

My Bloody Life: The Making of a Latin King Study Guide

**My Bloody Life: The Making of a Latin King by
Reymundo Sanchez**

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Plot Summary

My Bloody Life is Reymundo Sanchez's frank memoir of growing up as a member of the Latin Kings, Chicago's largest and most violent Latino gang. In what is ultimately a very sad story, the young boy who is the target of his parents' violence turned into a violent young man with no education or skills. Reymundo was a lost boy. His elderly father died when he was four, and his teenaged mother lived with a succession of violent men in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Both his mother and her boyfriends beat Reymundo unmercifully. At thirteen, his mother kicked him out and Reymundo started hanging out at the gang clubhouse because he was homeless.

Although domestic violence ruined Reymundo's family life, gang violence brought all the good things into his life. After a hit on a rival gang, he was welcomed into homes of gang members. They fed him, gave him alcohol and drugs, and praised him lavishly. Only through violence could Reymundo find the approval and acceptance of an older man that he so craves. Most of all, violence brought friends and a sense of belonging to a family into his life for the first time. The gang became his family and his support group. His six-year tenure in the gang is one long crime spree.

Gradually as Reymundo matured, he realized the harsh truths behind gang life. Street soldiers spent most of their time seeking out members of other gangs and shooting at them. The youngest gang members risked their lives and sold drugs, while the oldest gang members lived lavishly on the profits, far away from the fighting. Despite claims of undying loyalty, gang members did not really care about each other. Reymundo had value to the gang only when he was shooting at people, engaged in "hits" against rival gangs. He became aware of the inequities of gang life, but it would be years before he saw a way out.

When Reymundo first joined the Latin Kings, loyalties were split along racial lines with the Puerto Rican Kings fighting the white Gaylords and the African American Vicelords. Soon, the Kings were at war with other Latino gangs, including the Spanish Cobras, Spanish Lords and Gangster Imperials. Eventually the Latin Kings united with the Gaylords, Vicelords and Insane Unknowns to become the Peoples. Their sworn enemies were the Spanish Cobras, Spanish Lords and the Imperial Gangsters, united into a group called the Folks. The police seemed to intentionally incite gang wars by picking up gang members and dropping them off in neighborhoods controlled by competing gangs. Twice, Reymundo saw a high-level gang leader pay off a police sergeant or detective. At the peak of the gang wars, anyone living in the wrong neighborhood was fair game and even a grandmother who happened to be wearing the colors of an opposing gang would be gunned down. Gang members had no hesitation killing children in other neighborhoods because they assumed the kids would eventually grow up to be members of a rival gang.

The only way to get out of the gang was to endure a brutal, often fatal beating. Still, at eighteen, Reymundo wanted to leave the gang and go to college. He confronted D.J., the new King leader, who treated Reymundo with respect. Reymundo endured the



beating, said goodbye to his gang girlfriend Loca and walked out of the park. Behind him, he heard shots. Loca was wounded and her young son Angel instantly killed. At first Reymundo vowed to avenge Angel, but realized it is more important to end the vicious cycle of revenge and violence forever.



Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 Summary and Analysis

My Bloody Life recounts the life of Reymundo Sanchez, a young boy in Puerto Rico who moved to Chicago and joined the bloody Latin Kings. He performed dozens of hits in six years and waged war on rival gangs. In Chapter 1, La Familia, Reymundo Sanchez was born in 1963, in the back of a 1957 Chevy. The family lived on a hilltop farming village in central Puerto Rico. His elderly father died before Reymundo's fifth birthday.

Reymundo's mother soon married Emilio, leaving her children with their aunt while she went on her honeymoon. His cousins and aunt beat the five-year-old daily while she was gone. Eighteen-year-old cousin Alberto raped Reymundo and threatened to kill him if he told anyone.

In Chapter 2, Chicago, shortly after the wedding, Reymundo's mother gave birth to another daughter. Then the family moved to the U.S. to live in a Mexican neighborhood in Chicago. Six-year-old Reymundo was fascinated by the city, including the "L" trains, snow and indoor plumbing, but he had trouble learning English. Emilio began beating the children, and eventually left the family. Reymundo's young, beautiful, illiterate mother takes up with obese, toothless, stinky Pedro, an older man who sells illegal lottery tickets. They move to a north side neighborhood, Humboldt Park.

