

MALTIOX

News for Donors to the Mayan Scholarship Program

Number 2

Winter 2009



MEETING ANA MARIA

contributed by Marilee Wingert

Ana Maria Chali Calan, the village leader in Pachay las Lomas, came to Sonoma County for ten days last November at the invitation of Slow Food Sonoma County. In a whirlwind of activity, she visited farms, a heritage turkey 4H project, farmers markets, a farm gentleness program for at-risk children, a winery, a bakery, backyard vegetable gardens, a food bank, the redwood trees of Armstrong State Park, and a veterinary hospital. She was invited into homes for receptions and intimate meals, as well as to big events like a potluck Thanksgiving dinner and a dinner featuring a California-inspired menu made with ingredients available in her village. On

top of all this, she got to ride in an all electric car, took a private Pilates lesson, and collected wild mushrooms.

Ana Maria's visit was a moving experience for those who met her. Many comments focused on her integrity, dignity, strength, warmth, openness, and dedication. Some said they were "honored" to "bask" in her presence. Time spent with her was described as "wonderful" and "magical". All who met her were touched by her calm, her charm, and her confidence in social circumstances often quite different from those she experiences in Guatemala.



Some of those who spent time with Ana Maria offered specific comments about her. "When I think of a better quality of life, my mind can go to materialism—like the idea of a new kitchen counter. For Ana Maria it means finding ways to empower her people to get beyond surviving and to begin to thrive." "The gratitude and curiosity with which Ana Maria embraces the natural world inspires me to see familiar places with new eyes." "I was left speechless when she stated that one of the needs of her people is to have enough food." "I was inspired to donate since it came home to me that I live in an organic bubble of abundance that I take for granted and she does not." "We all need to be involved in more activities like this one." "I think this lovely lady deserves a whole bunch of stoves for her

Maltiox, pronounced mal-ti-osh, is a Kakchiquel Mayan word that means "thank you". Kakchiquel Mayan is the language spoken by our scholarship students, and the sentiment is theirs.



village.” (See page 4.) “Sitting beside Ana Maria, one senses the power and pragmatism of a woman fully grounded in her village and the earth that supports it.” And, finally: “Ana Maria is inspiration incarnate. Her devotion to her village, her talent as a mentor and her dedication to making life better for all of them is a quality to be admired and emulated. Her authenticity and generosity of spirit exude from her as she speaks of her village and of her hope for its future. I will continue to support her efforts and feel blessed to have met her.”

Ana Maria had some comments of her own: —Because there is discrimination against Mayans in Guatemala, she said that she had never expected to feel proud of being a Mayan anywhere but in her local, indigenous area. The warm welcome, the genuine interest, and the generosity here changed her mind. —After visiting many homes, she asked how so many retired people could live so well without working. In response to the answer, she said that no families in



Pachay las Lomas have a savings account. She also wondered where all the grandchildren lived. —In the realm of agriculture, livestock, and food, the focus of her trip, she saw us as thoughtful and caring people. Our farm animals and pets are so healthy. We even think to raise chickens that are on the endangered domestic breeds list. The hospital at the Humane Society is better equipped and cleaner than those for people in Guatemala. She didn't know that animal doctors, veterinarians, existed. —Ana Maria was most impressed with our attention to the care of the soil: worm composting, the regular compost, the manure, and the carefully calculated use of organic soil amendments. She

pledged to develop a program of making sure that all their animal manure ends up in the fields. —Steaming instead of boiling vegetables was a new notion. Although they drink the vegetable water in the village, she liked the idea of using less fire wood and having more flavorful vegetables while still having broth.



Everywhere Ana Maria went, people welcomed her with personal gifts as well as donations for village stoves and scholarships. She arrived with a small suitcase, mostly filled with hand-woven gifts from the village women. When she left, she took a second suitcase and a heart full of wonderful memories to last a lifetime. Our memories of her, her warmth, and her dedication to her village have provided us with lasting impressions as well.

MEET A SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT

Meet Norma Adelaida Calon Chali. She is the oldest of seven children and has been a recipient in the scholarship program since it began in January of 2003. Norma is very close to Ana Maria who is a constant source of inspiration.

