

MALTIOX

News for Donors to the Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development (AMIDI)

Number 7

Spring/Summer 2011



PORFIRIO'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Porfirio Tomas Castro was among our first scholarship recipients to attend high school. However, he didn't stop his education once he graduated. Instead, he entered an agricultural program offered by a Guatemalan NGO that received funding from the U. S. government. Students learned safe agricultural practices adopted from a set of international standards. He is now part of an agricultural group that produces high-quality coffee, French beans, and chili—all products that have a ready market and command a top price. The quality of his coffee meets export requirements.

Porfirio, being known as a resourceful and intelligent young man, was recently elected by the residents of the greater Pachay area to the Community Development Council. This program exists throughout Guatemala. In the position of community advocate, his job consists of listening to the concerns of the community members, planning a strategy, and taking action.

Usually this means interfacing with the local municipal government. For example, if the dirt road into the area needs repair, he would call it to the attention of the authorities and help organize work crews. This is a volunteer job for which his salary consists of gratitude.

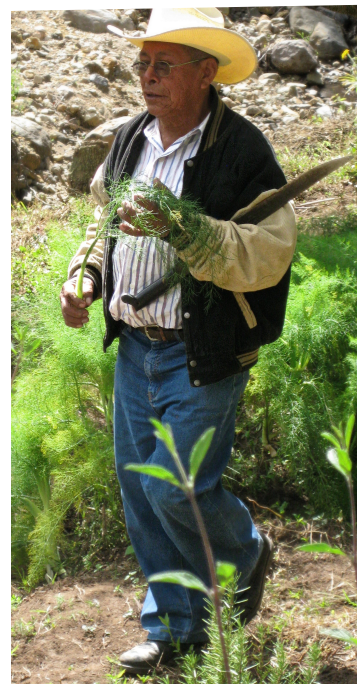
Among Porfirio's other skills is carpentry. In order to pay his share of his high school costs, he worked in a carpenter's workshop in a nearby Mayan town. In the photo, he is holding a framed weaving that gives thanks to the donors that made his education possible. He made the frame, and it is typical of his fine work. The mitered joints are precise and the sanded finish is silky smooth.

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.

AMIDI PLUS ONE

AMIDI, the Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development, grows in unexpected and surprising ways. The membership, now 48 strong, includes one man! Vernadino Ajbal, a Kakchiquel Mayan, was born and raised in Pachay las Lomas. During the 36 year war from 1960 to 1996, many of his family members were massacred, including his wife. Seeking peace, he took refuge in Mexico where he stayed for about 15 years. Once the “Conflicto”, as it is called in Guatemala, was over, he acted upon the longing to return to Pachay. He remarried and had a second family.

Vernadino, age 72, is an active and hard working man who is respected for his willingness to help and encourage others. Because of his years in Mexico, he has a unique perspective on problem solving that is valued by the women and the community. He takes delight in teaching the women skills that usually reside in the domain of men. Ana Maria Chali Calan, the AMIDI leader, says that he is a welcome addition to the membership.



A CELEBRATION SKIT

At the end of each school year, AMIDI creates an elaborate celebration to honor both the scholarship donors and the grateful recipients. The students have responsibility for part of the program. Sometimes they write and present skits about issues the Mayans of Guatemala face every day, such as economic exploitation and discrimination.

In the photo, Rosario, standing, plays the part of an employee working in a nearby agricultural processing facility. In Act I, her mean boss, played by Mario who is seated up on the stage, has refused to pay her full salary. She respectfully asks him for her due. In turn, he disdainfully justifies his position by saying that she is a woman and, therefore, should be paid less than a man. She walks away crestfallen. In Act II, it is evident that Rosario has learned from her AMIDI elders. She seeks assistance of a knowledgeable, indigenous advocate played by Hector. She wants to learn about her legal rights and develop a strategy to confront her boss. In Act III, she stands up for herself, successfully presenting her case to the manager. He rewards her with full compensation and begrudging respect.



Through AMIDI's leadership, the students of all ages are learning they can speak out for their rights. Members of the audience, including young children, were spell-bound by the skit. The message hit home.

THE SACRED

Religion is an all important force in Pachay las Lomas. All of the AMIDI families are Catholic with a strong overlay of Mayan spiritual beliefs. Their ceremonies and spiritual practices reflect this blending.

Throughout the village, homemade altars create living, sacred spaces in houses and at group gatherings. An altar invokes God, the Mayan spirits, and the ancestors. It can be simple as in the photo of the mug and candle on pine needles. This is an altar placed on the floor of the AMIDI community center's kitchen while the women made tamales. Or, the altar can be intricately designed and rich in symbolism, like the one below created by a Mayan priest as a blessing for the scholarship donors and students.



It is unthinkable to begin an event without at least one blessing. Sometimes a community elder gives a blessing. At other times, the blessing is part of an elaborate ritual involving community members of all ages. In the photo at right, three high school scholarship recipients are trying hard to be respectful as they drink Aguardiente, the strong liquor that plays an important role in religious rites. The audience was very sympathetic to their predicament: the locally made liquor is really strong, especially for the uninitiated.



The girls:

Left, Reyna Elizabeth Colaj Camey
Center, Vilma Veronica Bonon Coj
Right, Norma Adelaida Calon Chali

GREAT NEWS!

Recently, a study concerning the relationship between poverty and level of education was conducted in Guatemala. The findings showed that students who graduated from high school had a 91.5% chance of joining the ranks of a category labeled “non poor”. For the students who completed primary school, 61% had the same likelihood. Your scholarship donations make a profound difference. Because of the generosity of the donors, last year 8 students graduated from high school. They are breaking the cycle of poverty that has been inherited by the Mayans for centuries.

FEEDING THE MULTITUDES

Anthropologists and archaeologists have wondered for decades how the Maya managed to feed the large number of people living in their large population centers during the first millennium A. D.—the heyday of the Mayan civilization. It was long suspected that Mayan farmers had to have grown more than just corn, beans, and squash to feed the population, and that they had to have engaged in large-scale agricultural practices. However, archaeological or other evidence of the production of crops on a

large-scale basis had been lacking. In the summer of 2007, archaeologists from the University of Colorado made a discovery that may answer the question: How did the Maya feed their large population?

At a buried Maya village called Cerén near San Salvador in El Salvador, the archaeologists found the remains of a field of cultivated manioc that grew 1,400 years ago. This field was covered by a deep layer of ash from the eruption of a nearby volcano around the year 600—ash that had preserved the field underneath and evidence of the crop growing at the time of the eruption.



Manioc

This discovery is the earliest evidence for the domestication of carbohydrate-rich manioc (also called cassava) in the Americas. Anthropologist Payson D. Sheets of the University of Colorado is quoted as saying: “This field was a jackpot of sorts for us. Manioc’s extraordinary productivity may help explain how the Classic Maya at huge sites like Tikal in Guatemala and Copán in Honduras supported such dense populations.”

COMING SOON!

This fall the web site amidiguatemala.org will be launched.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to the AMIDI scholarship fund, please make your check payable to Global Community Works, a local 501 (c) 3 non-profit that manages the funds at no cost. Please send the check to:

Slow Food Sonoma County North
P.O. Box 1494
Healdsburg, CA 95448

THANK YOU!

A REMINDER

We are on Facebook now.

Visit

AMIDI: Mayan Women Who Farm and Weave.

The photo album contains images of the weavers and their fine work.