

Maya Educational Foundation

Providing educational opportunities for the Maya



Report to Contributors

2005

"I was impressed by the importance of the projects MEF supports... I believe that our visits as MEF staff and board members are important to encourage MEF project participants in both Chiapas and Guatemala not to give up on their worthy goals. The effects of persistent poverty, injustice and racism wear people down, making their achievements even more remarkable. Yet, the cultural revitalization movement... is vibrant and spreading. The MEF projects are leaders in this movement."

From Board Member, Christine Eber after her visit to some MEF programs in July 2005

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Oxlajuj B'atz Completes Second Year of Workshops for Women Weavers

Information supplied by Brenda Rosenbaum, MEF board vice president

OXLAJUJ B'ATZ, a project of Mayan Hands - Maya Traditions, offers workshops to 300 impoverished Maya weavers in 12 Guatemalan highland communities. Their purpose is to teach women new skills that will help them succeed in their work and improve the quality of their lives, improve their physical and mental health, increase their income, and learn to work cooperatively. The long-term goal of Oxlajuj B'atz is to create a resource center for women weavers and artisans in the Guatemalan Highlands.

Because women in remote communities cannot afford doctors or Western medicines, workshops on the use of traditional medicinal herbs have been offered. Also this year, for the first time in their lives, 130 women received thorough medical exams. Workshops on self-esteem, gender and domestic

violence are creating an awareness of the value of every person, the important role of women in family and community, and the fact that they do not have to tolerate any kind of violence against themselves or their children.

As a way to generate additional income, 35 women have learned the new skill of pine-needle basketry. Women from each village are attending a four-month course to learn to use sewing machines. They will soon be able to sew the woven cloth produced in their villages into products for export, a task previously performed outside their communities.



A motivational exercise before a herbal medicine workshop at Oxlajuj B'atz, Panajachel, Guatemala
Photograph courtesy of Jane Mintz

Sna Jtz' ibajom

Information provided by Robert Laughlin, honorary board member

SNA JTZ' IBAJOM (House of the Writer) is a writer's collective working since 1983 to improve literacy in Tsotsil and Tselal, the dominant Mayan languages in the highland communities surrounding San Cristóbal de Las Casas, in Chiapas, Mexico. This year, Sna Jtz'ibajom has provided native literacy classes to 396 students in 24 Tsotsil and Tselal schools in the *municipios* (towns) of Chamula, Zinacantán, and Tenejapa.

In addition to literacy programs, Sna Jtz'ibajom is dedicated to the preservation and promotion of local traditions through the publication of stories and poetry, occasional radio broadcasts, photographic exhibitions, and theater dramatizations of folk tales, Mayan history and contemporary social issues. This year, 3 plays were presented in 15 communities, *Cuando nació el maíz* (*When Corn Was Born*),

Trabajadores en el otro mundo (*Workers in the Other World*), and *De todo para todos* (*Everything for Everyone*). The first play describes how the gods give mankind corn as their basic food. The second describes the suffering of the Maya who work in the U.S. The third focuses upon the problem of providing water for everyone. Sna Jtz'ibajom also performed at The Encuentro

A Dream Comes True for FOMMA

Information provided by Mimi Laughlin, honorary board member

DISSATISFIED WITH WOMEN'S PRESCRIBED ROLES as passive bearers of the Mayan culture, FOMMA (Strength of the Maya Woman) was formed in 1994 by Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and Isabel Juárez Espinosa. Located in San Cristobál de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, this organization deals with issues women face in indigenous communities. Their all-women theater group writes award winning plays that are performed throughout Mexico and abroad. FOMMA also offers programs in literacy, art, health and nutrition for women and their children who have fled to the city from Indian villages in an effort to escape political, religious, social, and economic duress. FOMMA also operates small businesses, which, in addition to helping finance their programs, provide job training in sewing, tailoring and bread making.

Through generous donations of funds and time, a number of organizations and individuals are helping FOMMA realize a dream—to build a theater of their own! Though small in size—about 100 seats—its purpose is grand, for it is to serve not only for FOMMA's rehearsals and productions, but as a gathering place for highland Indians to hold meetings, conferences, exhibitions and presentations free of charge. In addition, the theater will be fully equipped with a video archive and viewing center, where weekly video showings are planned. The space will also be available to non-Indian groups for a reasonable fee.

Petrona de la Cruz writes:

"...thanks to the Maya Educational Foundation and donors for supporting our projects... without them we could not pursue our dream to have our own theater... Thanks also to the Foundation and its donors for helping young students achieve their academic goals."