Over the years, Norma has stood out because of her enthusiasm and her willingness to be involved. When we went on a field trip to the Archaeological Museum in Guatemala City, she was the only one who brought a small notebook and pencil to write and sketch her impressions of the ancient Mayan exhibits. Back in the village, when the boys demonstrated how they use their tools to tend the corn, Norma squatted down among them and weeded by hand. When one of the scholarship donors asked to have a traditional blouse (a *huipil*) hand-woven by one of the expert weavers in the village, Norma, who had recently graduated from middle school, took on the task with some help from her mother.



Norma is shown in the photograph above with the *huipil* that she made. Notice that her *huipil* has the same patterns—the designs that are traditional to her area and are worn by all the local women and girls. On a subsequent visit, after the *huipil* had been delivered to the donor, Norma wondered if it was being worn everyday or just on special occasions.

As part of her high school education, Norma, along with two other scholarship recipients, took a one-year course and is now certified as an auxiliary nurse who can administer first aid.

SCHOLARSHIP DONATIONS UPDATE

Thanks to your generosity, the fund drive for the 2009 school year was a success. The scholarship donations totaled \$11,405. A special donation of \$230 was also received for a roof over the outdoor kitchen at the women's community center in Pachay las Lomas. Your continued support to AMIDI is greatly appreciated by the women and children of the village.

ATTENDING HIGH SCHOOL

Throughout Guatemala, there are two high school attendance options for students like Norma: the traditional Monday through Friday format, or the weekend program. Many students opt for the more economical weekend program so they are free to work during the week. This option also requires only one round-trip bus ride a week making the cost of bus fares much lower.

NEW WOOD BURNING STOVES FOR 30 OF THE 40 AMIDI WOMEN

During a question and answer session at the reception held for Ana Maria at Susan and Bill Daniel's home, Nathan Boone asked if there were anything else the women of AMIDI needed besides scholarships for the village children. (AMIDI is the acronym for the Association of Mayan Women for Integral Development, a group Ana Maria formed in 2000 to increase household incomes by weaving and selling traditional Mayan fabrics, and by raising chickens to sell eggs.)

Ana Maria told us about a stove that she and a group of AMIDI women had seen and liked because of its efficient use of wood, its venting system through the roof to eliminate indoor smoke, and the safe placement of the fire off the dirt floor where children run and play. She added that even though the women would save by buying less firewood, the cost was simply beyond their means. On the spot, a village stove fund was created that, to date, has received donations of \$4,200, enough to purchase 30 stoves at \$140 each. These stoves are made by a small, local business in Guatemala not far from the village

Women were selected by the AMIDI membership to receive stoves based on their length of service in the organization and on their degree of active participa-



This fire with its cooking stand, called a *comal*, shows how the women cook on the floor in village homes.

complete when each and every member agreed upon the list of recipients—decision by consensus. Ana Maria says that those women are “muy, muy contentas” (very, very content). At this point, 16 of the custom-built stoves have been installed. As they need to cure, none of the stoves are yet in use; but on February 3, 2009, the women attended a class in the AMIDI community center to learn how to best use and care for them.

It turns out that there is an international movement among a wide variety of donor groups, of which we are now a part, to fund the installation of these types of stoves in the homes of impoverished families, around the world, who use wood for cooking fuel.

MODERN MAYAN CUISINE

The daily cuisine in Pachay las Lomas is similar to that eaten in ancient times in Guatemala. Corn, beans, and squashes (including yucca) are the predominant crops. Daily village fare includes corn tortillas, made fresh each morning, as well as bean dishes seasoned with a variety of locally grown peppers. Squashes often appear in large pots of soup or as a separate dish eaten with beans and tortillas.

Today, village gardens boast an array of other vegetables including carrots, cabbage, tomatoes, onions, and potatoes. Rice, obviously not a traditional food product, is now also available to the villagers.

Meat, while eaten in the village, tends to be an occasional treat because of cost and availability. Chicken is the most common meat to be found in the dishes of Pachay las Lomas, but both beef and pork are eaten when available or affordable.

Locally grown fruits include oranges, limes, and plantains, all of which make their way into the daily cuisine.

Leavened wheat bread has become available from markets in nearby towns but none is baked in the village itself. The mainstay of every village meal remains the fresh corn tortilla, stacked high and consumed at every meal.