In Chapter 3, Humboldt Park, Reymundo quickly made friends with Jorge, Noel and Julio in the new neighborhood. Reymundo was promoted to the fifth grade at Van Humboldt School, where all four boys were on honor roll. The four boys spent their time playing baseball and shoplifting candy from Gloria's, a store that also sells nickle bags. Reymundo learned to avoid white people when he saw a white cop arrest a Puerto Rican boy being bullied by a gang of white boys. At school and at Carmen's, the neighborhood hangout, the coolest guys smoked, drank and made out with very friendly girls. They also smoked marijuana joints rolled from the nickle bags. They called themselves the Latin Disciples. Ten-year-old Reymundo wanted to be one of the cool guys when he was a little older so pretty girls would be just as "friendly" with him. Soon Pedro begins beating the family, too.

In Chapter 4, The Beatings Begin, in September Reymundo was separated from his friends and sent to Tuley, a closer school. He played baseball and made friends with Papo and his five brothers, who hung out with a different group called the Spanish Lords. One snowy day Reymundo was doing his math homework at the table when Pedro came in. Because Pedro was illiterate, he assumed that if Reymundo was writing numbers, he must be competing with Pedro's illegal lottery business. Pedro beat the eleven-year-old boy brutally, flaying the skin off his back with a belt buckle. When Reymundo appeals to his mother, she beat his leg with an extension cord. Reymundo hid under his bed all night to avoid more beatings. The next morning, he had more bad news: his mother was pregnant again and the family was moving back to Puerto Rico. Reymundo was sure that the beatings would be worse there, and that Pedro might even



kill him. He hated his mother so much he wanted to kill her. Despite the abuse, Reymundo loved his mother and punched his friend Papo when he called her a bitch.

In Chapter 5, the Spanish Lords, the next day Reymundo and Papo cut school to hang out in the basement clubhouse of the Spanish Lords. He met Rican, Lil Chino, Snake, Pothead and for the first time witnessed a couple having sex, on the clubhouse sofa. He smoked a cigarette and marijuana with the group. Late that night when Pedro attacked him, Reymundo fought back, hitting the fat man with a plate of food. Pedro pulled out a gun and threatened to kill Reymundo. The more Reymundo was beaten at home, the more he acted out in school, which sparked more beatings at home. He stole Pedro's gun and the Spanish Lords sold it to another gang called the Insane Unknowns for \$100, which they spent on beer, wine and marijuana.



Chapters 6-10

Chapters 6-10 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 6, Murder in the 'Hood, Reymundo became close friends with Flaco, a teammate on the Western Boys sports team. The Spanish Lords start a gang war with the Spanish Cobras, a new Puerto Rican group on the west side of Western Avenue that included his old friend Julio. Reymundo heard shots fired a few blocks from his home. Later, he learned that the Lords were exchanging gunfire with the Cobras, who were barricaded in a house. The Lords threw firebombs into the building and shot at the Cobras as they ran out. Only the arrival of the police prevented all the Cobras from being mowed down. That ended the gang war until next summer.

Because of his violent upbringing, shooting and bombing rival gangs seemed like a normal way to resolve differences to Reymundo. He craved the acceptance, camaraderie and affection of the gang, fulfilling emotional needs that were not met at home. He still wanted to have sex with the "friendly" girls who were gang members. After a Halloween egg fight between gangs, the Spanish Lords gunned down an innocent member of the sports team La Familia, claiming he was a Cobra. The Lords declared war on every Puerto Rican who lived west of Western Avenue. That summer, Reymundo graduated from eighth grade. Rican's younger brother Afro was gunned down by Cobras. At high school, Reymundo found that he was one of the in crowd because he hung out with the Spanish Lords. Still, some of his old friends who were in other gangs avoided him.

In Chapter 7, My Teacher Maria, Reymundo's friend Speedy took him to an apartment several blocks away in the Insane Unknown's neighborhood. Three teen girls lived in the apartment with Maria, the mother of one girl. All four women had the reputation for being willing to have sex with anyone who would get them high. A nervous virgin, 13-year-old Reymundo had sex with 36-year-old Maria. She instructed him in the physical act, but it was completely without love. Later, he tried the same moves on a girl he liked, Jenny. She agreed to have sex with him, but his family moved to Puerto Rico before that could happen.

