

MALTIOX

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

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JOURNEY OF THE NOBLE HEART

When Ana Maria Chalí Calán, the leader of the Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development (AMIDI), was coming to the end of her recent 10-day trip to Northern California, she reflected. Talking about the gifts of knowledge given so generously by so many and pointing at her ever-growing mound of gifts received, she concluded that “Americans have noble hearts”.

The educational focus of her trip was beekeeping. At AMIDI’s suggestion, our scholarship program provided funds for 50 AMIDI members to attend a course on honey bees as a source of nutrition and income. Early in her trip to Sonoma County, Ana Maria visited a garden designed specifically to attract pollinators. As she watched nectar collection by countless bees from various species, she concluded that “it is not enough to provide a hive for the bees. They need us to collaborate



Ana Maria watching bees at work. Photograph taken at Melissa Garden.

with them.” She pledged not only to identify and propagate bee-attracting plants in the Guatemala Highlands but also to bring her new awareness to the AMIDI women. Farmers and gardeners gave her seeds of flowering plants that attract bees.



David Bassing teaches Ana Maria how to safely use a bee smoker.

Various beekeepers gave Ana Maria hands-on experiences. She learned how to inspect the activity inside the hive without opening it and with minimum disturbance of the bees. Hives constructed on a base with a drawer allow beekeepers to study the collective debris of the hive that gives important information about the health of the bees, the size of the hive, and the location of the queen bee. She was honored to eat honey straight from the hive and to see a queen bee at work. Into her suitcase went a hive drawer that can be reproduced by Guatemalan carpenters, a smoker for safely working around bees, and a special tool to open the hive to extract the honey.

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.

Every night Ana Maria sat in her room and wrote down what she had learned that day. Some nights she was up late writing about how to prune and care for peach trees, how to make medicinal salves using beeswax, how to make beeswax candles, how to extract honey using the sun, how to gently turn soil with a minimum of disturbance to its organisms, and on and on. When she had free time during the day, she took sewing lessons to develop and share a skill that could lead to the expansion of AMIDI's weaving product line. Another gift, a portable Singer sewing machine, went into her carry-on luggage.

Her suitcases got more interesting by the day as they filled with gifts: educational toys for children, sewing notions including an iron, honey, reading glasses, silk weaving thread, beeswax candles, embroidery thread, peacock feathers to be used during Mayan spiritual ceremonies, green (her favorite color, symbolic of Mother Nature) polka dot rubber farm boots, and so much more. She would have loved to have taken the case of delicious ripe, organic peaches home, but wisdom won out and, instead, she enjoyed sharing and eating them here.

With her goal of improving economic opportunities for AMIDI members, Ana Maria made some interesting contacts that could bear fruit in the future. She met with a San Francisco-based coffee buyer who already purchases coffee from Guatemala. He is interested in exploring the possibility of a business relationship with AMIDI and its production of high elevation coffee. In addition she met with the curator of the exhibition hall in the historic Mills Building located in San Francisco's financial district. Later this year AMIDI weavings will be showcased there for public viewing. Hopefully this will lead to market development.

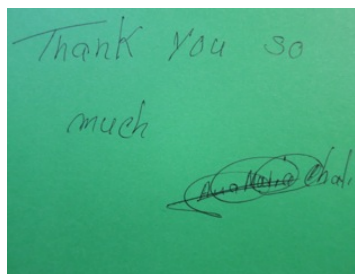


Ana Maria in front of the Mills Building, Montgomery Street.



Stephanie Chiacos teaches Ana Maria to sew an apron.

Ana Maria has learned four words in English and would like to express them here. "Thank you so much" to everyone who graciously made her trip so successful.



Mil gracias goes to everyone on the following list. The names are ordered chronologically according to Ana Maria's itinerary.

- Slow Harvest
- Jimtown Store, Carrie Brown
- Seam Stress, Stephanie Chiacos & Phyllis Baldenhofer
- The Melissa Garden
- Oak Hill Farm
- The Chicas
- Hosts Debbie & Peter Oliver
- Bee Garden
- Peterson's Farm
- Hosts Lia & Noemi Huber
- Ritual Coffee Roasters
- Artsource
- Community & Family Service Agency
- Quilter Lynda Chenoweth
- Dry Creek Peach & Produce
- Preston Farm & Winery
- Leadership Slow Food Sonoma County North
- Hosts Barbara & Bill Bowman
- Green String Farm
- Pilates Instructor Betsy Robinson
- Hosts Marilee & Steve Wingert



Thank you to generous Slow Food Sonoma County North for buying Ana Maria's airplane ticket and making it possible for her to enjoy such a meaningful visit.

