Adriana H., who is choosing not to share her whole name, is a native from Mexico. She came to the U.S. in third or fourth grade, sometime before 2001. At the time of the interview, she was approximately 29 years old and was a naturalized U.S. citizen.

In her interview, Adriana explains that when she was a young child, her grandfather lived in southern California. Her mother, who had a Green Card, would travel back and forth across the border during ‘picking’ time, living with her father when in the U.S. On weekends she would bring back to Mexico things she bought at Walmart. Adriana thinks her mother always planned to settle in the United States. It was around the time Adriana was in the third or fourth grade that her mother decided to move. Adriana over-stayed on a one-day Visa for a Disneyland field trip that her Mexican school arranged. Settling in her new environment, she found the community in southern California similar to her Mexican town - everyone spoke Spanish. Her school was bilingual with instruction in Spanish and English. They stayed there for three or four months before heading north to Reno, NV. It was there she felt different despite the fact that the area they lived in was heavily populated with Spanish speakers. She attended Echo Loder Elementary School the year of 9-11, attending two different middle schools and graduated from Sparks High School.

Adriana’s family was all mixed in different legal or non-legal status. Her mother had a Green Card and was quite savvy knowing how to start the legal papers for her children (Permanent Residents can file an I-130 for spouses and unmarried children but the approval process can take many years). Adriana and her younger sister were undocumented but unaware of the meaning until much later; her two younger brothers were born in the U.S. Her father traveled through the desert to join his family without documentation. Adriana was most afraid for him working at many different fast food restaurants such as McDonalds, Taco Bell and Baja Fresh having to stay home from work when friends would call him saying, ”they” were coming that day. “They” meaning ICE, Immigration Customs Enforcement. She also recalls a time her father was driving and was pulled over for a traffic violation. She saw him shaking, visibly scared and could hardly talk. For some reason the police officer issued just a ticket but did not arrest him for not having a driver’s license and told him to go home. A cousin was not so lucky after a minor infraction, he was forced to plead guilty and go to jail or the police would investigate all his relatives in Reno. Fearing of the undocumented members of his family he spent time in jail.

They first lived with an uncle who helped them get settled into their own apartment and getting her father fake papers so he could find work. Her mother was a steady worker at Walmart until she gave birth to her first brother. Her father was quite successful working at Baja Fresh. The company sent him to new locations to train the staff but never helped him fill out work papers to adjust his status from undocumented. Her mother on the other hand as soon as they arrived in Reno began the paperwork for citizenship and to get papers for Adriana and her sister. Adriana always lived in fear that because she was undocumented, she would be the cause of her family being torn apart and being sent back to Mexico.

Her mom filed all forms arranging for an attorney only getting updates about every three years – “your papers are being processed or your case is coming up”. This lasted ten years and cost $5,000. Adriana was a senior in high school when she finally became a citizen and was able to apply for college, get a job and help her dad pay a $35,000 loan he took out for her schooling. Her parents were advised by an attorney to remarry in the U.S. in order for her father to become a citizen. Adriana’s sister, two brothers, father and mother are all citizens now.

Summary by Lois Bianchi, UUFNN Borderlands Justice Team