



Maya Educational Foundation

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Dear Friends,

At the midpoint of each year, we send you a brief update on the work of the Maya Educational Foundation (MEF). As the new MEF Board President, I write to you with fresh feelings of joy from a recent trip with MEF's Director, Elisabeth Nicholson, to Chiapas, Mexico. There we visited all of MEF's projects and met with most of the university scholarship students in the two programs in San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

In our meetings with these students, we heard inspiring testimonials about their lives and the obstacles they confront to achieve their dreams. For example, Ángel de Jesús, a Tzotzil Maya student from the township of San Juan Chamula spoke with great honesty about how badly he feels when his fellow students in the state capital tell him, "Don't be a Chamula! Stop speaking Tzotzil and wearing traditional clothes." Ángel is proud to be Chamula and through support from fellow students and MEF program supervisors, he is not alone in his struggle to stay connected to his cultural roots. Magdalena recounted the sexism and male dominance that she encountered as a young Tzotzil woman growing up in Chenalhó. Despite these challenges, she has now achieved her dream of becoming a medical doctor.

We also traveled to San Pedro Chenalhó to visit with the high school students who receive MEF scholarships, and later went to Tzisco, a village in the Lagos de Montebello region of Chiapas, just a few miles from the Guatemala/Mexico border, to meet with the MEF scholarship recipients there. The majority of students in these rural areas do not go on in school past 6th grade. In Chenalhó, we were happy to meet Ceiba Marisol, the first young woman to successfully navigate the challenges of attending high school in MEF's program. She has become a role model for young women and has recruited two other girls. We expect all of the students in this program to continue on to university. In Tzisco we visited with eight MEF scholarship students who attend high school in the area supported by *Productores Alternativos de la Selva* (Alternative Producers of the Jungle), a coffee cooperative. The

parents and grandparents of these students are Chuj Maya from Guatemala who came to this region to escape the violence in the 1980s.

Back in San Cristóbal we made visits to two projects supported by MEF partner Amigos de San Cristóbal: *La Casa de Las Flores* (The House of Flowers) provides a safe, caring and educational environment for children who spend the majority of their days selling merchandise in the streets of the city. The second Amigos project, *Chantiik taj tajinkutik* (Learning by Playing) offers programs for youth not attending formal schools to teach them valuable job skills. Workshops foster mutual respect and self-esteem as well as teach computing, baking, English, and restaurant service. During our visit, *Chantiik* inaugurated a bakery run by the students. Programs such as these help stem the migration to cities in Mexico and to the U.S., which many young people see as their only option.

We also had the chance to attend two English language classes for university students taught by Steve Homer, long-time volunteer and coordinator of MEF's English Language Program in Chiapas and met Ranita Størseth of Norway who assisted him. We are very grateful to both of them and to all English Language Program volunteers in Chiapas and Guatemala.

MEF's programs in Guatemala and Belize continue strong. We send a big thanks to friends and board members in Guatemala, the U.S. and Europe who support these programs, not only financially, but with their skills and friendship. We will report on these programs in our end-of-the year newsletter.

Batz'i kolavalik (Tzotzil for "thank you very much") for your past support which makes our work possible. Please help us continue supporting the dreams of Maya students in Guatemala, Chiapas, and Belize.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine Eber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Christine Eber, MEF Board President



University students supervised by La FOMMA (The Strength of the Maya Woman), Chiapas, Mexico, and MEF visitors, February 2013



Chantiik taj tajinkutik
(Learning by Playing) bakery project, Chiapas, February 2013



Chenalhó students and supervisor, Chiapas, February 2013



University students from Zinacantán, Chiapas, supervised by Sna Jtz'ibajom (House of the Writer), February 2013

For information on these and all other MEF programs in Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, please visit our web site mayaedufound.org



Thank you for your interest and support!