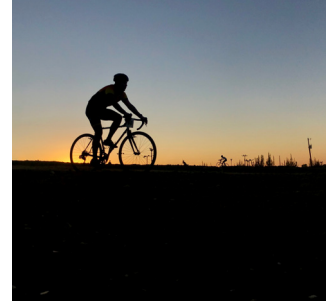
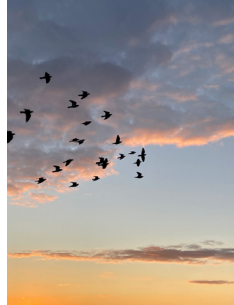


# The Commissary

a community digest by prickly pear



Photos by  
@iavargas

## Monthly Picks

### Book

[\*We are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast\* by Jonathan Safran Foer](#)

### Podcast

[Stuff You Should Know Episode- How Landfills Work](#)

### Recipe:

[Minimalist Baker's Oil-Free Oatly Milk](#)



## Letter from the Editors

by the Vargas sisters\*

At the tail end of 2018, Luisa and I started an Instagram account called Prickly Pear. The name came while hiking at Big Bend National Park on a trail lined with prickly pear cacti, and because we're a pair of misfits. A sister duo.

At first Prickly Pear was just a place we'd post recipes and videos of us fooling around in the kitchen. We'd share the plant-based baked goods we'd cook at home and food we'd take camping.

Then it evolved into something more. We began sharing knowledge on topics like wellness and sustainability that we learned from podcasts, Instagram accounts, and books. As the community grew, we created a cooking club with friends, baked goods baskets, and eventually started a community Slack channel for others to contribute their own recipes, resources and ideas. Most

recently we're producing short films and interviews of local businesses and people doing rad stuff.

The new layer we're adding to Prickly Pear is a community digest, The Commissary. Our hope is to take the voices we cross paths with and curate stories to equip you with useful knowledge for your journey. Like you would at a commissary, we hope you'll find what you're looking for.

The Commissary brings you elevated levels of curiosity and courage to explore diverse concepts or ideas you may have never thought of. The bulk of this digest comes from you, the Prickly Pear community.

We're not sure how you got to reading these words. No matter how you got here, somehow our paths have crossed. Thank you for being part of this and we hope you'll stay for the ride.

\*we couldn't agree on whose name should go first

# Finding Common Ground in Coffee

by Luisa and Maria Vargas



*We walked up to the storefront of Mi Mundo Coffeehouse in Round Rock, Texas, and immediately got reeled in by the smell of coffee. Except it wasn't coming from coffee cups, but from their garden where they use coffee grounds as compost. Sabin Shrestha came out of the shop wearing a mask and long apron while balancing a tray of to-go drinks for cars idling in the parking lot. Their passengers, itching for their caffeine fix. He gives off the energy of someone who loves what he does despite the late nights and crack of dawn mornings of the job. Someone committed to his craft, community and planet.*

When the sun rises, no matter where you are in the world, someone is greeting the day with a cup of coffee. In the tiny moment when the aroma flirts with your nose right before it reaches your lips, you know the day is going to be exponentially better.

The entire journey of coffee from bean to cup relies on extreme detail. Planting, harvesting, processing, transporting, roasting, serving. Details so complex most people take them for granted. Here we are focusing on one topic and leaving your curiosity to guide you to the rest.

Coffee is the third most consumed drink on the planet, only after water and tea. But as a

commodity demanded by pretty much every household in the world, it leaves in its wake a very wasteful production cycle that harms the very people who cultivate it and the environment, if not managed consciously.

In this context, we're referring to "wasteful," as the throw-away consumerism practices where we manufacture cheap mass-produced items, consume, dispose, and don't think about them anymore. Out of sight, out of mind. This system we know all too well is called the linear economy.

Plastic cups, lids, and straws are the tip of the iceberg. Our planet cannot provide enough resources to supply our growing demands. To change the way we consume, we must turn to the foundation of life itself—nature.

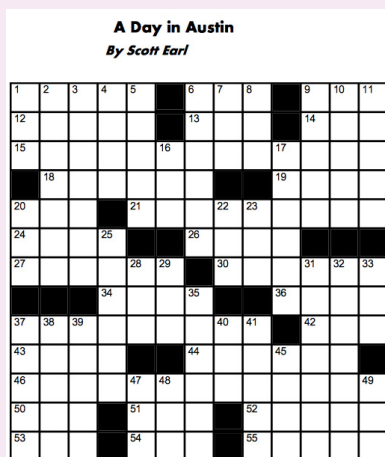
Sabin Shrestha from Mi Mundo says, "The concept of mimicking nature by design by eliminating, minimizing, or repurposing waste so it goes back into the cycle, is called the circular economy."

