

MALTIOX

News for Donors to the Mayan Scholarship Program

Number 1

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MALTI-WHAT??

You must be wondering what the title of this newsletter, *Maltiox*, has to do with our scholarship program. The word comes from the Kakchiquel Mayan language, the one spoken by the scholarship students. It is pronounced "mal-ti-osh" and best expresses what the students would most like to communicate—"thank you".

Why the expanded size of our communication with donors? Well, the scholarship program is now six years old. Many of you have donated year after year and it seems like a good time for us to learn more about the people whose lives you have touched so deeply.

The weaving shown in our newsletter heading was given to Marilee Wingert as a tribute to the students and donors in the scholarship program. The piece was hand-made by Maria Rosario Atz Bonon, a scholarship recipient who graduated from high school last December. The textile measures 15" x 47", is made of cotton, and represents countless hours of work. Considering that Maria Rosario is one of eleven children, that she has many responsibilities in the home, and that she had to use precious resources to buy the thread, the gift is extremely generous. The photograph shows Maria Rosario in her calm, lovely way, presenting the weaving to Marilee during last year's annual village celebration of the scholarship program. Maria Rosario's

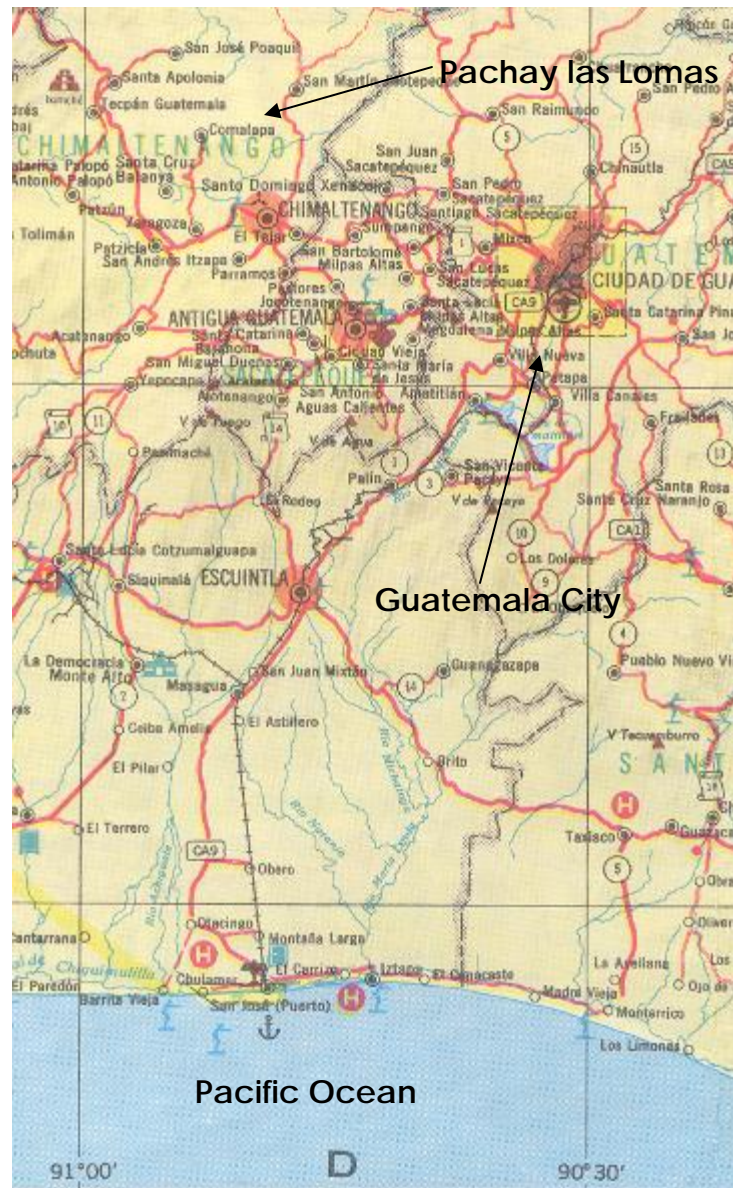
mother, ever grateful for the scholarship program, was never able to attend school. Despite her considerable leadership capabilities, her reading skills are limited to recognizing a few of the letters in her own name, Katarina.

We hope you enjoy the "expanded coverage" of the scholarship program, its students, and their world. It is written and produced by Marilee Wingert and Lynda Salter Chenoweth with the editorial advice of Barbara Bowman. Resources to prepare, print, and send this newsletter are not taken from the funds donated for scholarships. If you have any questions about the scholarship program or this newsletter, you can get in touch with Marilee Wingert at marileewingert@earthlink.net.



PACHAY LAS LOMAS

Pachay las Lomas, the home of our scholarship recipients, is a small village inhabited by indigenous Mayan people. It is located near the top of a mountain on a dirt road in a forested region of the Central Highlands of



Guatemala, northwest of Guatemala City. The village is so small that it is not designated on general maps of the country.

