



## The Marimba

To honor the 2014 donors and the scholarship recipients at the end of another successful school year, the women of AMIDI continued their tradition of hosting an annual celebration. Music is an important part of any Mayan festival; this year's festivity featured the marimba, an instrument known to uplift the mood of the party and inspire dancing.

Much like a xylophone the marimba is a percussion instrument made of bars struck by mallets. The instrument at the AMIDI festival had bars made of wood. The sound is amplified from underneath by wooden, gourd-shaped resonators. Unlike other Mayan instruments such as the flute or harp, the marimba can be played by several people, each using at least 2 mallets.

The marimba has a long history among the Mayan. The xylophone was first developed in central and west Africa. By 1680 it had made its way to Central America. Over time the musicians expanded the range of the marimba by adding a row of sound bars that act like the black keys on a piano. In 1821 the marimba became the national instrument of Guatemala. To this day all Guatemalans, Mayans and non-Mayan alike, love the marimba.



*AMIDI volunteer Dimas (at center) and his son (on the left).*

Dimas Atz Mejia, a dedicated musician, is a school teacher; his wife is an active member of AMIDI. One of two volunteers who, twice a month, gives cultural classes on Sundays to the scholarship students, Dimas is deeply connected to his Mayan culture which he continues to study and explore.

His 7-year-old son, Dimitas, or little Dimas, showed interest in music as a very young child. He has become an accomplished marimba player who joins his father and their friend to play for community celebrations.

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.

## Ofelia, the President

The undeniable leader of AMIDI (The Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development) has been and is Ana Maria Chali. She is a born leader who understands the importance of developing leadership in others as well as giving them the opportunity to apply their leadership skills. That is the reason the AMIDI membership annually elects an entirely new board of directors. This year Maria Ofelia Atz Camey is the president.

Years ago, as a girl, Ofelia showed her courage and determination. Out of economic necessity her family needed her to drop out of 5th grade and work in a tortilla factory in the capitol, Guatemala City, hours away from home. When she was able to return to the village as an 18-year-old, she humbly requested and received a scholarship allowing her to resume her elementary school studies. Now a married 30-year-old and mother, her love of education continues to enhance her life. Ofelia and 15 other AMIDI members are currently studying to become medicinal plant therapists. Over a two year period they will attend classes two days each month in a nearby town; each will create, maintain and make use of a home-based medicinal plant garden. One of Ofelia's favorite therapy teas is a cough remedy made from colored bougainvillea leaves.

Ofelia begins her day at 5:00am when she prepares coffee and cooks beans for the day's meals. Next she feeds the chickens and the pig, her first. She is pleased to own a female pig, now pregnant. After tending the animals Ofelia weaves, an activity she loves. A master weaver, she is drawn to complex patterns and old, traditional styles. She teaches weaving to girls and has developed a small market for her own work.

What these two photos have in common is a child's huipil woven by Ofelia as a gift to the baby's mother. It is an expression of AMIDI's appreciation for the mother's support as creator of the AMIDI website, [www.amidiguatemala.org](http://www.amidiguatemala.org) and graphic designer of the Maltiox newsletters. A huipil this size is the first garment a Mayan baby girl wears.



*Ofelia Atz Camey and the child's huipil she wove.*



*The huipil reaches its destination.*

# Map Making

After experiencing the destructive mudslides generated by Hurricane Agatha in 2010, a number of AMIDI members took classes in disaster preparedness. One assignment was to walk the mountains around their village, identifying areas prone to mudslides and finding routes that might provide a passage to safety in the event of another catastrophic storm. They also assessed the need for reforestation. In the process they learned a new skill, one they had never anticipated learning - map making. It was a stimulating, valuable lesson, one that they wanted to share with their children.

Twice a month on Sundays AMIDI scholarship recipients gather at the community center for classes primarily, but not exclusively, focusing on their Mayan culture. The lessons focus on subjects not studied in their regular school programs; the intention is to deepen the students' connection to their Mayan roots and community.

The AMIDI members saw the advantages of learning map making skills and recognized it can be taught to children of all grade levels. Map making was a chance for students to learn more about where they live and its historical importance. The name Pachay las Lomas means hills of obsidian. Pachay is the home to one of the two obsidian mines used by the ancient Mayans to make tools and adornments. While tilling the soil in the fields, farmers still uncover discarded obsidian pieces that had been worked over a thousand years ago by their ancestors.

With large sheets of paper and markers in hand, the students drew the village roads, foot paths and creeks as well as the important buildings. The student who drew this map included the middle school (Instituto), the church (Iglesia), the agricultural cooperative (Cooperativa), the elementary school (Escuela), and up there in the far left corner is the AMIDI community center, a focal point of life in Pachay las Lomas. This activity was such a success that the maps now hang on the walls inside their community center.



*A map of the village made by a scholarship recipient.*

## Anything is Possible

This year in the March 1st edition of Parade Magazine there is an article entitled Anything is Possible: Meet the Everyday People who are Changing the World - and Learn How You Can Too. The article is noteworthy because Ana Maria Chali, the leader of AMIDI, is featured as one of those “everyday people”.

The readership of Parade Magazine is vast. Tens of millions of people have had the opportunity to read about her “impossible dreams” of gender equality and social justice and how she goes about making change. In a section called tips for newbie world-changers, Ana Maria imparts her wisdom. In moving forward on any project she always asks herself, “What is the right thing to do?” She wisely keeps her focus on the greater good.

The intention of the article is to inspire others to make a difference in ways either large or small.

Here is a link to the article:

<http://parade.com/378875/parade/anything-is-possible/>

*Parade Magazine features Ana Maria Chali*



To receive Maltiox automatically via email, please consider signing up on AMIDI's website, [www.amidiguatemala.org](http://www.amidiguatemala.org).

It's easy!

We would appreciate it greatly; and of course thank you for your continued interest in this remarkable group of women.

### To Make a Donation

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to the AMIDI scholarship fund, please make your check payable to Slow Food Sonoma County North, and mail it to the following address:

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

**Thank you!**

Should you want to make a donation via Paypal, please visit [www.amidiguatemala.org](http://www.amidiguatemala.org).