



Barbara, the Newest Scholarship Recipient

Barbara Noemi Calan Chali turned six years old last year on December 4th. She has been looking forward to this birthday because it means she can start school this month. Her older sister, Rosy Adriana – an 11th-grader studying to become a primary school teacher – is Barbara’s personal, pre-school tutor. Working without pencil, paper, or books (or an iPad), the sisters sit on the smoothly packed soil outside their adobe home and study. They use carefully selected stones to practice math and sturdy twigs to engrave letters of the alphabet in the red soil.



When asked about her dreams, Barbara, in her pixie-like manner, unabashedly states that she would like to win the honor of representing AMIDI as their elementary school queen. Each year a queen is selected based on the following requirements. She must speak her native language, Kakchiquel, and compose and deliver a speech to all of the AMIDI members and their families, a gathering of hundreds. The topic: what she plans to do to improve the future of her community. At the same ceremony, she must perform a traditional blessing and dance. Barbara has her heart set on being the elementary school queen, and she has the determination and spunk to win the title.

Her mother, Ester – past president of AMIDI, master weaver, and the mother of five daughters – is beginning to teach Barbara the art of backstrap weaving. Barbara helped some, but mainly watched as her mother created the blouse, *huipil*, that she is wearing in the photograph. Using traditional patterns, Ester wove the garment for a special occasion. After this photo was taken, Barbara scampered off to the local church to attend the wedding of her oldest sister, Norma, who was one of the first high school graduates supported by our scholarship program.

Barbara represents the future for Pachay – one that embraces education, keeps her native language alive, and creates a better community.

Barbara Noemi Calan Chali outside of the Community Center.

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.

Being on the AMIDI Board of Directors



AMIDI board member Maria Justina Bonon Atz

Maria Justina Bonon Atz serves on the AMIDI board of directors. In that role she helps guide the scholarship program by participating in the selection of recipients, tracking their grades, and setting up tutorial sessions when students need additional help. She also assists in developing the adult education classes and is a student herself. She participated in the coffee course and attends other classes on farming. As a result her coffee trees are thriving and she increased the diversity of her crops by planting lemons and oranges. She is already harvesting vitamin rich lemons from her young trees.

Like all of the AMIDI members Maria Justina is dedicated to maintaining traditional Mayan cultural practices. She masterfully weaves for her own use and for the collectors' market. When presented with a photograph of a weaving style that was once popular in her region, but no longer woven, Maria Justina was intrigued. She understood the mathematics of the pattern, but creating raw edges of cut thread on the face of the weaving represented a new, unfamiliar method. She calculated, experimented, and mastered the technique (see detail). In the spirit of generosity that is also a traditional value in Mayan culture, Maria Justina gave the weaving as a gift to the researcher who discovered the historic style.



The revival of an old weaving technique.

Saying No to GMO

In Guatemala the rainy season traditionally extends from May until November with rain falling almost every day, reliably irrigating the crops. Last year a severe drought, at times lasting many weeks, decimated the corn crop. The consequences are dire because corn is the mainstay of the Mayan diet. The AMIDI members lost the corn to feed their families until the next harvest and their seed to plant for the upcoming growing season. They face further hardship because the scarcity of corn in Guatemala has driven up the price.

The proactive AMIDI women explored ways to address this crucial issue. They spoke with agricultural experts including one who suggested they use genetically modified seeds. They all passionately agreed that they are determined to plant the seed that has been cultivated by their grandparents, their grandparents' grandparents, and their grandparents' grandparents' grandparents. This May they will plant a trial crop of traditional corn seed, not from Pachay las Lomas (their home), but from nearby Mixco, an arid region of Guatemala where the seed has adapted to drier conditions over the centuries.

An AMIDI member prepares the corn dough, masa, to make tortillas that are eaten with every meal.



At the 2014 annual celebration honoring the scholarship recipients, a group of students enjoy a skit performed by fellow classmates about conserving natural resources. The students and their mothers are wearing traditional huipiles and ikat skirts tied with hand-loomed belts.

Global Community Works: Thank You and Farewell

For many years now Global Community Works (GCW) has been a supporter of AMIDI, processing your tax-deductible donations and giving generously themselves. They provided funds to build a water delivery system connecting the homes in the village with a spring located near the top of a mountain above Pachay las Lomas. When the mudslides from Hurricane Agatha upended some of the water pipes, GCW paid for the necessary repairs. They also funded the construction of the community center; this well-used venue for meetings, classes, and celebrations is surrounded by AMIDI's plant nursery, beehives, medicinal plants, and integrated orchard of fruit and coffee trees.

With a mixture of appreciation and sadness, we say goodbye to Global Community Works. After much reflection the organization has decided to dissolve as a non-profit. As a parting gift GCW donated a whopping \$20,000 for projects to benefit AMIDI members over the next three years. Discussions are underway as to how best to use the funds. Stay tuned. From now on Slow Food Sonoma County North, a 501c3 involved in the AMIDI project for 12 years, will process your tax deductible donations. Thank you, Slow Food and GCW.

Inaugurating the Community Center, built with funds from GCW.



Accounting

In 2014 we raised \$13,265 for the women and children of AMIDI. In addition Global Community Works donated \$20,000 that will be used over a period of three years for new projects.

Newsletter

The Maltiox newsletter is written and produced by Marilee Wingert, Barbara Bowman, Bill Bowman, and Anya Glenn. No donations to AMIDI are used to fund this newsletter.

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.