

A mosaic nativity created by Rural Education participants.

This just in...
As of January 1st, Amistad Canada
welcomes a new project partner:
PATRONATO PRO NIÑOS



By providing medical and dental care, ***Pro Niños*** helps children from economically disadvantaged San Miguel families lead healthier, fuller lives. Since it began in 1970, the organization has grown to provide services to more than 11,000 children a year, many in the small rural communities that surround SMA.

Amistad's partnership will support purchase of a new mobile dental van and maintenance of the existing van fleet. More about ***Patronato Pro Niños*** in the months to come.

Thinking about holiday gifts for family and friends?

Wanna do better than socks, books and chocolates?

Consider donating to one or more of Amistad's projects.

And here's a fine idea from one of Amistad's Directors:

Make a one time annual donation to replace all those bottles of wine and flowers you give as hostess gifts throughout the year. And then give a card to your hosts explaining your donation is in lieu of those gifts. People love it!

And, remember that for any donation over \$25 you will receive a Canadian tax receipt.

For further information go to our website

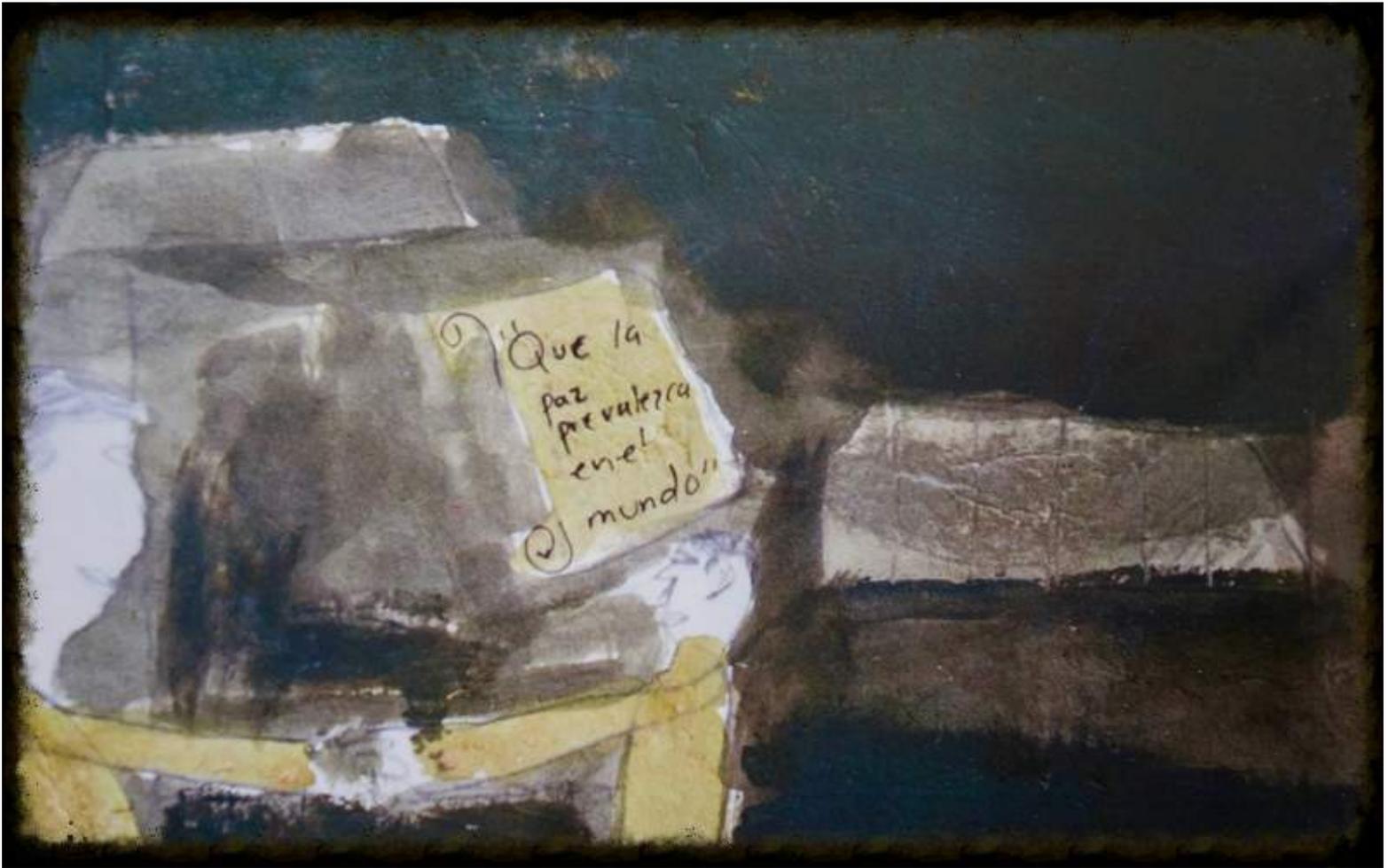
www.AmistadCanada.org

and click on Our Projects for information and then Donate.

2016 saw three new organizations become AMISTAD project partners. In alphabetical order, they are:

CHILDREN'S ART FOUNDATION

(Arte de los Niños)



Activities included the 6th annual **Children's Art Foundation** art contest. This year's theme was 'May Peace prevail on Earth'. Six top prizes – 3 for art, and 3 for story writing – were presented on November 12th.

This year's 1st place winner was 10-year-old Mario Jesús Matchala whose painting (above) has a timely title: *Los presidentes que arreglaron sus problemas* or "the presidents who fixed their problems". All the entries are on display at Bellas Artes until the end of February.

Click [HERE](#) for CAF president Javier Morales perspective on the event (English y español).



As well, during the summer CAF offered a five week 'Little Picasso' Art Workshop at Rosewood Hotel. It's a fun and intensive art program for international visiting

young children with proceeds supporting the program in the campo.

