

Book Title: Always Running, La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.

Author: Luis J. Rodriguez

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Book Review by Terri Collins

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The book is an autobiographical piece, written with the intent of turning away Mexican youth from the gang life they have grown up with. This book is a very strong account of what it was like to be a part of the gang life in East L. A. Rodriguez writes about the street fights, gang symbolism, drugs, sniffing, and alcohol abuse. He captures the reader's attention by the graphic nature of what a boy must do to survive and be accepted into his "hood." This book describes the courage it took for the author to realize and embrace values that were not in his life prior to becoming a father, which was the turning point in his life. Subsequent to parenthood, he devoted himself to leading his son away from the life he once led.

Throughout the book, Rodriguez often described his awareness of the disappointment his parents felt about his actions. He referred to the many times his mother came to school to get him when he was suspended and how many times she had to retrieve him from jail. The book described very clearly the strong bond between siblings and their intense focus upon protecting the family name. In spite of this, he continued to let his family down.

This was a difficult book to "get into" because of the cultural differences and lack of knowledge I have regarding gang life. However, I felt the author provided rich detail in describing his struggles. I could feel him building strength to survive his battles and felt his defeat when he had been beaten and left for dead. His triumph in escaping the police left me cheering for him and celebrating the victory. In addition to gang-related conflicts, Rodriguez also struggled with mental health issues. He attempted suicide many times, yet he did not complete any attempts. I felt that on any page, this could be it; I was relieved at the turn of each page that he was still alive.

I encourage everyone to read this book. It is an eye opener about a young boy becoming a man with a past that will always haunt him.