During a devastating earthquake in 1976, Pachay las Lomas gained attention by having the highest mortality rate in the affected area. For a period of thirty-six

years ending in December 1996, it was one of the embattled regions of the guerilla insurgency between poor Guatemalans, especially the Mayans, and the Guatemalan government. The Mayans fought against suppression of the indigenous population, political intolerance, economic exploitation of the disadvantaged, abuse of human rights, and denial of access to basic educational and health services. The government's response was violent and resulted in an estimated 150,000 casualties and the displacement of about one million people. In the 2000 census, 56,000 people were counted in the municipality in which Pachay las Lomas is located. At that time, those people were served by a total of 125 telephones. The people of Pachay las Lomas have many reasons to feel hopeless. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

Revealing the ingenuity of the war widows of Pachay las Lomas, 29 Mayan women of the village formed the Association of Mayan Women for Integral Development (AMIDI) in 2000 with the objective of increasing household incomes by weaving, selling traditional Mayan fabrics, and raising chickens to produce eggs that could be sold. (By the way, Pachay is pronounced Pach-eye.)

A MAYAN VISITOR

From November 6th until November 14th, Ana Maria Chali Calan, the founder and leader of the woman's group AMIDI in Pachay las Lomas, will be visiting Sonoma County. She has been invited by Slow Food Sonoma County as part of its project for cross-cultural sharing of agricultural and other traditions between Sonoma County and the AMIDI organization. Ana Maria will demonstrate tortilla making and the use of the back strap loom. Should you wish to meet her, you will have an opportunity. Details will be provided closer to the time of her visit.



MEET A SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT

Meet Clara de Lourdes Chali Bonon, shown below on the right. Actually, everyone calls her Lourdes. She is our youngest scholarship recipient and was a newborn when the scholarship program began. Lourdes is enrolled in the Guatemalan equivalent of kindergarten. Children do not have to enroll in this program, but all research has shown that children who attend the preparatory year tend to do better in school and to stay enrolled for a longer period of time. This is noteworthy because most Mayan children do not graduate from elementary school. Unfortunately, many children skip the kindergarten experience because it means one more year of educational costs. The good news is that Lourdes loves school and is an eager, active participant in all of her school activities.

One of Lourdes's best friends, Cristi, is the granddaughter of the village leader, Ana Maria Chali Calan. When they are together, as they were below at the Mayan archaeological site of Mixco Viejo, they can giggle up a storm—especially when they are chasing after one another or simultaneously planting kisses on an unsuspecting village baby. Lourdes's mother, a recent widow, is an accomplished back strap weaver and intends for her daughter to carry on this ancient tradition.



THREADS OF CULTURE

"Our women have known how to struggle for our culture. It's women who preserve the art of weaving; we are the weavers. Our knowledge concerning weaving, our art, is very advanced. That's why many people everywhere consider the Guatemalan woman to be an artist. And weaving is an art."

Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú,
a Guatemalan Mayan 1983

The weaving traditions in Pachay las Lomas and other Highland Mayan communities are grounded in the mythology and cosmology of the ancient past. From Pre-Columbian times, the Mayans have believed that weaving was invented by their moon goddess, Ixchel. Ixchel, who was also the patron of conception, childbirth, medicine, and reproduction, passed the knowledge of weaving to women who have maintained and transmitted the techniques of this domestic art through their daughters and granddaughters from generation to generation.

From the earliest times to the present, Mayan women have produced woven goods on back strap looms like the one below being used by a young woman in

Pachay las Lomas. While some men in the Guatemalan Highlands also weave, their weaving is performed on treadle looms introduced by the Spanish long after women had mastered the back strap loom.

Back strap looms have survived through the centuries because they are simple to make from local materials and are easily portable. A cord (often handwoven) or rope is used to tie the top of the loom to a tree or post. At the other end, a strap is worn around the weaver's back, connecting her to the loom and providing the tension needed to keep the warp (vertical) threads taut. Various wooden rods are used to maintain the crossing of the warp's threads and lift its alternative threads. A simple batten helps to separate alternate warp threads and tighten the weft (horizontal threads) as they are woven. Finally, a bobbin, which holds the thread of the weft, is used to pass the thread from side to side through the warp.

Back strap looms are used in Pachay las Lomas and elsewhere in Guatemala to weave fabric for the *huipil*, the colorful, traditional blouse worn by Mayan women. The designs woven into *huipil*

cloth reflect the cultural identity of each weaver. Individual artistic expression is revealed by designs and symbols that relate to the weaver's own history and philosophy of the universe. In addition, women from different towns in the Guatemalan Highlands use distinct colors and patterns that make it easy to identify a woman's community by the *huipil* she wears. In ancient times, only the elite were able to wear such intricate, beautifully woven clothing.

