



A Reward for Antonieta and Her Community



In 2005 Antonieta Colaj Camey finished high school, the first of our scholarship recipients to graduate. She loved being a student and thinking about how her education could lead her to helping others. Motivated by her success and determination to serve, she worked, saved, and was able to attend the university where she ultimately earned a master's degree in social work. Antonieta is now married, the mother of school-aged children, and a social worker at a local convalescence hospital. She lives in the tight-knit, supportive community where she was born, a place where she has always thrived.

She wove the message in the photo at the end of the Guatemalan school year, in December of 2005. It says, "M. Antonieta Colaj Camey thanks the donors that helped her economically from 2003 to 2005. May God bless them." Along with her numerous achievements, she is a master weaver.

Antonieta Colaj Camey wove this thank you note to the donors.

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.

A Cistern with Bathrooms and More



(Left) Each AMIDI member pledged two to three days of unskilled labor. (Above) The cistern with two rooms below.

For many years the AMIDI women dreamed of having a cistern to store water for their various agricultural projects. Last year they purchased a spring high on the mountainside and laid pipes to deliver the water to their land downhill. The water flowed, but they had no catchment system. They had to hand-carry water to irrigate their crops.

One of our donors volunteered to fund a cistern project, and on September 3rd construction began. Because of the donor's generous gift, the AMIDI members were able to expand the project to include a room with two shower stalls and another with two flushing toilets, referred to as *formales* or formal toilets. With the help of gravity, the showers have the best water pressure in the village. The flushing toilets are a rare luxury in rural Guatemala.

As with all AMIDI projects, each member pledged two to three days of unskilled labor. When the building was completed, there were leftover building materials. Never letting anything go to waste, the women focused on two other dreams - to have a well built chicken coop at the AMIDI Community Center and to build some permanent, cement block terraces in their mountainside plant nursery. They took a proposal for additional materials to the municipal government and received the necessary funds. The cistern, bathrooms, chicken coop, and terraces were all completed in 2018.

Accounting

Fundraising in 2018 was successful, thanks to the generosity of the donors. The donations totaled \$21,950 including \$3,000 for the cistern complex. The AMIDI women and their families send their heartfelt gratitude.

The Mayan Palette and Global Trade

When a Mayan begins a new weaving, her first thoughts revolve around color selection. She looks to the vibrant Mayan palette, and the design emerges spontaneously as she begins to weave.

Sixteenth century diaries of Spanish Conquistadors describe the brilliant, colorful dress worn by the Mayans. In pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, the Mayans were the dye masters, sourcing raw materials from plants, animals, and minerals.

Of particular interest to the invaders was cochineal, a dye derived from insects growing on Prickly Pear cactus. Collected, sun-dried, crushed into powder, and mixed with water, the dye produces intense colors ranging from red to orange to purple, depending on the mordant used. At the time of the conquest, European dyers produced a weak, red pigment through a difficult, costly process. When Cortez discovered cochineal, it became extremely valuable to the Spanish throne, almost as prized as gold and silver. They traded the dye throughout Europe where bright red fabric, especially silk, was coveted by royalty, Catholic clergy, and tapestry weavers. Some commentators say that Mayan cochineal changed Europe from drab to colorful.

The Spanish also traded cochineal to Asia via the Manila Galleons. Using the Philippines as a base, galleons delivered items from Central America to trade for Chinese luxury goods.

By the late 1800s, European-produced synthetic dyes expanded the palettes of weavers, world-wide. The village weavers of Guatemala were attracted to the array of colors. The yarns are color-fast and resist fading from repeated, vigorous washings in stream beds. Today there are a few artisan farmers in Guatemala and Mexico who grow Prickly Pear cactus and produce cochineal. Except for a small number of purists, the vast majority of weavers use synthetically dyed yarns in their masterful work.



An AMIDI scholarship recipient in her bright traditional colors.

The Traveling Television

The AMIDI members have inaugurated a new educational program for the youth, ages 12 to 24. They describe it as *fuerte*, meaning that it is strong and has the potential for a big impact. On a weekly basis, five action-oriented discussion groups with five to six participants each explore pertinent topics such as human rights and how to defend them, food security, self-esteem, and how to create a business.

The local elementary school teacher and president of AMIDI, Mayra Gricelda Jacobo Chali de Atz, is the facilitator. A donor provides a salary for Mayra, classroom supplies such as paper and pens, 25 videos on the various discussion topics, and a television/VCR unit.

For those who live nearby, Mayra holds the gatherings in the AMIDI Community Center. For those who live further away, she hikes up and down the steep mountainside, with television apparatus in hand, to locations convenient for the students. The classes have been so successful that the founder of AMIDI, Ana Maria Chali, offers the same sessions, as adult education, to the AMIDI members.



Mayra Gricelda Jacobo Chali de Atz, the AMIDI President, a teacher, a drummer and the woman who hand-carries a TV up and down the mountainside for her students.

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.