While it may seem complex, we don't have to look very far to see how it's already being taken into action.

Mi Mundo is working to prove that a business can survive and prosper while applying circular economic practices. It's a blend of Shrestha's past professional experiences in

## Creative Corner

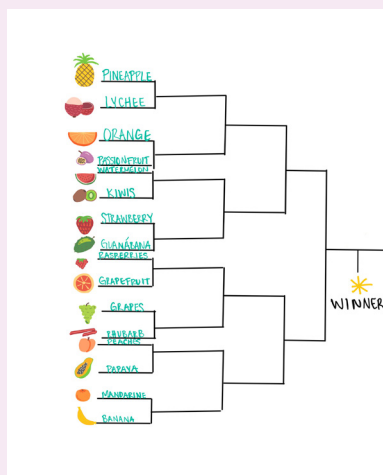
### Crossword Puzzle by Scott Earl



[Click here to play!](#)

Share your attempt  
on Instagram and tag  
@PricklyPearAtx

### Fruit Bracket by Briana Cohen



[Click here to play!](#)

Share your fruit  
champion on  
Instagram and tag  
@PricklyPearAtx

chemical engineering, supply chain, and marketing, with his love for coffee and the environment. He sees the coffee industry's potential in transitioning from a linear to a circular economy. Shrestha recognizes that businesses are only one part of the equation and must work in unison with individuals, and government. These three form what he calls the three pillars.

"It's like a circle, if one decides to do the right thing, then the rest will follow in some form," he says.

Challenging the status quo is a huge risk for businesses whose livelihoods depend on systems that have been established for years. Why reinvent the wheel? It's companies led by people like Shrestha who believe in the positive impact even a small coffee shop like his can have on his community, supply chain, and planet.

It doesn't come without challenges. Cost and infrastructure are among the barriers businesses face when choosing circular practices over traditional ones.

For example, businesses in Round Rock have to pay for recycling services. Because Mi Mundo is committed to sustainability, they're willing to pay fees so customers can recycle their used coffee cups. Additionally, they provide customers with cups made from plants. These cost twice as much as plastic cups but have a smaller impact on the environmental than plastic.

Mi Mundo engineered a

pathway that ensures anyone who steps through their door (with a mask on obviously... it's 2020, folks), is taking part of a sustainable system without having to think about it.

One example is composting coffee grounds, which are put back into the soil and used to grow more plants.

"We have to find a way to make it reusable or repurposed," Shrestha says, "even if it is not one hundred percent as useful as it was before."

But time's a-ticking and the urgency is pressing. How do we mobilize people to do similar actions on a wide scale? The responsibility not only falls on the shoulders of businesses but also on governments and individuals.

All three pillars—businesses, individuals, and government—share equal responsibility in restructuring consumer practices and our ecosystem.

Individual's choices dictate businesses because businesses will meet the demands of individuals. Therefore, with pressure from consumers and business initiatives, government action will follow. The result being enforcement and support of sustainable business practices.

"I told my wife and my dad a couple of months ago that I would quit Mi Mundo if I could inspire Starbucks to do the same thing I do," Shrestha said, "It's stuff we know in the back of our minds but we haven't put it into practice."

Coffee is a microcosm of



## Prickly Pear Pal Updates



**Matt Ferro**

Our plant-powered friend and runner, Matt Ferro, just completed a 103.3 mile run from Waco to Austin in 22 hours. He inspires us to work towards our goals with dedication and enthusiasm.



**Tabria Williford**

Tabria is the founder of the recently rebranded, Tawa Threads Co. and launched a new line of scarves and bandanas. She inspires us with her passion of bringing diversity to outdoor spaces.



**Aaron Chamberlain**

Our friend Aaron is cycling the entire perimeter (3,046 miles) of the state of Texas in two months. He started Sept.

1 and is getting ready to hit the panhandle. He inspires us to seek a little discomfort and create adventures in our own backyard.

other industries facing the same challenges. We have to do better, and we can. Perhaps it comes from the realization that we can take ownership of our choices and responsibility for our actions, like our daily cup of caffeine.

We can use coffee as a common ground to empower us in taking responsibility for our lifestyles and the ways we consume. An easy starting point is supporting companies like Mi Mundo that facilitate us to live more sustainable lives.

Our friends @mimundocoffeehouse are happy to share more of their story and sustainability practices, from how they roast their coffee with solar power, to the origin of the beans themselves. If you want to learn fun facts about coffee and the best local shops, look no further than our friend Lee @Coffee\_Cheers. A documentary we recommend is [Caffeinated](#) (2015) and a fantastic audiobook called [Caf-feine](#) by Michael Pollan.

