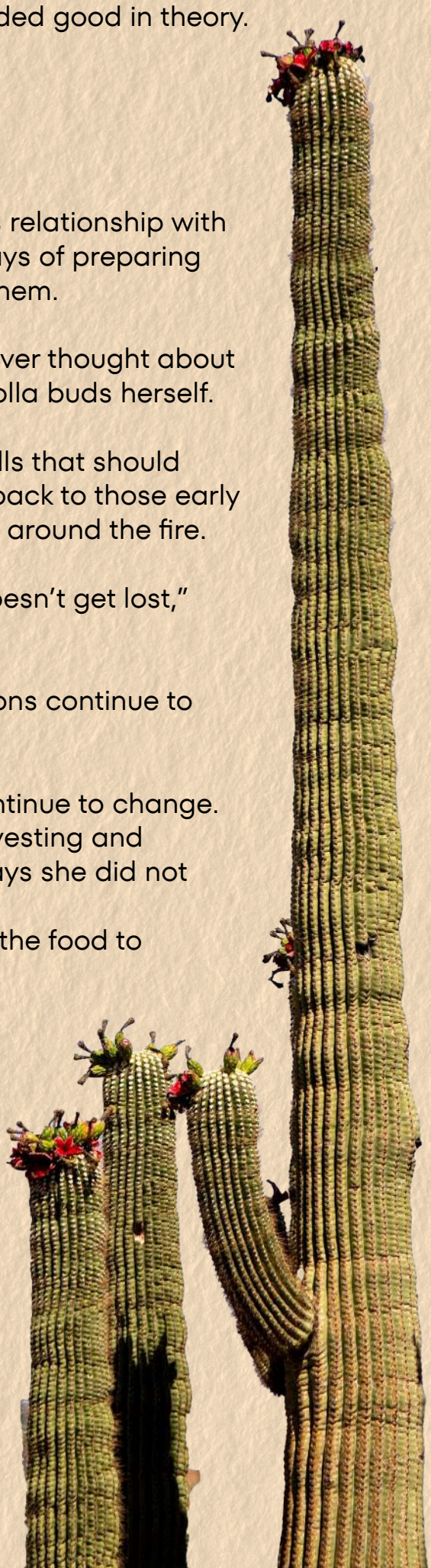
“I hope that the art of cooking on the mesquite fire doesn’t get lost,” Jasmine said. “It is a skill. It’s an art,” Jasmine said.

That is part of what Jasmine hopes younger generations continue to learn.

She knows the ways people cook and harvest will continue to change. She has already seen newer tools being used for harvesting and O’odham foods being incorporated into recipes in ways she did not necessarily grow up seeing.
What she does not want is for the knowledge behind the food to disappear along the way.

For Jasmine, part of that knowledge comes from understanding what is already around you. The desert holds foods that generations of O’odham people have known how to gather, grow and prepare. Learning about those foods has made her more aware of just how much can come from the environment around her.

She thinks about that especially when it comes to beans.