In September, the Foundation began to offer its 'Literacy through Art' core program in five new communities including an orphanage. And CAF worked with *Camino de la Paz* (Peace Walk) to run a 'Painting for Peace' class during International Peace Day. To learn more, check out this [VIDEO](#) created to mark CAF's fifth anniversary in 2015 .

If you'd like to get involved, but have more computer skill than artistic inspiration, the Foundation is looking for a volunteer to maintain and update its website four times a year.

ÓPERA SAN MIGUEL

[Ópera de San Miguel](#) is dedicated to identifying and encouraging, through professional grants and performance opportunities, the most talented and promising young opera singers in Mexico and, in the process, enriching and perpetuating the musical and artistic life of San Miguel de Allende.

It holds an annual *concurso* (competition) which was won this year by the exciting young Mexican mezzo-soprano Ligia Cedillo (below with OSM Artistic Director John Bills; see her winning performance [HERE](#).)



"Ligia blew the judges away," raves Bills. "Her bel canto technique, vocal beauty, and poise were outstanding. She is clearly on the threshold of an important career."

OSM also works with *Les Jeunes Ambassadeurs de Montreal* which holds a similar competition for young Canadians. Winners of both sing at an annual Mexico-Canada CoOPERative concert; the third edition is coming up soon: January 28, 2pm at Bellas Artes. Ms Cedillo will perform with Toronto-based soprano Beth Hagerman.

Bills says Beth is "one of the most talented young sopranos in Canada. Her lush lyric soprano, radiant top voice and solid technique, combined with her dark, exotic beauty, made her a stand-out in Montreal."

The **RURAL EDUCATION** Institute of Mexico



*A Christmas procession by **Rural Ed** participants in the community of La Palma*

In urban Mexico, about 60% of young people go to school for nine years, but in rural areas only 12% make it that far and 65% drop out by age 15. **Rural Ed** is devoted to narrowing that gap currently in three communities around San Miguel.

Rural Ed builds education-based community centres and recruits international post-secondary interns to run programs in those centres. As well, it grants scholarships to students who would otherwise not be able to stay in school.

