

MALTIOX

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

Number 6

Winter 2011

A DREAM COME TRUE

contributed by Marilee Wingert

Last December at Pachay las Lomas, during the annual celebration honoring the donors and scholarship recipients, a young, familiar face from the past appeared in the crowd. Maria Soledad Chali Colaj was among the first students to receive support from our scholarship program in 2003. Maria's mother, one of the founders of AMIDI, is a model of leadership who has formed and inspired her daughter's goals in life. Maria has a keen drive to learn fueled by a strong work ethic. When her family's economic constraints left the future of Maria's education in doubt, we were able to offer scholarship assistance.

Six days after graduating from high school in 2006, Maria began working as a bookkeeper for the Association of Victims from the Conflict, a group that provides DNA testing to identify the remains of civil war victims as well as counseling for the war's survivors. Now the chief bookkeeper for the Association, she has just enrolled in a university program with the goal of earning a masters degree in business administration. Doing so well financially, she is able to manage her university expenses on her own. She has married and has a young son for whom she cares, while also serving her community as a mental health worker.

Maria came to our December celebration because she wanted the donors to know that she is living the bright future that, as a child, she didn't dare to dream. She said there are no words to express the gratitude she feels for the faith, trust, and generosity of the donors. In response, I told her that her story is a dream come true for the donors as well.



Maria Soledad Chali Colaj in 2003 as a scholarship recipient.

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.



Stephanie Chiacos and Aletha Soulé strolling with new friends.



Carrie Brown learning about a Mayan herb.



Phyllis Baldenhofer and Elissa Rubin-Mahon enjoying the village.



Barbara Bowman and Marilee Wingert admiring a gift presented to Marilee.

A VISIT TO PACHAY LAS LOMAS

Every year in early December, members of AMIDI, the Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development, set aside a weekend to celebrate the successes of the scholarship students and various projects, as well as to honor the donors. On a Saturday morning, eight of us (Phyllis Baldenhofer, Barbara Bowman, Carrie Brown, Stephanie Chiacos, Elissa Rubin-Mahon, Aletha Soulé, plus Steve and Marilee Wingert) traveled by van to remote Pachay las Lomas, fording a river where tropical storm Agatha had wiped out the bridge. We arrived at the AMIDI Community Center and were immediately greeted with a traditional welcome, one punctuated with a series of firecrackers. Hugs, which are not traditional, followed as an expression of the women's affection toward us. In turn, we presented the AMIDI members with a scholarship check for \$9,525. Below are Aletha Soulé's thoughts about the experience.

"After the spring mudslides, I cringed to think the village would be faced with reclaiming their lives from the mud, then make preparations for our visit! Ana Maria insisted. And as I sat transfixed during the village celebration, I witnessed her wise leadership at work.

The village celebration allowed the community to come together after an unspeakably difficult year. What better way to affirm what had been accomplished?! Food for the celebration was prepared, and shared in the community center. Young Mayan queens were crowned. The hard work of scholarship students was acknowledged, and they were able to thank their patrons. AMIDI weavings destined for the U.S. were proudly displayed, speeches were made, music played, and everyone danced—even the Virginia Reel.

All 40 AMIDI members and their families attended the celebration. Some people had walked for hours to get there. They were able to hear the young queens speak of the importance of education, Mayan culture, family, health, and women's rights. The speeches were a potent mix of Mayan cultural, religious, and civic ideals, too dangerous to express not very long ago.

When Ana Maria spoke, it was the quiet climax of the day. Her message was clear, careful, buoyant, but strong, and respectful. She spoke of the importance of remaining positive. Yes, it sounds simple but she had distilled the very essence of what needed to be said on that day. I understand completely why she was 'called' to be a leader. The message has to be simple, and at times attainable. Life in Pachay las Lomas is difficult enough."

MAYA TEXTILES

contributed by Barbara Bowman

Guatemalan backstrap weaving is one of the most vibrant ancient craft traditions in the world. It has survived for centuries, and over time the region around Pachay las Lomas has been an important weaving center. Nineteenth century photographs show the weavers sitting on the ground, working outdoors in the shade—just as the AMIDI weavers do today.

In her comprehensive book, *Maya Textiles of Guatemala*, Margot Blum Schevill chronicles the Eisen collection (Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley) which includes *huipiles* (blouses) from San Martin Jilotepeque, a municipality very close to the village of Pachay. The 100-year-old San Martin *huipiles* and modern day *huipiles* that the AMIDI women wear have prominent similarities. Both incorporate dominant, horizontal bands of geometric design, usually zigzags or chevrons. These are called *pechos*, or breast bands.

Wanting to know more about the weavings, Marilee Wingert and I paid a visit to Margot Schevill in Berkeley. We took contemporary AMIDI weavings for her to evaluate. Margot silently and carefully inspected some of the weavings as only an expert could. When her head finally came up, she emphatically declared them to be “very fine work”. Especially interested in their *pasadita* technique (weaving little passageways with the weft), Margot wants examples for her collection. Although historic Maya textiles have been her focus, she is turning her attention to current Guatemalan weaving trends and plans to visit the AMIDI weavers on her next trip. A renowned expert on Maya and Mesoamerican textiles, Margot recently edited the Caribbean and Latin America volume of Oxford University’s *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*.

This photograph of Leticia Castro and her child shows the use of horizontal bands of geometric design called *pechos* (breast bands). Leticia is a weaver and a member of AMIDI.



AMIDI WEAVINGS

contributed by Marilee Wingert

Many months ago, Barbara Bowman, Carrie Brown, Stephanie Chiacos, Lisa Hunter, and Marilee Wingert gathered together in the Jimtown Store and developed an order for over 350 backstrap loom weavings in anticipation of our December weaving sale. Twenty-three AMIDI weavers took to their backstrap looms and produced napkins, placemats, table runners, guest towels, and “pockets” that were later stitched on bistro aprons designed by Stephanie. We prescribed some of the colors and designs but left plenty of room for the weavers’ own creative processes to unfold. All items were offered at the December sale held at the home of Phyllis and Chris Baldenhofer.



Ester Chali presenting the weavings for our sale.

Pricing AMIDI weaving items is challenging. What should determine the price? Hours worked? Beauty? Skill? Weaving is often coupled with child care and, therefore, goes in the category of free time rather than work. When asked how long it takes to complete a weaving, the weavers just don’t know because tracking free time is not a part of their mindset. After considerable discussion, a committee of AMIDI members agreed—by consensus—on the pricing that theoretically reflects hours spent at the loom. Based on what each weaver contributes, she is assigned a percentage of the total earned from the sale of all items.

To date, the weaving profits from the December shipment amount to \$5,338. The weavers are deeply appreciative; the per item return from our sale is significantly higher than the earnings offered by the National Textile Museum where AMIDI weavings are sold in an upscale gift shop.

It’s not too late to own a weaving as some are still available. Should you be interested in making a purchase, please contact Marilee Wingert at marileewingert@earthlink.net for more information.

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.