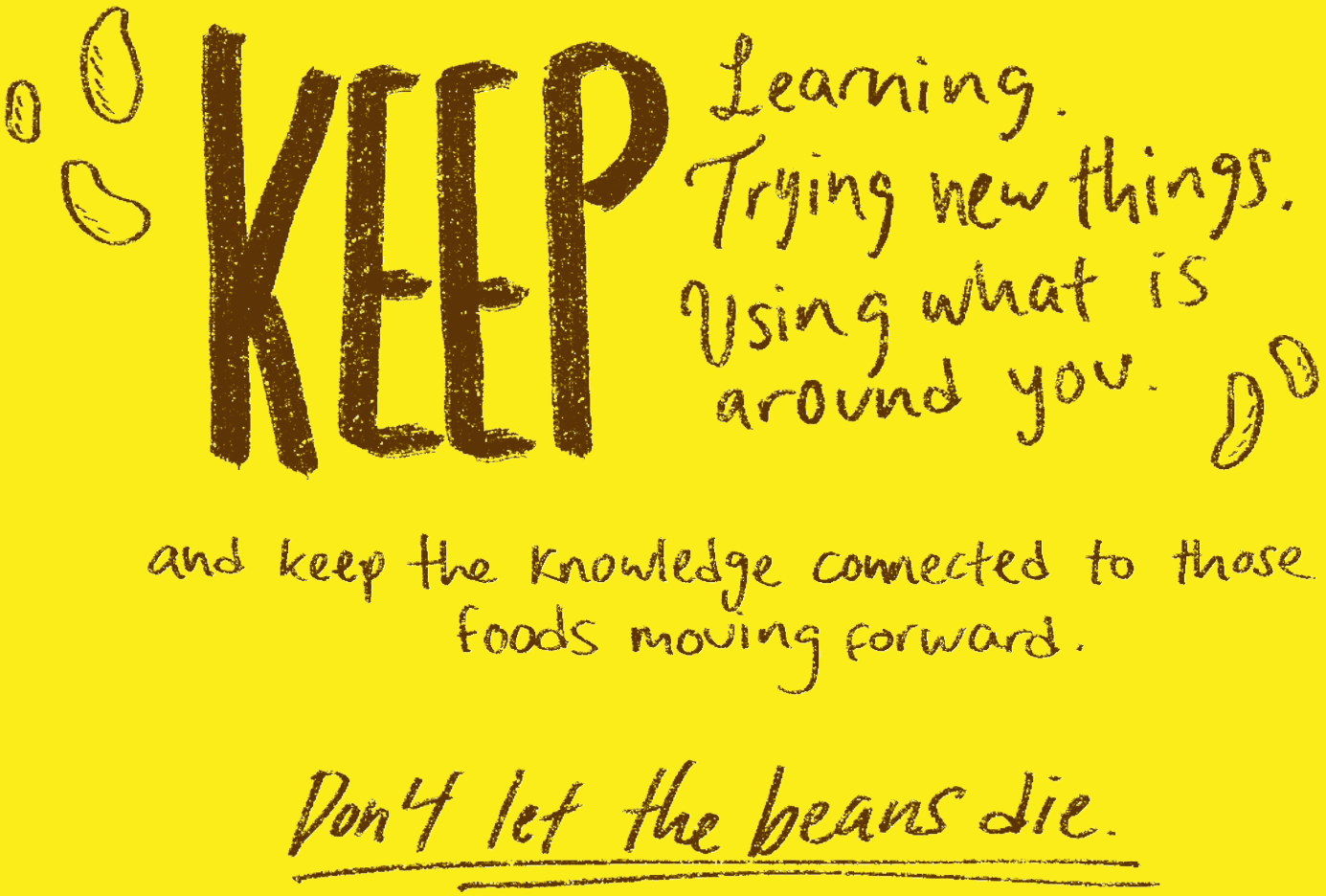


Jasmine has been learning more about different O'odham beans and efforts to bring varieties back into use. She hopes younger generations continue that work, whether they are learning older recipes or finding new ways to cook them.
For her, continuing those foods is also about continuing the knowledge that comes with them.

At the end of the conversation, Jasmine tried to think of one simple message she would leave for future generations.

"Don't let the beans die," she said. Then she laughed.
"Mic drop."

While it was funny, the message carried everything Jasmine had been talking about.



SANAA GONZALES



Baboquivari District - Tohono O'odham Nation

Sanaa's first memories of O'odham foods ***came from a school field trip.***

Growing up in Sells, Arizona, Sanaa did not have many experiences with traditional O'odham foods when she was younger. That changed during elementary school at Santa Rosa Ranch, when her teachers took her class out harvesting.

After they finished, the class returned to school, where her teachers cut open the bahidaj and gave the students a chance to try it.

At the time, Sanaa remembers being more curious about the tools they were using than anything else.

"When we were picking, I was so confused about this tool that they gave me to get up onto the cactus higher, " Sanaa said. "I wasn't really aware of what it was or what we were doing."

She did not know much about the harvesting process then. As she has gotten older, though, she has started to understand more about the traditions surrounding it.

"When I was little, I didn't know, but now that I've grown a little bit and have grown up around it, I know that there are different ways people harvest and what times they harvest, usually around the summertime," she said.

When Sanaa finally tried the fruit,
She remembered its sweetness and the fact
that it was unlike anything else
She had tasted.

"It was a sweet-tasting fruit. It had a unique taste," she said. That first experience became an early introduction to a tradition Sanaa is still learning about today.

She says she did not grow up trying many traditional O'odham foods, and even now, she is still becoming more informed about them. For her, learning about food has also meant learning more about the culture and traditions connected to it.

“I haven't really tried a lot of traditional O'odham foods when I was little or even now,” Sanaa said.

Her connection to these traditions is something she hopes will continue to grow. “I wasn't really connected to these traditions and I'm just getting into them now,” she said. “I'm getting informed about them now.”

For Sanaa, traditional O’odham foods are important because they offer a way to stay connected to culture and to the ways traditions have been practiced within the community.

“I think traditional O'odham foods are important because it helps us stay connected to our culture and how things are done over here,” she said.



That connection is something she hopes younger generations have the opportunity to build as well. “I hope that younger generations get to know about this food and tradition because I think it's important,” Sanaa said.

For someone who is still learning herself, Sanaa does not see tradition as something that has to be learned perfectly or in one particular way. Instead, she sees value in learning together.

When asked what she would want future generations to remember about O’odham traditions, her answer was simple.

“I would want them to remember that there isn't particularly a right or wrong way to do these traditions,” Sanaa said. “It's just important to do these traditions all together.”

