YOLANDA: Hey, let's talk about

everybody's favorite subject:

bureaucracy and money management.

[blows noisemaker]

That's about right.

So hi, my name is Yolanda Vargas.

I am a queer disability

advocate and activist,

proud Latinx and here's my story.

♪ funky music ♪

Photo of Yolanda in her wheelchair.

I've been on Supplemental Security Income

since I was little.

Usually, most of the

time to get SSI you have

to fill out a bunch of paperwork.

Luckily, I've been disabled

since I was pretty much born,

that means my parents

handled the paperwork.

Oh, the perks of being a baby.

Fast forward 18 years, I'm ready to go out

on my own and go to college.

Dun-dun-dun. [dramatic music]

You might be wondering how

I got control of my money.

Well, luckily for me, when I went down

to my local Social Security office,

I was able to talk to

somebody who realized

that I was capable of

handling my own money.

When you turn 18, you can

fill out a form requesting

that your benefits be

given directly to you.

♪ upbeat retro music ♪

Animated graphics illustrate Yolanda’s instructions.

You may need to provide evidence

to the Social Security Administration

that shows you can control your own money.

That could include a doctor's note,

legal evidence or lay evidence.

For example, a note from

a friend or a landlord

that shows that you can

handle your expenses.

So, what happens if you're in a situation

where maybe you can't handle your money

or you are unprepared to

take on your money yet?

What happens to a person then?

In that case, you get assigned

a representative payee,

which is a person appointed

by the Social Security Administration

like a family friend or a family member

or somebody that they feel can take care

of your best interest.

Remember, even if you

aren't directly controlling

your money, always know how

your money is being spent.

So now you've jumped

through a million hoops,

you know how your money is being spent.

But you want more. You

deserve more. You need more!

And for me, that "more" was going

to college and getting a job.

♪ 8 bit video game music ♪

Photo of Yolanda in cap and gown.

The photo shifts to become a videogame character maneuvering floating platforms above swirls of fire.

It was really overwhelming. It felt like

at every turn I could mess up my SSI.

♪♪♪

Yolanda’s photo is struck with a fireball mid-jump and falls into the fire below.

The letters, “SSI” float upwards.

But I kept it simple and I

broke it down into steps,

which made it a lot less overwhelming.

As you go to school or get

a job, make sure to keep

in touch with SSA about your benefits.

Don't wait to tell the Social

Security Administration

that something has changed,

whether it's just your address,

or maybe you've started working

or going back to school.

Before you contact the Social

Security Administration,

you should speak with

a benefits counselor,

who can help you plan a strategy.

So, we've all gotten those ominous letters

from the Social Security Administration.

[eerie scream]

A dark envelope with wings and teeth flies in from off-screen

But they're a lot less scary

when you know your rights.

And a big part of knowing

your rights is also knowing

how to financially adult responsibly.

What does that mean?

That means doing the

stuff that you have to do

before getting to do the

stuff you want to do.

If you want more information

on where I got my facts,

or resources to help you with your journey

and to support the Storytellers Series,

visit RootedinRights.org,

and follow us on Facebook,

Twitter and Instagram.

Written and directed by Yolanda Vargas,

that's me! special thanks to my sister

for holding the camera.

Also super special afterlife

thanks to Kelly and Tania.

Even though you are dead, I couldn't

have done it without you.

You too, Lorena, even

though you're not dead. Bye!