Maria Guatemala, who is using an alias for this interview, arrived in Nevada at age 19, five-months pregnant, at some point in the 1990s. She had a tourist visa but overstayed it due to complications of pregnancy, resulting in her giving birth by C-section after four months of bed rest. At the time of the interview, she was in her thirties and still undocumented.

Maria explains what life has been like since she arrived. She explains that she was living with her sister initially, but the sister resented her because she was unable to work and contribute to the household expenses. Eventually Maria found restaurant work cooking Guatemalan food but she had to rely on bus service that was unreliable, and her newborn was often at a babysitter’s from early morning to very late at night. Maria faced severe hardships due to her limited English and undocumented status. She was the first to lose her job when COVID-19 hit, even though she had more longevity than many coworkers. She dreams of opening her own business – a food truck or a childcare service – but can’t without a valid social security number.

One of the biggest and most concerning differences she experienced in the U.S. is children’s lack of respect for elders here. Guatemalan parents are very strict and children learn very early to be polite, obedient and quiet. Her own children are not respectful, and she is apprehensive disciplining them without risking the social service authorities taking them from her or picking her up and sending her back to Guatemala while her children remain here.

Though she arrived at age 19 and thus does not qualify, she wishes she could get DACA status so she could visit Guatemala, as she has already lost close family members since arriving here.

Summary by Lily Egan, UUFNN Borderlands Justice Team