Donations made via Amistad help support the interns, many of whom hail from Canada.

Shortly after Rural Ed entered into a partnership with Amistad, it opened a third, purpose-built centre in Don Diego, a village just outside San Miguel de Allende on the Salida a Celeya.

SMA Mayor Ricardo Villarreal and his wife were on hand to cut the ribbon (with some help) after which the women of the community served a delicious feast of celebration.



Marco Maccario of Oakville is one of two current Canadian Rural Ed interns. After three months on-the-ground in Don Diego he says: *"I learnt many things, from how to build a lesson plan and curriculum to building the patience to deal with 30 rowdy 8-year olds. My appreciation for teachers has grown*



abundantly after understanding how much it takes to try to teach children. Working with the kids has been a very humbling experience. From the first day of registration when we received 200 students I knew this experience would be one long roller coaster."

from *el presidente* **Charles Novogrodsky**

2016 was an excellent year for Amistad and our partners. We distributed a record high \$70,000 (Canadian) to projects that provide the Mexican people with valuable programs and services. Our new partner NGOs – Children's Art Foundation; Rural Education Institute and Ópera de San Miguel – demonstrate the impressive range of benefits being delivered. Amistad-supported projects often serve as "model projects", attracting government and other institutional support. In this way they're incubators for important social, educational and health progress in Mexico.

Our 2016 Annual General Meeting welcomed new members and voted in an expanded Board of Directors including new members Jenny Formanek, Mark O'Neill and David Winfield. Our Board actively monitors all projects so Canadian donors can be assured that our projects are accountable and effectively managed.

Interested in getting more involved in Amistad Canada? It's easy. Simply write to us at contact@Amistadcanada.org to express your interest. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your Mexican experience. Members receive up to date information on Amistad projects, news of volunteer opportunities and events. Being a member gives you the opportunity to discuss and vote on future Amistad development at the Annual General Meeting. There are no membership fees.

Now that the holiday season is upon us, we encourage Canadians to make a gift to one or more of our projects. Your 2016 Canadian income tax receipt awaits when you donate by December 31. The **DONATE** page of our website offers an easy way to identify the project you wish to support and receive your income tax receipt minutes later. We also offer the option to use your donation to recognize an important achievement, to thank someone or to remember a loved one.

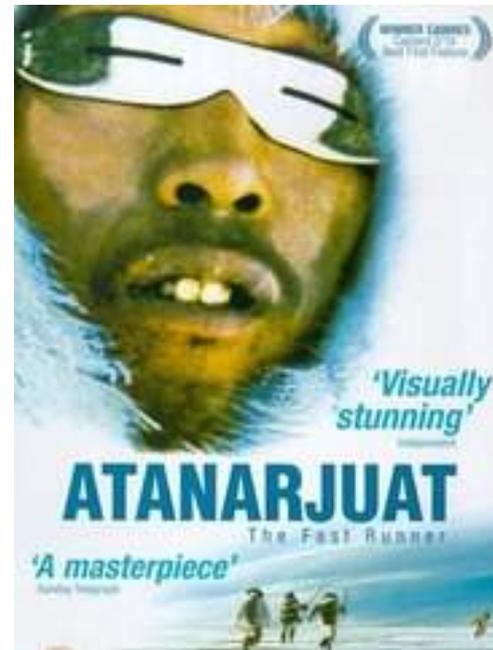
We wish you all a healthy and happy holiday season and new year.

COMING EVENTS:

Long-time Amistad supporter Bram Morrison is organizing a screening of the award-winning Canadian film **ATANARJUAT: The Fast Runner**. It's a benefit for the AC Biblioteca Project.

The New York Times says "It is, by any standard, an extraordinary film, a work of narrative sweep and visual beauty that honors the history of the art form even as it extends its perspective."

Monday, January 9th, 11am at El Teatro Santa Ana, La Biblioteca. Only 100 pesos.



Amistad and JÓVENES ADELANTE present SMA resident author **Sandra Cisneros** reading from her new book ***A House of My Own*** on Friday, February 3rd 5pm at Bellas Artes (note change from Feb. 2).

