

# Always running

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Always Running is an autobiographical book about Luis Rodriguez's experiences as a Mexican-American growing up in East Los Angeles. The book is divided into ten chapters, which is significant because the number ten represents a return to unity. Rodriguez begins as a boy who does not belong anywhere, and finishes his story as a respected member of society. By ending up as a respected member of society, Rodriguez is united with his community and is reunited within him. As a boy, he constantly battles himself about his worth as a human being, but as a man, he finally comes to terms with his identity.

Written in 1993 for his son Ramiro as an attempt to steer his son away from "La Vida Loca," Rodriguez carefully describes all his experiences of first being a victim, then being a victimizer as part of several gangs, then being a victim again when he moves away from his life of constant violence and struggle and has to deal with the consequences. This is a story of self-discovery. A young boy finds himself thrown into a world that does not accept him; as a result he becomes a victim.

Not knowing what else to do, this young boy seeks protection through violence and his peers. As he grows up and learns to think for himself and question everything, he learns he does not need to be ashamed of his family or heritage, and he works to gain respect in his community. Part of Rodriguez's heritage is speaking Spanish. Therefore, he often incorporates Spanish words and phrases into the text. In order for everyone to have a clear understanding, he includes a glossary in the back of the book with an English translation for every word he uses.

This makes the book easily accessible to everyone; it also gives the reader a sense of how important Rodriguez's culture is to him. For the most part, this book is written in chronological order. Each major event signifies a different stage in Rodriguez's life. However, sometimes events are repeated and sometimes less significant events are out of order. This makes parts of the story confusing, as the reader has to take some time out to understand what's going on and where to place the event in the author's life.

Rodriguez writes in a very flowery, poetic way which makes the stories come to life; many memories of people who Rodriguez has seen die as a result of the gang life touches the reader and makes these events seem as if they were happening today. It is very easy to sympathize with the author; the reader can clearly see where he is coming from and why he acts the way he does. However, he often justifies his violent actions. In this way, he is like the character Clemencia in Sandra Cisneros' "Never Marry a Mexican." Like Rodriguez, she justifies all her actions.

But also like Rodriguez, although there may be a reason behind the action, it does not always make the action right. The most descriptive parts of the story are when Rodriguez writes about women he's either been with or was merely attracted to. He shows no hesitation when describing how intimate he is with these women, and he uses many similes to emphasize how beautiful he thinks these women are. To Rodriguez, the images of these women are very important for the reader to imagine. For example, he describes one of his first loves, Viviana, as "looking like delicate earthenware, glazed in honey" (88).

The way he describes his women gives the reader insight into how Rodriguez thinks of women. He obviously treats them with respect, since he sees them as fragile, sweet objects. There are many women mentioned in this book, and Rodriguez is very free and bold when recounting these memories. He is not afraid to share his hopes, feelings of excitement, and even feelings of rejection and hurt. Every moment spent together is described in detail, including Rodriguez's thoughts during these moments, and the women are always remembered fondly and with respect.

Women are an important aspect of Rodriguez's life; even though he spent the majority of his time with his homeboys, he always valued and respected women. A majority of the book is written in dialogue. This makes the book more interesting and easier to read. It also helps the reader see and understand events better. By seeing how the characters interact with one another, the reader gets a better sense of how each character feels about the other and can draw more conclusions about why things turned out as they did.

For example, the dialogue between Rodriguez and his peers a few nights before they shoot at him helps the reader understand that his peers no longer respect him and will no longer protect him. In fact, he has become a liability and they feel they need to get rid of him because he no longer believes in continuing the violence and fighting back to avenge his gang. Because of this, his peers call him a " Pinch Puto" (208) and tell him that " nobody messes with us" (209). The reader can clearly see these words serve as a warning to Rodriguez. It foreshadows what they do to him later.