Ana Maria Chalí Calán on Weaving

In addition to being a founder of AMIDI, a midwife and a leader recognized by Guatemala's Mayan communities, Ana Maria Chalí Calán is a master of the backstrap loom. Some of you have her weavings—solid colored napkins in cream, slate blue and forest green and intricately patterned table runners woven in her favorite deep tones.

During her summer visit to Sonoma County, we talked about the importance of weaving in her life. Here are tender musings, spoken from her heart.

Weaving brings joy. The pleasure begins with a trip to the market and selection of thread. Working at the loom you are in a joyful state, concentrating on your art. You express your spirit through color, pattern, and technique.

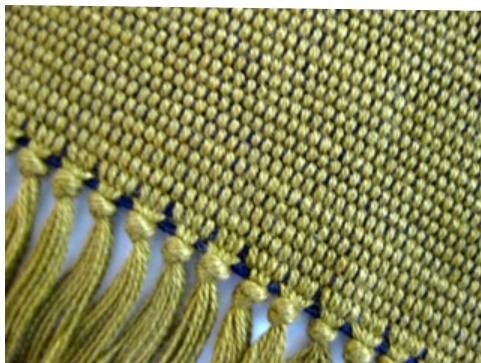


Weaving is meditation. You leave your daily life behind. Things that are unforgettable come to you.

Weaving is communication with nature. You feel in contact with everything you can see. Weaving is gentle and produces a feeling of well being. It is a process, not a goal.



There is comfort in connecting to the Mayan past and with other weavers. Passionate about their art, Ana Maria and the women of AMIDI like to spend at least 30 minutes to an hour weaving daily. "I listen to religious or marimba music and weave to the tempo of the song," says Ana Maria.



Weaving sales provide income to the women, many of whom are subsistence farmers and single heads of household. Of the AMIDI members, 20 are master weavers, and the others are improving their skills as they recognize the market we are developing for their work. Ana Maria assigns the weavers and checks their quality by holding the work up to the sun, looking for tautness, consistency, and finish.

Each weaving represents hours of experience and pleasure. A customer who recently purchased a set of AMIDI weavings wrote, "The placemats and napkins are beautiful . . . the colors exquisite and the love with which they were woven is felt! They are now a part of my life and family."

So many symbols, spells, sayings, stars and conjectures are warped in their cloth.
Miguel Angel Asturias of Guatemala, Nobel Prize in Literature, 1967, on Mayan weaving.



AMIDI Meets Gandhi

Since some time in 2010, a canvas sign has been hanging on one of the turquoise walls inside the AMIDI community center. It stands out because it is large, prominently placed, and compelling. It says:

“Struggling for Gender Equality, Social Justice, and Peace

Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development (AMIDI)

Don't Forget, Don't Be Silent”

Clearly this is AMIDI's mission statement.

A slogan on the wall is a written reminder, but actions speak louder than words. Believing in action, the leadership of AMIDI organized a march from the village into town on the last International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. In solidarity with the women of the world, they marched carrying a banner that read in bold capital letters: FOR OUR RIGHTS, A LIFE WITHOUT VIOLENCE.

AMIDI members are strong and courageous. In Guatemala, indigenous women are among the most downtrodden. During the recent civil war, the government fought free expression with bullets.

AMIDI's children are living in a brighter world. Scholarship students joined the march, an educational activity as important as any learned in the classroom. AMIDI's message is lucid. Have a voice. Stand up for your rights.

In our ten-year relationship with the members of AMIDI, they have experienced many successes, but the poverty that has been created over centuries cannot be alleviated in a decade. The racial discrimination in Guatemala's male dominated society is something that the women of AMIDI face everyday. Come the fundraising season later this year, we will continue to seek donations for scholarships and also for bee-keeping equipment and bees. Only education and self-sufficiency can alleviate the poverty faced by AMIDI members and their families.

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!

AMIDI Weavings for Sale

Should you be interested in buying a beautiful hand-woven weaving for yourself or for a gift, there are still many available in a variety of sizes, styles, and colors. If you would like to make a special order, that can be arranged too. Contact Phyllis Baldenhofer at pbaldenhofer@att.net or Marilee Wingert at marileewingert@earthlink.net for more information.

Also visit www.amidiguatemala.org and Facebook under AMIDI: Mayan Women Who Farm and Weave.