Wendy Lopez, who is using an alias for this interview, was brought to California from Guatemala at age 7 (approximately in the 1980s), after having lived with her grandmother and two younger siblings for many years. At the time of the interview, Wendy was in her forties, working in the social services sector, and was a naturalized U.S. citizen.

In her interview, Wendy shares that her parents had fled civil unrest in Guatemala when their children were babies, and when they came back to fetch them and bring them to the U.S. Wendy didn’t know who they were. That, plus cramped, dangerous living situations, poverty, English language challenges, and the general prejudice she experienced made life especially hard for Wendy.

Eventually Wendy’s mother put all her children into a Catholic school and things improved, as the church made sure their basic financial needs were met. Also, her grandmother lived with them throughout her childhood, which was a godsend since her parents worked two jobs each, plus she never fully bonded with her mother, given their multi-year separation when she was three years old.

Wendy applied for and was approved for citizenship within a few years of her arrival to the U.S., so being undocumented was not the source of any problems for her. Two circumstances were very disheartening and challenging, however. First, since she came to the U.S. so young, Guatemalans and other Latinos she met did not accept her as one of their own; but since she was not native, Americans didn’t accept her as one of their own either. Thus, she had no sense of fully belonging to either culture. Second, since she was the oldest child and the most fluent family member, at age 12 her parents insisted she get part-time jobs to help support the family. In addition, and probably more disturbing, she had to be the family’s secretary – her term – i.e. she interacted directly with public/official agencies, organizations and individuals on any and all matters for her entire extended family. The poignant example she shared was having to arrange a funeral and burial for a still-born cousin when she was still a child herself.

Wendy moved to Nevada in her 20s and has lived here ever since. She eventually got a B.A. and M.A. and works providing social services for the disadvantaged. She feels strongly that California has more and better resources than does Nevada for immigrants in general, particularly the undocumented.

Summary by Lily Egan, UUFNN Borderlands Justice Team