In Chapter 8, No Paradise, the family lived in a nice house with indoor plumbing in hilltop village in Puerto Rico. Reymundo's mother started defending her daughters from Pedro's beatings, but life for Reymundo was armed warfare. Pedro carried a machete and constantly threatened him with it. Reymundo carried a piece of guava wood the size of a baseball bat to defend himself. After six hellish months, Reymundo's mother grew tired of her son. She decided to send him back to the U.S. to live with the drug dealer, Hector, and his heroin junkie friends.

In Chapter 9, No Home, living with Hector, Reymundo became a pothead, shooting up junkies with heroin for sex or money. Rican invited him many times to become a Spanish Lord. Reymundo was always too stoned to answer.



In Chapter 10, Jenny, Reymundo went to Jenny's house with the intention of having sex with her. Instead, her brother Lil Man pulled Reymundo into a van. Some Gaylords had beaten up an old man and molested his wife in the park, simply because the couple was Puerto Rican. Lil Man and his gang, the Latin Kings, were going to teach the Gaylords a lesson. Reymundo thought they intended to beat the gang member,s but Lil Man and his posse decided to shoot at any white person in the Gaylord's neighborhood. Lil Man blasted three people with the shotgun, then they ditched the stolen van a few blocks away after wiping off the fingerprints. To Reymundo, it seemed natural that people had the right to kill victims of another race. Afterwords, he had sex with Jenny, who seemed impressed by the crime.



Chapters 11 -15

Chapters 11 -15 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 11, Lords of Nothing, Reymundo got into a fistfight with a Spanish Lord named Snake, who believed that Reymundo had insulted his girlfriend. All of the Lords gang up on Reymundo, because he was still not a member of the gang. In a blind frenzy he beat Snake in a one-on-one fight. Gang members traded jibes with Reymundo. He was shocked that his friends would be so disloyal and no longer wanted to join the Lords.

Reymundo went to a high school hangout with several friends from the Lords, including Crazy One. When they saw some members of the white gang Chi-West walking down the street, Crazy one gave Reymundo his gang sweater to hold. In the melee, two Chi-West in their twenties beat Reymundo and took the sweater. Crazy One threatened to kill Reymundo for losing the gang colors unless he got the sweater back. A council of older teen Lords decided to wait until the weather was warmer. Then, Reymundo would be required to get the colors back with Papo's help. Until then, he has been kicked out of the clubhouse and made homeless and friendless.

In Chapter 12, Chi-West, Jenny seemed excited that her "man" was going to kill someone. The Spanish Lords gave Reymundo a gun and told him that he could get the sweater back or kill a Chi-West. Papo, Mouse and an older girl named Morena would go with him. If Reymundo failed, he would be killed.

They found the Chi-Wests getting drunk in a schoolyard. Reymundo pulled out his gun and demanded the sweater back. The Chi-West refused and told Reymundo to shoot him. When fourteen-year-old Reymundo hesitated, the Chi-West said all Puerto Ricans are cowards. Mouse shot the guy in the leg twice while Morena started shooting anything that moved. The guy with the sweater was on the ground, next to a girl wounded in the arm. Mouse took the sweater and aimed his gun to shoot the white gang member again. The Chi-West pulled the girl on top of himself, using her body as a shield. Mouse's two bullets hit the girl in the head and chest. Sirens started and the Lords ran away, but Morena came back for Reymundo. Hiding out that night, Morena told Reymundo that he needed to learn to hurt people before they hurt him, and to be a leader.

In Chapter 13, Coward, with no home to return to, Reymundo hid at Maria's. The teen girls were seductive until they learned that Reymundo was a coward, not a killer. Reymundo's best friend Papo suggested that the Lords stop hanging out with the "coward." Jenny told him she can't have a boyfriend who is a punk. Reymundo wanted to enroll in high school for the new school year. Maria agreed to pose as his mother if he could find his transfer papers at Hector's place.



In Chapter 14, *Can't Be Normal Even If I Tried*, Reymundo returned to Hector's, where he sold heroin to junkies and consistently had sex with a nineteen-year-old drug prostitute. He left and went to Jenny's house, violently forcing himself on the girl. The next day, when he refused to have sex with Maria in front of a roomful of people, he was branded a faggot.

In Chapter 15, *First Kill*, Reymundo had nowhere to stay. He went to hang out with the Latin Kings, including Morena, Pebbles and Hercules. They got in a van together. When someone asked where they were going, Hercules said "to see what the newcomer is all about." Reymundo was so naive he did not realize he was the newcomer. Pebbles kissed him and promised sex if he would kill a Vicelord. Hercules put a sawed-off shotgun in Reymundo's hands and showed him how to use it. Moreana told him to get ready. Pebbles pointed out the Vicelords on a street corner. Reymundo jumped from the van, and opened fire on a group of people. They lay bleeding to death on the ground, begging for mercy. When a man ran out from the back of a car, Reymundo blasted him in the head and back. He jumped back into the van.

