

Thelma Barone

Country of origin: Mexico

Circumstances of arrival: Thelma was born in the state of Sonora. As a child she met many people from the United States who came to her town. She remembers enjoying meeting these people, and trying to speak English with them. She had a lot of admiration for them. Growing up, she realized that her opportunities in Mexico were very limited—the salaries for men were low, and those for girls and women even worse. She finished high school facing the challenges of a politicized situation, in which there were many strikes and few classes, with a scarcity of teaching materials. At the age of 21, Thelma decided move to the United States to get a better education for more long-term opportunities. She was inspired to live in a place that offered great universities and beautiful ideals. Despite the reality of barriers that she experienced when attempting to attend a community college in the U.S., she persisted, and ended up graduating from UCLA with a degree in Geography and Environmental Studies. She and her family moved from Los Angeles to Oregon out of a desire for better schools and a more peaceful environment.

Work/Avocation: Thelma worked in Social Services for many years. She also was a parent educator for Birth to Three, where she met young parents who impressed her greatly with their stories of resilience. Later, she developed a program as a multicultural liaison for a police department, in which she helped police build partnerships with the community. Through this program the police officers had an opportunity to experience the warmth and generosity of multicultural communities. Thelma also assisted Spanish speakers in getting access to government services. Currently, she is getting her Masters in Social Work. All of her children have completed or are attending college.

When I first came to the United States, I heard what the politicians said, what the media said, and I thought, how did I get here, this is heaven, because of the values of freedom and equality. Because in Mexico, politicians and the media don't really do a lot of propaganda, or they didn't back when I came...because if there was any uprising, they had the military....Here there was such beautiful talk. And then...my heart broke. It happened a long time ago with the first Gulf War....But then I see the change...the young people, my goodness, they are so amazing, they are talking about everything without fear, and I see how young people are very protective of others....There is evolution, I think.

Photographer: Melissa “Mimi” Nollo