Cisneros won the 2016 PEN Creative Nonfiction Award for the book (review below) and in September she received the National Medal of Arts & Humanities from President Barack Obama.

The next **AMISTAD CANADA Board of Directors meeting** will, for the first time, be held in San Miguel on Wednesday, February 8th, 10:30am at La Biblioteca. All members are welcome to attend (but only Directors may vote).

Bram Morrison will be performing his annual Amistad/CASA benefit concert twice this year: February 25 and March 4, 4pm at La Biblioteca.

The third annual **OSM Mexico-Canada Co-OPERA-tive** concert is on Saturday, January 28th, 2pm at Bellas Artes.

And, the **Children's Art Foundation's annual art auction** is set for Sunday, March 5th, 2pm at the Rosewood Hotel.

To keep up-do-date with goings on at AMISTAD and our project partners, please join our **Facebook**

BIBLIOTECA UPDATE:

(by Jaci Winters, Project Chair) The **Biblioteca Education Project** celebrates five years of Canadian donor support through Amistad Canada. In 2016 donations of nearly \$100,000 pesos helped to support all three areas of the Education Program (Books, Classes, Scholarships).

Amistad donors purchased Spanish books for the more than 300 children who use the library every week. These books are essential for improving literacy and enjoyment of reading. Students also use the library's reference books that assist them with homework, essays and exams. Donations also support salaries for professional teachers of 70 young people attending music classes. The choir of 25 participates in contests and has received invitations to perform from the State of Guanajuato and the community of San Miguel.



Guitar classes involve 25 students in developing their playing and singing styles. These classes operate on Saturday so that there is greater opportunity for more kids to attend including kids from rural areas. Piano classes cater to 20 young people eager to learn and improve their technique. Piano students also have access to the piano purchased 2 years ago by Amistad donors.

The Biblioteca was the first organization to offer scholarships to students in San Miguel and the campo. The program began in 1970s and continues today. Amistad donations supported 10 students in 2016. Each of 4 University students received \$4000 pesos and 6 High school students were awarded \$2000 pesos. The Biblioteca program helps young people to reach their academic goals and prepare them for careers.

ELEGIR UPDATE:

(by Lorna Ferguson, project chair) **Elegir** (to choose) as CASA's Anti-Violence program is known, has been in place for eleven years. For four of those years Amistad has provided funds to pay the salary of the Educational Psychologist (currently Alma Barbosa) who works with students through the school system, and often with their mothers. Reaching beyond the city of San Miguel, she travels out into the campo (or countryside) to conduct workshops.

On a recent visit to the campo with CASA's two staff psychologists, I was privileged to be present as Alma worked with a group of 30 young "Secundaria" students in the rural community of Corral de Piedras.



The object of the lesson was to raise awareness and sensitivity to violence. The task for the day was to paint a cloth banner that would be taken to CASA on November 25th in recognition of the UN's **International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women**. Several schools planned to attend with their banners for a commemorative parade at CASA.

When the 13 and 14 year olds gathered around Alma, (30 in all) they giggled self-consciously while playing a fun game with a little stuffed bear. The second exercise was designed to raise awareness of aspects of violence that they might have experienced in their own lives. There was no giggling as they listened attentively and responded silently, eyes closed, to questions about various life experiences they might have had – one step forward for 'yes', one step backward for 'no'. This was a simple, yet profound, exercise. Sad to say, some of the young women took many steps forward. The young men took fewer.

This was followed by a communal "paint-in" of the banner. The messages were genuine and heartfelt as you can see in the photos. Then Alma and I joined the students and their teacher for the requisite group photo (above).

As with my campo visit last year, I came away knowing once again that Elegir is making a difference. They are doing an excellent job and deserve all the support we can give them.



JÓVENES ADELANTE UPDATE:

Jonathan Emmanuel Salgado Yáñez



(by Nora Weaver) From the time Jonathan Salgado was small, he has enjoyed the total support of his family. Their confidence in him and his ability to make good choices created in him an enthusiasm that is charming and contagious. From childhood forward, he earned his parents' trust with his persistence and determination to master every challenge he faced.