### MYCLIMATECONNECTIONS

If you live in the Austin area, we're granting you access to this free tool to see the impact of your climate footprint and learn ways you can improve it. Visit [myclimateconnections.com](https://myclimateconnections.com)

## Prickly Pear Pals



**Lillian Seidel**

Trail Runner & Native Texan

Welcome! I'm Lillian. This is a space for wellness, personal growth, curiosity, learning, kindness, and inclusivity. It's a space that I hope will leave you feeling replenished rather than wrung out or torn down. Maybe we'll gain some new tools along the way. I'm by no means an expert on psychology, leadership, wellness, or any of the topics we'll be discussing. My goal is to share research and tangible resources for you along with my own personal vignettes since our vulnerabilities are often the threads that connect us most closely. While I don't expect that my experiences and insights will translate to or resonate with everyone, I hope to invite reflection on how these topics come to bear in your own life. And I hope we enrich each other in the process.



**Lily Friend**

Raw Vegan & Farmer

Lily is an organic farmer in Austin, Texas. She lives in a camper van with her beagle dog, Abigail. She thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail, has experience in wilderness therapy, is a raw vegan and enjoys cycling.



by Collin Findlay  
@collin\_fin

# How to Listen Well

by Lillian Seidel

Listening is one of the most valuable skills I've ever learned. And it's just that – a skill. Can you recall a time when you've had an unsatisfying conversation, trying to get a point across and frustrated that your conversation partner doesn't seem to be listening? What about a time when you felt fully heard and understood? Active and intentional listening can transform how you relate to others. Happily, there are five guiding principles that, with a little exercise, can help anyone strengthen their listening practice.

1. Minimize distractions. Ask yourself – am I able to be fully present right now? If not, is this a conversation that could be rescheduled? Of course, this is not always possible. But Other times, there is room for rescheduling – and your conversation partner is more than likely to appreciate the ability to have an engaging conversation with you rather than one where half of your mind is elsewhere.

2. Be aware of your body language. Your body language may send other signals to the person you're speaking with – are you leaning toward or away from them? Are you maintaining appropriate eye contact? All of these nonverbal cues send signals to your conversation

partner about your level of engagement in the conversation and how you're responding to their message. Be sure to consider cultural norms as well.

3. Prioritize understanding. Before you start mapping out what you're going to say in response, focus on what message your conversation partner is trying to communicate.<sup>1</sup>

4. Use context clues. Listen for the emotions behind someone's words. Is someone telling you, "I don't care," but their voice is raised, or they seem agitated? Or are they telling you, "I'm fine," but you're noticing signs of sadness or distress?

5. Offer your own understanding of what's been said. This is perhaps the most valuable skill I've learned when it comes to listening and one that can make a noticeable difference in the effectiveness of your communication. You may simply repeat back in your own words what you heard the other person say, or you may mine deeper for underlying feelings. I find this practice immensely powerful for two reasons: 1) It helps confirm both parties are on the same page. Either you're right (yay!), or you're wrong, in which case they'll correct you. 2) The other person knows you are listening<sup>2</sup>.

The items in this list are





by Lily Friend  
@dogandhergirlandhervan

simple, but it's surprising how often feels any different. Over time, you may observe a shift in your ability to understand and be understood. For more on listening, I highly recommend checking out the two sources in the footnotes – or just pop “active listening” into your favorite search engine for a wealth of videos and other useful resources!

## Oklahoma Adventures

by Lily Friend

I'm a farmer who lives in a camper van in Austin, Texas but every six months I try to go on a road trip. My friend Jeremy has joined me on two such trips; so I was stoked to camp in Oklahoma with him. Here is a brief recount of our adventure.

### Sunday

On Sunday afternoon, I pack up the van and head to Lubbock to pick up Jeremy– the big brother I wish I had. He is tall, goofy, and a good listener. His casual attire is a T-shirt with the sleeves cut out, running or hiking shorts, sandals, and a cowboy hat. We make plans to leave the next day before 10 a.m. and drive to Wichita Mountains.

As soon as we roll into the campsite, we discover a few things we didn't plan for:

#1. The water at the campsite is not potable. We improvise by filling up empty bottles with

<sup>1</sup>In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, Dr. Stephen Covey highlights the importance of this practice. See “Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood” (Covey, S. R. (2004). *The 7 habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in personal change* (Anniversary ed.). Free Press.)