Theater under construction
Photograph courtesy of Christine Eber

Scene from Viva la Vida,
a play about death in childbirth.
Photograph courtesy of FOMMA



Nacional de Teatro Comunitario, which is a national meeting of community theaters. It is important because it provides the only opportunity for Mayan actors to see the theatrical work and creativity of other indigenous people.

Bi-lingual books that are being published and distributed this year are anthologies of folk tales and descriptions of local culture as well as updated manuals for teaching in Tsotsil and Tzeltal. One book in each language consists of contributions by students of the literacy program. These materials are already reaching the communities, where teachers and students are invited to attend the presentation of the books in the Casas de Cultura. This is a stimulus for teachers, students and the general population to appreciate the worth of their language and culture.

*Sna Jtz'ibajom Lo'il Maxil theater
in a Maya community of highland Chiapas
Photograph courtesy of Sna Jtz'ibajom*

Sna Jtz'ibajom is working to create the Instituto de Ciencias y Artes Mayas y Zoque, which was endorsed by President Fox in December 2004. The Instituto, which would become a project of the Universidad Intercultural of Chiapas, plans to have Mayas and Zoques doing research in native science, the arts and language. Its mission is to interweave modern and traditional knowledge and to train individuals to return that knowledge to their own communities. It hopes to have an outreach program so that its activities will become known in the Mayan communities.



Chiapas Photography Project (CPP)

Information provided by Carlota Duarte, CPP Coordinator.

THE MAIN COMPONENTS of the CPP are currently the Archivo Fotografico Indigena/Indigenous Photography Archive (AFI) and Lok'tamayach, Mayan Photographers of Chiapas, both of which are based in San Cristóbal de Las Casas and involve indigenous participants.

AFI provides workshops for affiliated photographers and this year has focused on work with the manual camera, black and white processing and printing. Instruction is by the AFI indigenous photographers who staff the Archive. The first semester's theme was "food" and the second's has been "altars." A new technology was introduced in July, when a volunteer visiting artist provided a workshop on digital photography for 2 weeks. The AFI collection will thus now include digital
(Continues on page 4)

From a board member who recently visited the CPP and the AFI:

"I was impressed with the body of work that has been produced, not only by the photographers but by volunteers who come for periods of time to offer their assistance... The Archive's photos have been used in many publications by scholars and others."

Photograph from the Series "Cambios / Changes", by Emiliano Guzmán Meza, a member of Lok'tamayach and worker at the AFI.



(Continues from page 3)

images in addition to the film-based color and black and white materials.

Lok'tamayach, the photographers' own organization, had the benefit this summer of a volunteer consultant for the month of July to work with the core group to identify their needs and strengthen the management of the organization.

AFI and Lok'tamayach are eagerly awaiting the forthcoming publication of their latest book, by Genaro Sántiz Gómez, *Pox: Un licor tradicional de Chiapas / Posh: A Traditional Liquor from Chiapas* (2005). The book includes photographs and texts about an activity

that is disappearing as part of the Maya Tsotsil religious and health traditions and practices in the state of Chiapas, Mexico.

The CPP endowment campaign, aimed at providing sustainability for the Indigenous Photography Archive and Lok'tamayach was started at the end of last year and is beginning to show positive results. Fundraising will continue with events in the US and with the marketing of a limited edition portfolio of photographs. A goal of this CPP fund is to start offering special grants to Mayan photographers as early as 2007.

Publications

The book *El machete y la cruz: Sublevación de campesinos en Yucatán* by Don E. Dumond, about the caste war of Yucatán, has been translated into Spanish and sent to press. This publication is the result of a collaboration between the Maya Educational Foundation, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and the Department of Humanities of the UNAM in Mérida, Yucatán.

Scholarship Program News

THIS YEAR, MEF HAS GIVEN 35 scholarships to university students in Guatemala and 24 in Mexico. In the Guatemalan and Mexican university systems, students are required to submit a thesis after formal classes end. The university degree is not official until the thesis is submitted. However, the inability of students to write their theses after graduation is a real problem. Although MEF already offers scholarship support to students working on the final step in their graduation process, it will continue to explore new ways to help students at this critical stage. This year MEF offered support to 16 students working on their theses. Six students graduated and the others expect to do so in 2006.

In Todos Santos, Jacaltenango and Huehuetanago, MEF gave 2 scholarships for elementary school level, 1 scholarship for middle school level and 12 scholarships for high school level. In addition, MEF approved a grant to a Mayan anthropologist to enable her to complete the work necessary to translate and eventually publish her Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Texas in Austin.

