



## AMIDI's Queens

In late November 2015, AMIDI held their annual celebration honoring the 35 scholarship recipients and the generous donors who make those scholarships possible. As always, one of the highlights of the festivity was the crowning of the three queens: three female students who embody the mission of AMIDI.

Fatima Maribel Atz Atz, age 8, was chosen primary school queen. She won the competition because of her native language ability and the way in which her speech, appearance, and personhood reflects the values of her culture. She appreciates her scholarship in a way that is unusual for a child her age. Seeing the long break before the beginning of the new school year, Fatima decided to spend part of each day reviewing what she learned as a first-grader. She wakes up at 4:00 AM with her mother to allow time to study and help with family chores. She reads and rereads all her school materials; her greatest scholastic interest lies with math. As she goes about her day, she likes to create and solve math problems in her head. Music and dancing are also among her favorite activities. Her dream is to become a teacher of young children.

Fatima's mother, Maria Ofelia Atz Camey, is currently president of AMIDI, and she is imparting to her daughter the importance of having a voice and serving her community. Maria Ofelia is one of the finest AMIDI weavers, and she has started teaching Fatima this time honored art. As with all of her other studies, Fatima is an interested, skillful student.

*Queen Fatima Maribel Atz Atz*



Matiox, pronounced ma-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.



The newly chosen queens kneel at their coronation. In the case of Fatima Maribel, she is crowned in a series of steps. First, her braids, the traditional hair style for girls and women alike, are undone by the outgoing queen standing behind her. In turn, the outgoing queen unbraids her own hair, removing her sash-crown and weaving it into Fatima Maribel's hair. It is the dream of every young, female scholarship student to wear the crown. Fatima Maribel shows her respect for the history of her people by wearing a huipil (blouse) hand-woven by her mother in a pattern used in the early 20th century.

## Obsidian

In the photograph of Fatima she is wearing a necklace of jade beads that her family found in their cornfield over a period of many years. Although veins of jade do not exist in Pachay las Lomas, the home of AMIDI, the beads confirm that ancient Mayans wearing jade decorations made the long trek here, not for jade, but for the high quality and abundance of obsidian. The name Pachay las Lomas means “the hills of obsidian,” and evidence is obvious; the rough, dirt road that leads to the village is embedded with the volcanic rock.

Because the stone is heavy to carry, the ancient Mayans worked it into tools, jewelry, and artifacts *in situ*. Today, as they work the field, Fatima's family members find shards of chipped obsidian that were discarded because they were not deemed fine enough to use or trade. As she works the field, Fatima's mother watches for obsidian, because it connects to her cultural roots and it is also a hazard – easily cutting skin. She wants the soil to be safe for young Fatima who enjoys helping her grandfather plant, cultivate, and harvest in their field.

Today obsidian holds importance to the Mayans. The weavers use it to cut their thread. Men use thin stones to shave and thicker ones as machetes. Every Mayan traditional healer carries three tiny blades in a pouch because obsidian has healing properties and is a spiritual force of positive energy and abundance.



*An ancient Mayan discarded this core after chipping blades from its surface. It was found in an AMIDI farmer's field.*



## Reflecting Upon and Preserving the Past

Last year, in an effort to preserve and share their history, AMIDI members attended a course on recounting stories and memories passed to them through generations. The teacher prompted the students with suggested topics and with historically documented information. The discussion went from the mundane to the esoteric - from diet to how to communicate spiritually with plants and animals.

The collection of stories was recorded on paper and made into a book presented by AMIDI scholarship recipients to the local town's mayor. The women hope that others, particularly the youth, will read the stories and strengthen the connection to their rich cultural heritage.

At the annual scholarship celebration, one of the course members gave an inspired speech about lost social customs. She recounted a forgotten tradition: in times past when people met one another as they were out walking, manners dictated that they stop, that the men remove their hats, that they bow to one another, and that they carry on a short conversation before going their way.

To reinforce the theme of reflecting on the past, one of the donors gave the AMIDI weavers a book about the history of weaving: Maya Textiles of Guatemala by Margot Blum Schevill, a foremost Mayan weaving expert. This beautifully illustrated book features collections of exquisite, historic weavings and includes descriptions of fiber dyeing processes and weaving techniques. The book has an anthropological orientation describing the social and historical influences and pressures impacting Mayan culture.

When the book's author learned that her work had been given to the AMIDI weavers, she was thrilled. From the beginning of her project, she wanted her research to find its way to the hands of Mayan weavers. The book was warmly received; a small group of weavers gathered closely together, reverently thumbing through the book. Their excitement grew when they came across the historic photos of old weavings from their highland area.



*As in the distant past AMIDI members still carry heavy loads on their heads. In this case the basket contains dough to make hundreds of corn tortillas for the celebration.*

## Other News

Two AMIDI members have been chosen to take a government sponsored course to become midwives. At the end of their studies they will be presented with medical equipment and a license certifying their expertise. Pregnant women much prefer giving birth (*giving light* as they say) at home rather than in hospitals.

Ana Maria Chali, the founder of AMIDI, has been honored yet again for her role as an enlightened leader. She is now a member of a council called the National Project for Holistic Development that is focusing on the needs of the Kakchiquel-speaking nation to which the AMIDI members belong. The vision for the region around Pachay las Lomas is big. On their wish list is a garbage-processing plant, a hydroelectric facility, reforestation, a program to keep the springs and rivers clean, and more. Some of the council participants are powerhouses; members include the national government's ministers of the environment, transportation/communication, education, health, energy/mines, agriculture, and rural development. When she attends the meetings, Ana Maria usually takes another AMIDI member or a high school graduate (from our scholarship program) with her in order to expose them to a larger stage.

The AMIDI members continue to take classes in best practices for the cultivation and harvesting of coffee. Each month an expert from the National Coffee Institute travels to Pachay las Lomas to teach in the AMIDI community center. As a result the women have created a successful coffee seedling project. At the appropriate time the young trees will be distributed among members. All 50 members attend this course; they not only enjoy drinking high quality coffee but the beans are an important cash crop for the village families.



*AMIDI members inspect a healthy young coffee tree.*

### Accounting

Fundraising in 2015 was successful due to the generosity of the donors who contributed a total of \$13,468.00. These scholarship funds support children's and adult education.

Thank You!

The Matiox 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.

Visit Facebook under AMIDI: Mayan Women Who Farm and Weave.

### 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, 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

Or visit [www.amidiguatemala.org](http://www.amidiguatemala.org) to donate via Paypal.