<sup>2</sup>These types of reframings are called “reflections” in the context of Motivational Interviewing (MI), a technique used in therapeutic settings such as in substance use treatment. Reflections can be either simple or complex. For more information on reflections and MI, see Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

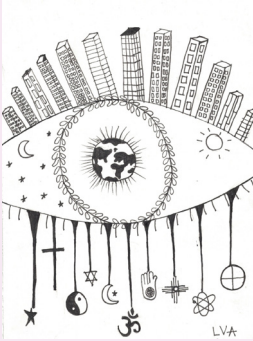
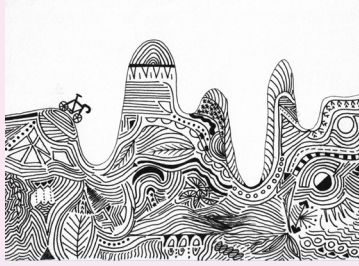
non-potable water for dishes, and reserving the van's water tank for drinking.

### Monday

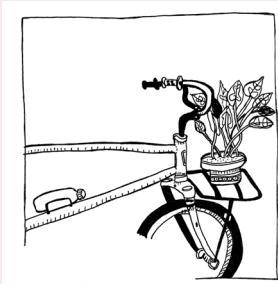
During our 4 hour drive to the park, we catch up on our lives, sing to Stevie Wonder, and make fun of each other as siblings do. On the drive, we pass rolling hills of grassy plains and rocky hills jutting out of the smooth landscape.

#2. All facilities in the park are closed. Thankfully there is a porta-john in front of the closed bathrooms, which we quickly learn that scorpions and tarantulas like to hang out in.

#3. Critters. After Jeremy sets up his hammock, he suddenly opens the van door in a tizzy. “A raccoon tried to steal my field guides and my eye drops!” he yelled. “They drooled all over my clothes!” I find this all hilarious.



by Luisa Vargas  
@cuadruchos.de.luisa



by Maria Vargas  
@iavargas

Later in the car, I see tiny black bugs crawling on my legs. “Hey Jeremy, what color are chiggers?” “Red,” he responds. “Never black?” I ask, at which point he looks up and makes eye contact with me, concerned. I show him my legs and he says something to the effect of, “shit.” Turns out they’re ticks. We then spend the next hour picking ticks off of each other’s legs with tweezers. Anyone who picks tiny ticks off you is the highest caliber friend.

### Wednesday

We hiked to The Parallel Forest, an area with 20,000 red cedar trees planted in parallel lines by the government to counteract the effects of the Dust Bowl. It wasn’t until after our trip that I learned this forest is rumored to be haunted...

Normally, I’m the one packing days with physical activity and coaxing Jeremy to agree to some hair-brained excursion. But on this trip, I wanted to take it easy, so I was expecting a leisurely afternoon. Jeremy on the other hand was intent on going on a gravel bike ride he saw on a park poster.

It’s 100° and hot as blazes, so at first, it doesn’t seem like a great idea, but I reluctantly agree, not wanting to miss an adventure.

Within a few minutes, I realize it’s not so much gravel as it is a technical mountain bike trail. The hills are steep and

though the trail is wide, it isn’t well-maintained. At this point, I’m determined to finish the ride, so I put my head down and bomb down the last hill fueled by adrenaline and drenched in sweat.

We reach a paved road and a few minutes later, Jeremy apologizes for misjudging the trail. But my spirits are so high I look back thinking it was actually a pretty awesome ride. We take the paved road back and I push ahead back to the van, then go pick up Jeremy who’s still biking. When I see him, I roll down my window, and scream “Yeaaaahhh! Get it! WOOOOOOOOO!”

### Thursday

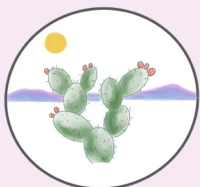
This is our last day of the trip. After hiking we eat guanabana smoothies and chips with guacamole then leave the park.

Back in Lubbock, Jeremy shows me Buddy Holly’s grave and Prairie Dog Town. Prairie Dog Town is a seven-acre field of dirt home to hundreds of prairie dogs. These creature’s behavior is fascinating and I’m engrossed watching the many dramas of their world.

On my solo drive back to Austin the next day, I take some quiet time to reflect on the trip:

- Plan as much as you can, but expect the unexpected.
- When you get thrown a curveball, roll with it and have a positive attitude.

## Prickly Pear History



Prickly Pear

- Take care of each other. Right now everyone can benefit from feeling cared for.
- Hard things can be fun if you are with your favorite people.

## One More Thing...

We had a blast creating this first edition of The Commissary and hope you enjoyed it too.

Next is thinking about how we can refine it. We want you, our Prickly Pals, to have a voice in what we change and how we can improve. We'd greatly appreciate it if you could fill out [this short questionnaire](#).

Want to contribute to next month's issue of The Commissary? Have any suggestions or thoughts you'd like to share? We'd love to hear from you!

Contact us at

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and follow us on Instagram

@pricklypearatx.