News from FEP Maya in Guatemala

In order to enrich their educational experience, FEP Maya has begun a series of mandatory bi-monthly workshops for scholarship students in areas that have been identified to be weak in the current university system. This year, workshops have focused on indigenous, Latin American and world literature, with topics such as Racism in the Media, the Popol Wuj, Postmodern Latin American Literature, Classical European Literature, and Contemporary Indigenous Literature. In addition, other conferences and lectures have been offered.

What scholarship recipients in Chiapas do for community service

Literacy courses taking place on Saturdays at FOMMA are possible thanks to some students who, in exchange for their scholarships, teach children, adolescents, and adults how to read and write Tsotsil and Tseltal. Other students help Sna Jtz' ibajom implement their ongoing projects.



A FEP Maya scholarship student graduates as a lawyer, July 2005

Photograph courtesy of Héliida Ramos

Quote from board member who visited FOMMA this Summer:

"I visited with several scholarship recipients and observed them teaching Tsotsil and Tselal to groups of children... The classes seem to be an excellent way for scholarship recipients to give something back to a variety of communities."



A MEF scholarship student in a literacy class teaching Tselal
Photograph courtesy of Christine Eber

New scholarship programs

To achieve our goal of expanding services to under-served communities, this year MEF has been working to develop the following:

- Establish a special fund to honor the legacy of Ben and Lois Paul, two outstanding and internationally recognized scholars whose work and presence on the southern shore of Lake Atitlán left a positive imprint on the Maya of Guatemala. The Ben and Lois Paul Fund will be used exclusively to support the education of Tz'utujil students.
- Lay the groundwork for five scholarships for Mam students from the Cajolá region, near Quetzaltenango, and for a few more scholarships for Chuj students living in Chiapas.

News about *becados*

Several students have decided to pursue higher education and are working on masters degrees, with two more ambitious students studying for a doctorate.

Graduates have been able to find good jobs after graduating. They work as lawyers, medical doctors, engineers and accountants. Several are elementary or high school teachers. A former MEF *becado* is now the head of an academic branch of the newly created Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas.

After graduating as a lawyer, Marcos Xilon, a former scholarship recipient in Chiapas started working with a UN project aimed at facilitating justice for the indigenous people of Mexico.

In Memoriam Victor Pérez Pablo (1980–2005)

We mourn the sudden death of Victor Pérez Pablo, a scholarship student from Xalbal, Ixcán, Guatemala.

After a childhood in exile in Chiapas, he returned to Guatemala, where he was the first member of his family to realize the dream of attending university. He was just four months short of completing his thesis and graduating when he was brutally murdered by a gang in Guatemala City in August.



Photograph courtesy of Laurie Levinger

We will miss his smiling face, his motivating energy, and his favorite expression:

"Échenle ganas muchá"

(Do it enthusiastically, Guys!).



English Language Program

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM grew out of the need for students to know English in order to enhance their careers or pursue studies abroad. In December 2004, a group of 12 US volunteers traveled to La Antigua, Guatemala for two weeks to teach English to two dozen scholarship students. The feedback was positive, from both the students and the teachers, and a second trip is planned for December 2005. The volunteers pay their own transportation, room and board, plus room and board for the students. In preparation for this opportunity, students have been attending English classes on the weekends to improve their skills, polish their accents, and identify their needs. MEF has provided interactive software and dictionaries to FEP Maya for this purpose.

Preliminary work is being done to implement an English as a Second Language (ESL) course in the summer of 2006 in Chiapas.

Quote from a volunteer from the December 2004 trip:

"I think we got more out of it than we were able to give the students."



Teaching English in La Antigua, December 2004
Photograph courtesy of Carol Vanier

centro de investigaciones regionales de mesoamérica



CIRMA

ONE OF CENTRAL AMERICA'S premier social science research centers, CIRMA is dedicated to creating a new culture of research and public dialogue on the challenges facing Central America today; preserving the region's historical memory; and fostering a new generation of social, cultural, and academic leaders. This year CIRMA was designated by the National Library of Guatemala to serve as one of several regional centers to house a core collection of Guatemalan literature.

MEF's support of CIRMA focuses on their unique historical and photographic archives and their comprehensive library specializing in books and periodicals pertaining to the Central American region. The collections consist of materials acquired by CIRMA, as well as collections of current, historic and rare materials donated from private collections. Funds from MEF help with the acquisition, maintenance and preservation of materials for these collections as well as staffing for each department.

Hurricane Stan and MEF's Programs

AS THIS NEWSLETTER GOES TO PRESS, we continue to receive news about the devastation, loss of lives, and suffering caused by rains, flooding, and mudslides in Central America and Southern Mexico. We have been in contact with most of our program partners in the region and can provide the following information to you.

