



How Marta Lidia Beat the Odds

Motivated students like Marta Lidia Atz Castro, a recent high school graduate, work to help pay for their education. In Marta's case she worked five full days a week as a domestic employee. Her daily salary, the standard for women, was \$5.50. All day Saturday she attended a high school that is located one hour away by bus. Marta dedicated the rest of her time to studying and doing chores at home. At times it was a struggle. To her credit she received the highest grade point average of any of the AMIDI high school students, and she served with poise as the mistress of ceremonies for the annual celebration to honor the donors and the students. Marta is currently taking a leadership training course and is learning public speaking in order to represent her community.

In light of data recently collected by the Guatemalan Ministry of Education, it is significant that our scholarship recipients persevere and succeed. The nationwide findings are disturbing. There is a scarcity of public middle and high schools. Due to ineffectual implementation, the intercultural/bilingual program to increase enrollment of indigenous children has had limited impact. Low parental support for education, especially for girls, is common among Mayans. The Mayan population ranks

lowest in the number of students who graduate from primary school in Guatemala.

Students in our program beat the odds because the AMIDI Scholarship Committee selects students based on their interest in education, their ability to succeed, and the readiness of their parents to lend support - both morally and financially. None of the students receive full scholarships.

High school graduate Marta Lidia Atz Castro, on the left, poses with her family at the annual celebration.



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.

More Successes!

Our first college graduate, Mayra Gricelda Jacobo Chali de Atz, joined a group of other teachers to participate in a teachers' strike to create a government funded, light meal program in every public primary school in the country. They demonstrated in Puerto Quetzal, the port town on the Pacific Ocean that is located a long way from home, both geographically and culturally. Even though the demonstrators got tear gassed, they persevered and the students got their meals. Mayra is now the president of the AMIDI Board of Directors.

A local NGO held a workshop on grafting coffee for the AMIDI members. Wanting to engage the younger generation in new cultivation techniques, they invited eight of the scholarship recipients to participate. The students were pleased that all of their grafts were successful.

Five of the scholarship students participated in a 10-day leadership training program.

Ana Maria Chali Calan, the leader of AMIDI, is on the Board of Directors of ACECSA, a Guatemalan

NGO that focuses on health issues of the indigenous population. One week each month she travels to other areas of the country to monitor and evaluate their programs and to give talks on a wide variety of topics - from the use of medicinal plants to the importance of avoiding the use of plastic bags. Ana Maria has recently been given the position of national President of ACESA.

Every Tuesday two of the AMIDI members, Rosalina Atz Cojol and Erlinda Lopez, go to the coffee coop in the nearby town, San Martin Jilotepeque, where they learn to cup coffee. Cupping is a practice of observing the tastes and aroma of brewed coffee. Their goal is to improve the quality of the AMIDI coffee to such an extent that the members are able to enter into the specialty market on an international scale.

Rosalina Atz Cojol is currently taking classes in coffee cupping. She is holding placemats that she designed and wove on a back strap loom.



Built Upon Tradition

Although drums have been a part of the Mayan's musical heritage for centuries, the snare drums in the photo are something new. Instead of a slow classic drum beat, they produce an expressive staccato sound. In other years, when guests arrived by car at the annual celebration to honor the students and donors, they were welcomed with a string of ear-popping firecrackers. What a delightful surprise this year to be accompanied up the steep dirt path to the fiesta by drummer-girls, taking their charge very seriously and playing in robust syncopation.

Students such as Bergelina Sofia Calan Chali, age 13, hold to tradition by wearing their handwoven blouses; but the necklines, both for the students and their mothers, have changed drastically in the last year. Previously the uncut necklines were finished with colorful ribbon, often made of velvet. Now weavers trim them with beads and in some cases, as in the photo, they cut the hand woven fabric for an open-work effect.



At the annual celebration students welcome the guests with the unique sound of snare drums.



Scholarship student Bergelina Sofia Calan Chali wears the latest style neckline on her handwoven blouse.

Guatemalan Jade

When AMIDI farmers work the soil in their fields, they occasionally uncover jade beads carved by their ancient ancestors. These beads become family heirlooms.

Over a thousand years ago Mayan craftsmen carved jade into a variety of objects such as vessels, jewelry, figurines, teeth inlays, tools, masks, and mosaic pieces for decorating belts and chest coverings. In the absence of metal, artisans worked using tools made of jade along with string saws for cutting and carving, leather for polishing, and bone and wood for drilling holes.

Exquisite jade artifacts have been discovered in elite burial sites where they served as personal adornments and items to accompany the deceased into the afterlife. The photo represents a museum quality replica of a Mayan king's funeral mask found in a burial site. Jade beads were placed inside the king's mouth as well as inside his mask. Controversy surrounds the exact meaning of the bead; however, all agree that it held deep spiritual significance for the ancient Mayans who believed that jade, with its dense and enduring qualities, represented eternity. Green, the most common color of jade, was associated with water and crops, especially corn.



A replica of a royal funeral mask from the Classic Period

Learn More About AMIDI

Should you prefer to receive an electronic version of Matiox, please sign up at www.amidiguatemala.org.

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

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.

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 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 to donate via Paypal.