If he failed at something, they encouraged him to try again or try a new approach. So, Jonathan became a self-directing, upbeat young man who never, ever gives up on himself and his goals. After graduating from high school with honors, Jonathan applied for and was granted a Jóvenes scholarship, which includes tuition, financial support, a mentor, life skills training, English tutoring, counseling, a laptop appropriate to his major and a supportive network of JA graduates.

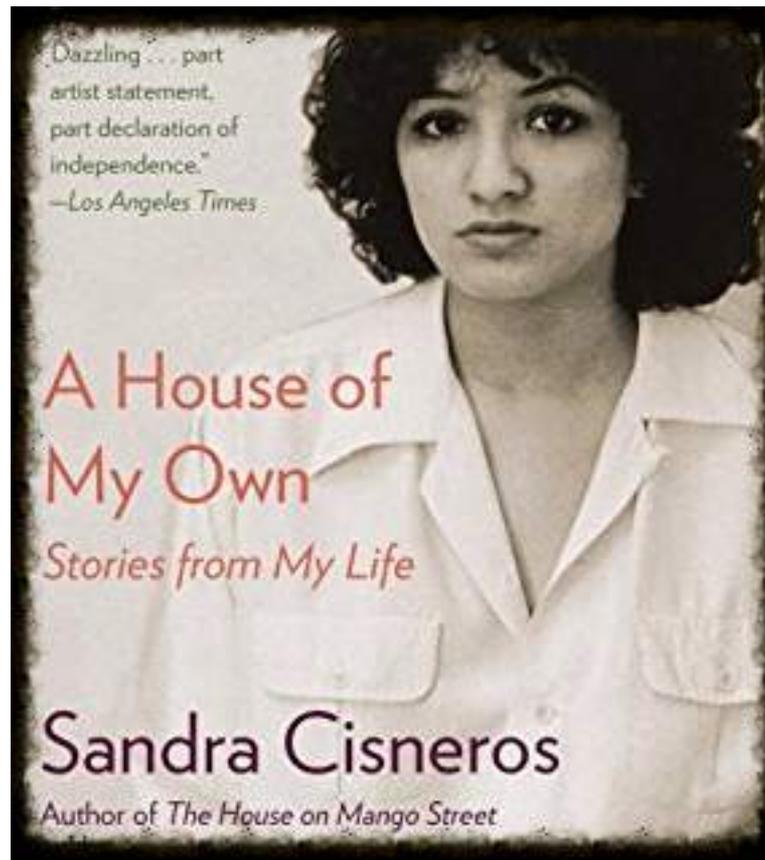
Jonathan is studying mechanical engineering with the goal of attaining his Masters degree and PhD in the US or Germany. His courses include physics, thermodynamics, calculus, computer programming, English and German. During this past semester, he designed and built a mechanical shelf that automatically adjusts its height to accommodate people with handicaps. And, this school session, he is formulating a project that would convert body heat into electrical current. Jonathan says "Imagine that you have an emergency and your phone has no power. With converted body energy, you could recharge your phone and call for help."

"Jonathan is a bright and hard-working young man who has great decision-making ability," according to his JA mentor Jorge Philippe (in photo above). "Those characteristics, and his facility in language, will help him reach his goals. I enjoy being a mentor to him because it's a two-way street. I support him and, in return, I learn a great deal from him. It's fun!"

As a way of expressing his gratitude for all the support he's received, Jonathan is giving back by organizing reading and history workshops for children, focusing on the history of San Miguel de Allende. He plans to continue to coach and tutor children in their studies as his social contribution.

Jóvenes Adelante grants college scholarships to local honor graduates who otherwise could not afford to pursue higher education. This educational assistance allows them to break the cycle of historic economic disparity in their families and change their family's lives for generations to come. Eighty-five percent of Jóvenes Adelante students graduate from college, a higher success rate than Canada.

