Abigail Hernandez, who using an alias for this interview, came from Mexico to the US with her parents and two older sisters when she was three, sometime between 2005 and 2007. At the time of the interview, she was about 20 years old, a student at the University of Nevada, Reno, and still undocumented.

In her interview, Abigail explained her journey to the U.S. and the initial adjustment. She explains that she doesn’t remember much about coming. She knew it was a secret because they had come without documentation. They referred to it as the journey to El Norte. The family live in a rural town (name not specified) in Nevada and she had grown up there. Her family tried to come legally but the application for a visa was refused several times. Finally, they decided to cross anyway because the parents wanted to give their children a better life.

In her interview, Abigail explains that she always felt different. It was hard to tell people about their situation and this made her feel alone. It helped having two older sisters who tested out what they could do ahead of her. The rural town in Nevada where they grew up was conservative so they were scared to admit they were undocumented as they thought people might come after them. The girls did not realize until they were in high school that they could participate in sports in school. They wished they had known sooner because they were good athletically and might have won scholarships. However, they are grateful for the athletic opportunities as there were none in Mexico.

She further explains how she and her family met the resource challenges of being undocumented in their rural area. Abigail argues that there are not enough resources in rural places. There was no specific group to support her family, she explains, but the Catholic Church helped because there were a lot of Latinos there. Some of the services were in Spanish. There were also many Latino agricultural laborers in the area. She was grateful for these people being close by. There was no one to ask about college or getting a letter of recommendation for DACA. She was afraid to ask about these things because there were a lot of Trump voters around who said bad things about Mexicans. Later there were counselors at school but they didn’t talk about being undocumented. She was surprised that even her friends said bad things about immigrants, not knowing her situation. Members of her family were afraid of being apprehended and detained (by ICE) and didn’t know if they would run. They did not want to return to Mexico. An agricultural company nearby was raided one time. They worried that their school might be raided. She said that overall this meant that many Latinos were abused, underpaid and overworked because they were afraid to say anything for fear of being detained.

Abigail discusses a major problem for undocumented immigrants: that they don’t have access to health insurance – and how it has influenced career choices in her family. She only went to the doctor twice when she was very sick as a small child and once to the dentist. Her parents made sure the children lived a healthy life so they wouldn’t get sick and would not need to go to the doctor. She knew she could not break any bones because if she did there would be no doctor! Because of the absence of insurance, she was always interested in healthcare. In high school she became a state officer for HOSA, Health Occupation Students of America, which made her very proud. She was the first state officer in her school for any organization. Her two older sisters have bachelor degrees and are applying to medical school. She wants to go into healthcare also but via an engineering route.

Abigail discusses issues of immigrant documentation. Her two sisters have DACA and so can work and provide income for the family. She applied for DACA but was refused because of a court case in Texas which cut off new applicants. The government kept her $500 application fee. She doesn’t know what will happen with this and is hoping that she will be able to apply again but isn’t happy to have to pay the fee once more. She feels there are not enough legal resources in the rural parts of Nevada. She says there should be a path to legalization. There are so many complicated forms. The process is long and difficult and becoming legal seems unattainable. Any permissions given are only for a limited time (e.g., with DACA). She is still afraid to put too much information online.

To wrap up the interview, Abigail gives her call to action. She feels the media gives a very bad impression of immigrants and makes them frightened. Since they can’t say much, she feels politicians do not know their stories. She said politicians don’t understand that immigrants would really like to come to the US legally. They have no choice but to come because their countries are doing poorly. She feels she is regarded as less than human. This is amazing to her because she is like other people except for the piece of paper giving her the right to live in the US. She wants to tell other immigrants that they are not alone and to push through. She wants people to know that she and other undocumented people are human, like everybody else, and should not be treated as separate.

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