As far as we have learned, the scholarship students and their families in Guatemala and Chiapas are unharmed, although there has been some loss of housing and possessions. The most serious losses, however, occurred in the Lake Atitlán area and affected the Tz'utujil people and the people in the Oxlajuj B'atz program (see front page). Many of the 300 women in the program and their families are accounted for. But one complete family died, two women lost their babies, and those who lived in Panabaj and Tzanchaj, towns that are now buried, lost practically everything.

The staff from FEPMaya and Oxlajuj B'atz have been organizing and distributing emergency supplies and clothing for those most affected. Visits have been made to Santiago Atitlán, Panabaj and Tzanchaj to assess the situation and provide direct help. CIRMA has been helping with the recovery of Pastores, a town near La Antigua.

The area on the south and west side of the Lake Atitlán and the area around Quetzaltenango have been seriously affected. It is in those areas where MEF's latest programs of scholarships will be implemented. As challenging as it was before for those living there to get by and to pursue their educational goals, it will be even harder now.

It is still raining in Guatemala and Chiapas and the ground is saturated with water. It is our goal to assist in making possible long-term recovery from the disaster caused by Hurricane Stan. For the time being, we want to do whatever we can to help get the Oxlajuj B'atz people and program back on their feet. We also want to help more people in the Tz'utujil region and make a special contribution to the education of children in this area. To those ends, we urge your immediate support of one of the following groups:

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS EXCEPT AS NOTED:

Checks payable to **Maya Educational Foundation** and mailed to:

MEF - Oxlajuj B'atz - Paul Fund - Cajolá
P. O. Box 38
South Woodstock, VT 05071-0038 USA

Checks payable to **Mayan Hands**

(NO TAX-DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS)

and mailed to:

Mayan Hands
12604 West Old Baltimore Road
Boyd's, MD 20841 USA

Checks payable to **Friends of Sharing the Dream**

and mailed to:

Diane Nesselhuf
31612 471 Avenue
Burbank, SD 57010 USA

Indicate on memo line: "Resurrection Help for Mayan Hands"

Checks payable to **UPAVIM Community Development Foundation** and mailed to:

Barbara Lorraine
808 East 23rd Street
Bryan, TX 77803 USA

Indicate on memo line: "Resurrection Help for Mayan Hands"

To help any area affected by the hurricane

Checks payable to **Rights Action**

and mailed to

Rights Action
Box 50887
Washington, DC 20091-0887 USA

Indicate on memo line: "Hurricane Relief Fund"

Credit card donations accepted at www.rightsaction.org
or

CANADA: Rights Action
509 St. Clair Av. W., Box 73527
Toronto Ontario, M6C-1C0 Canada

Indicate on memo line: "Hurricane Relief Fund"

Credit card donations accepted at www.rightsaction.org

To help the recovery of Panajachel and the Lake Atitlán area

Checks payable to **Acc't. # 6962046246**

(Write in the account number)

and mailed to

Wells Fargo Bank
P. O. Box 3488
Portland, OR 97208-3488 USA

How You Can Help

There are different ways you can help MEF:

- by sponsoring an event in your community to bring awareness of our mission
- by volunteering your time and expertise to enhance an ongoing program
- by considering a bequest to MEF
- by providing special support to the programs affected by hurricane Stan
- by making a financial contribution

How	\$ 150 support the education of a university student for one month.
	\$ 70 support a student in high school for one month.
your	\$ 35 support a student in middle school for one month.
	\$ 20 help parents send a child to elementary school for one month.
donations help	\$ 40 cover the cost of teaching a Maya how to read and write his or her native language in six months.

A note about frequent flyer miles

Frequent Flyer Miles are a great way to support MEF since they offer travel opportunities for Maya students, scholars and volunteers. This fall, a donor made possible trips for two Maya men, one who traveled to Chicago and another who traveled to France to pursue their studies. A similar contribution will help three Maya women travel to Boston in April of 2006 to present their latest theater production. If you are interested in helping with this kind of support, please contact us.

Maya Educational Foundation

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MEF is a 501(c)(3) public charity. All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

MEF needs your help to do more for the Maya people.
We hope you will send your donation today.
Thank you very much!

Yes! I want to support the Maya Educational Foundation projects

Enclosed is my check payable to Maya Educational Foundation in the amount of US\$ _____

Please charge my _____ MasterCard _____ VISA in the amount of US\$ _____

Credit Card Account No. _____ Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

Cardholder's name _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____