BOOK REVIEW



(by Myra Novogrodsky) Canadians who love San Miguel de Allende have welcomed to their city as a permanent resident, Sandra Cisneros, the acclaimed Mexican-American author of **The House on Mango Street**, **Caramelo** and now **A House of My Own: Stories from my Life**.

In 2011 Cisneros was a keynote speaker at the San Miguel Writers Conference and Literary Festival. She admits in the final essay in **A House of My Own** that she “decided in advance I won’t like San Miguel – too many expats – and I am ashamed and surprised when I do. I like the people, both native and foreign, and I came back of my own accord.”

Peripatetic Cisneros was born in Chicago, the only daughter in a family of seven children. Her dashing Mexican father from Mexico City struggled to make ends meet working as a *tapicero* or upholsterer while her long-suffering mother found solace in music, museums and

She questions how the first generation daughter of a *tapicero* could end up teaching at the university level.

Cisneros pays tribute to people who influenced her thinking such as the French author Marguerite Duras and the Uruguayan political writer Eduardo Galeano, known for his **Open Veins of Latin America** who spent much of his life in exile. Then there are her female Mexican heroes such as Teresita Urrea, the healer of whom she says, “there was once a Mexican girl so famous she frightened the president of the Mexican republic and had to be exiled.” Costa Rican born but spending most of her career in Mexico, the sensational Chavela Vargas had a “voice as transparent as mescal.”

Cisneros describes Vargas as appealing to “drinkers of pulque as well as champagne”.

The author never leaves behind her class consciousness born in her lived experiences in a Chicago immigrant

libraries. It was books which excited young Cisneros. "On Saturdays I walked with Mother to the library. For me the library was a wonderful house. A house of ideas, a house of silence."

Cisneros took a path different from traditional Mexican-American women as she neither married nor had children. Much of the book is about the challenges she faced in breaking the mold and in carving out physical and spiritual space where she could write and think.

Her journey was not linear. She travelled and lived in Greece, Chiapas, France, the former Yugoslavia, France and California before finally settling in San Antonio, Texas for twenty years. **A House of My Own** is a collection of essays, articles and vignettes from these years which document both her insecurities and triumphs as she breaks new ground as a Latin American woman writer. In Chiapas she feels like a *gringa* with indigenous people. In the "academy" she feels like a fraud.

family of nine which had to move often and struggled to pay the rent. Even after achieving financial success and purchasing a home in SMA she continues to see the world through the eyes of people without class privilege. Looking at San Miguel she asks, "What must it be like to come from this town where so many of the houses are empty days, months at a time? Imagine you don't have a house, or your house is something not worth inhabiting. What must it be like to walk by these houses worth a million, two million, three million, when one's own home has no heat except firewood?"

Her brilliant chapter *!Que Viven los Colores!* demonstrates her lifelong love of things Mexican and it is certainly no surprise that the arc of her life returned her to Mexico and a place where she can be thoroughly bicultural.

Cisneros will read from **A House of My Own** on February 3, 2017 at Bellas Artes as a benefit for Amistad's project partner Jóvenes Adelante.

AMISTAD CANADA's work is built upon the efforts of Canadians with a strong connection with the Mexican town of San Miguel de Allende.

Click on [OUR HISTORY](#) to read how the organization began and has grown. If you wish to make a [Canadian tax-deductible donation to any or all of Amistad's projects](#), please go to our [DONATE](#) page. All the required information is there, including a downloadable donation form.

(If donating by cheque, please indicate the particular project you are supporting.)

Or, make an easy, quick and secure on-line donation via [CANADA HELPS](#)

(and your tax receipt will be send immediately).

If you are not currently a member of **Amistad Canada** and would like to be OR, if you are already a member and would like to nominate someone for membership, please contact AC secretary **Joy Levine** by clicking: volunteer@amistadcanada.org

Feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone who might be interested. And, please help us maintain an accurate mailing list by letting Joy know of any name misspelling or other corrections: volunteer@amistadcanada.org

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