

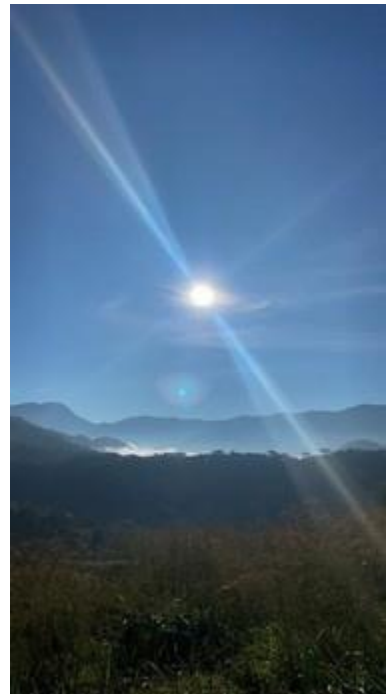
## Elia Mendoza's Immigrant Story



Born in California and raised in Mexico by Mexican parents, I consider myself an immigrant. My father was deported when I was a month old and instead of embarking in a treacherous journey back to California, my mother moved my three siblings and I to Mexico with my father. We lived in the Sierra Mountains of the state of Michoacan. Life in the mountains was unique; there was no electricity, no water or sewer systems and no communication services. Although it sounds out of the world I currently live in, our small piece of land in the mountains was surrounded by clear water rivers where my siblings and I spent the summer days, had an immense playground full of rope swings and soccer fields. The land gave us delicious crops, fruits, and Avocados! (Because avocados “are” their own food group ☺). We raised farm animals and made handmade tortillas very early, every morning.

In 1997, we left everything behind and came to the U.S. For the next 20 years we lived in the small agricultural town of Mattawa in Central Washington. My siblings and I were enrolled in primary school while my parents worked in the orchards. Our summer breaks consisted of harvesting asparagus at dawn and picking cherries or apples during the day. Although the population in Mattawa is predominately Hispanic, we were subjected to racism in school and around town. We were often called “beaners” and “wetbacks”, and sadly “anker babies” in the most recent years. My parents hard work paid off when my father became a Permanent Resident and my mother a U.S. Citizen passing the test in English without speaking any English. They were able to purchase their first home, meet their grandchildren, retire, and move back to Mexico, achieving their American Dream.

As for me, I am the first in my family to obtain a college degree thanks to my parents’ hard work. Although I love my life here, in my heart, my home will always be in the Sierra Mountains of Michoacan.



*Photo of my parents view from their current residence in Michoacan, Mexico*