TRINITY NORRIS



Sells District - Tohono O'odham Nation

Trinity remembers some of her earliest memories of O'odham foods ***are tied to being outside with family.***

Trinity grew up in Sells, Arizona, where the people around her were often people she had known for most of her life. She spent most of her childhood and teenage years there, and even after moving to Tucson, she continued to consider Sells home.

"I really cherish where I come from," Trinity said.

Growing up, O'odham foods were a part of that connection to home. On her father's side of the family, cousins and uncles would take her out harvesting, giving her some of her first experiences learning about foods that came from the land.

Bahidaj was one of the foods she remembers learning about through those family trips. Another was wi:hog pods, which she first learned about through her elementary school culture classes.



Once she learned that the small, thin pods growing from mesquite trees could be eaten, they became something she noticed everywhere.

As a kid, Trinity would see mesquite trees around the community and pick the pods from the branches while she was playing outside.

"I always picked out the ***wi:hog*** from the tree and ate it, regardless if it was sweet," she said.

Sometimes they were sour. Sometimes they were hard and crunchy. Other times they were slightly sweet. For Trinity, it became a simple snack she could find right outside.

"It was a little snack and you spit seeds out and let the, you know, circle recycle again," she said.

Her memories of bahidaj are tied more closely to family.

When she was younger, her cousins and uncle would take her out into the desert on their quads to harvest. She remembers learning how to use the ***Kui'pud***, a tool made from the skeleton of an old cactus, to bring the fruit down from the tall ***ha:sañ***.

Her job was often to stand underneath with a bucket and try to catch the fruit as it fell.

The work was not always easy.

Sometimes the fruit would come down with stickers still attached, leaving her with stickers on her shoulders or on her head. But those moments became part of learning how harvesting worked.

Over time, Trinity began to understand more than just how to bring the fruit down. She learned why certain tools were used, the meaning behind different movements and how knowledge was passed from one person to another.

Her cousins and uncle were some of her teachers. "They showed me, this is the Kui'pud, this is how we pull it down and then, you know, me standing already with the bucket," Trinity said. She also remembers learning how to open the fruit using the small stem when there was no knife nearby.

Her school culture classes became another part of that learning. She remembers being introduced to O'odham foods and traditions through her teachers and even having traditional beans and squash incorporated into school meals.

One of the teachers who stood out to her was the late Verna Enosbadt.

Trinity remembers admiring her and being open to what she was learning. "I really just admired and was so open to learning and being proud of who I am," she said.

Those experiences helped Trinity understand that food was not just something to eat. It could also be a way of learning where you come from.

Of all the foods she remembers, bahidaj remains one of the strongest reminders of home. For Trinity, harvesting bahidaj connects family, the desert and the O'odham New Year.

"I think the bahidaj is just such a strong symbol that reminds me of home," she said. The memories of harvesting with family continue to ground her and remind her of the community she grew up in.

"I think for me, that's why it's important to me," Trinity said.

SHE HAS ALSO WATCHED SOME OF THESE HARVESTING TRADITIONS HAVE Changed.



Some tools have become more modern. Where people once used baskets, buckets may now be used. Traditional harvesting tools can be replaced with metal ones. Trinity has noticed these changes while also seeing how O'odham people continue to adapt.

For her, that change does not erase the traditions that came before it. "Our people, we've adapted," Trinity said.

What matters to Trinity is that people continue to learn the meaning behind the foods and the practices connected to them.

For younger generations, she hopes they are willing to learn even if they did not grow up knowing these traditions.

"Just know that, like, it's a little piece of home, and to be proud of where you come from," Trinity said.

She encourages people who are unfamiliar with O'odham foods to be open to learning, asking questions and understanding why these practices continue.

“Be open-minded and not be scared and really try to get involved with yourself,” **she said.**

For Trinity, that curiosity is part of how knowledge continues.

The foods carry memories of the people who taught her, the places where she grew up and the traditions that have been passed down through generations. Looking toward the future, she hopes those connections remain.

“Be proud of who you are and understand that, you know, these foods represent us as people and our ways of life,” Trinity said.

There is still much to learn from food, she says, including the ways people connect with one another through harvesting, cooking, teaching and sharing.

“And there's a lot that you can learn from food and how we all connect with food,” she said.



GLOSSARY:

BAHIDAJ : Saguaro fruit

O'ODHAM CANDY : Mesquite Tree Sap

CEMAIT : O'odham tortilla

POPOVERS : also known as "frybread" a fried soft dough-like bread

HA:SAÑ : Saguaro Cactus

WI:HOG : Mesquitie Tree Pods

KUI'PUD : O'odham tool, which is constructed together from two to three ribs of a dead saguaro cactus. This creates a "T" shaped pole, which can be from approximately 15 to 30 feet in length. The Kui'pud is used to hook or gently nudge the fruit from the Ha:sañ, allowing for harvesters to collect the fruit from the ground or in buckets. (Norris, 2025)

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