Reymundo rationalized his cold-blooded killing spree by telling himself the Vicelords were "just niggers." He felt a rush of adrenaline and bragged about his bravery all night. Pebbles never intended to have sex with him because she had a boyfriend. She just wanted to get him fired up to kill Vicelords. The Latin Kings accepted Reymundo because of the killing.



Chapters 16-20

Chapters 16-20 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 16, *The Acceptable Difference*, Reymundo still wanted to enroll in high school. Back at Maria's, Crazy One and Papo congratulated Reynaldo on the kill. Papo and Reymundo got into a fight with a group of Insane Spanish Cobras led by Flaco, Reymundo's old friend. Flaco refused to harm Reymundo but had the Cobras hold him while they brutally beat Papo.

In Chapter 17, *Officer Friendly*, Reymundo partied with the Latin Kings and their female counterparts the Latin Queens on the rocks at Montrose harbor. He then met a beautiful girl nicknamed China. When the police tried to chase them out after the park closed, someone threw a bottle at a police car. Suddenly the parking lot was full of police cars. Kings and Queens were getting beaten and arrested left and right. Trying to escape from the park in Morena's car, they were pulled from the car and beaten before being told to get in the car and go home. The Kings and Queens who were not in jail spent the rest of the night vandalizing government property, especially police cars.

In Chapter 18, *China*, Reymundo and China crashed on the couch in the King's clubhouse that night. The next morning, a tearful China recounted her life story. Her stepfather beat China, and her mother did nothing to protect her. Even worse, the stepfather has started to fondle her and become more sexually aggressive, even though he has been warned by several Latin Kings to stop. China dreamed of going to college to be a teacher. She gave Reymundo the gang nickname of Lil Loco, saying that he acted crazy. Maria began acting like a mother to Reymundo. She bought him school clothes and registered him in school. Hector bought furniture for the second-floor apartment so Reymundo will have a place to stay, instead of crashing with friends or in various gang clubhouses. Hector still occasionally sent junkies to the apartment to shoot up.

In Chapter 19, *Back to the Hunting Grounds*, at school Reymundo hung with Papo and Speedy, giving the impression that he is a Spanish Lord. He flashed the Lords gang sign when he is in their territory, and the Kings sign when he is in that 'hood. He still walked Jenny home from school and had sex in her room nightly, but began a chaste romance with China. With Papo and Speedy, he badly beat up a classmate who was a Latin Disciple.

In Chapter 20, *Betrayed into a Coma*, Jenny admitted that Speedy told her about Reymundo's romance with China. In revenge, she had sex with Speedy just moments before having sex with Reymundo. Although he had no feelings for Jenny, Reymundo felt insulted and disrespected. He slapped the girl around and then left angrily. He was so furious that instead of taking the bus, fourteen-year-old Reymundo walked down Western Avenue, right into Gaylord territory. A young white boy playing with a ball confronted him and nine days later Reymundo woke up in the hospital. It took him three

months at Maria's to recover from the concussion and other injuries. China and the Latin Kings visited him in the hospital. All he could think about was revenge.



Chapters 21-25

Chapters 21-25 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 21, Madness, China and Reymundo shared a bed at Maria's although she still wouldn't have sex with him. She was saving herself for marriage. Reymundo got revenge on the Gaylords. Reymundo was disgusted by the Lords extreme violence and decided never to be a member of that gang.

In Chapter 22, Rosie, back at school Reymundo developed a crush on Miss Popularity, Rosie. She was not impressed and would barely speak to him. China, disappointed that he had become a hardcore gangbanger, moved in with her father. Reymundo was happy to see her go, since it opened the door for him to date Rosie.

In Chapter 23, Convenient Agreement, Lalo of the Kings went with Reymundo to answer to the Unknowns about beating Speedy. Lalo and J.J., the leader of the Unknowns, agreed that Speedy and Reymundo will fight one-on-one to settle the argument once and for all. Reymundo got in a few good punches before Speedy picked up a bat and opened a gash on Reymundo's head that would require fifteen stitches to close. Speedy's fellow gang members turned on him and beat him brutally for using a weapon. Afterwards, the Kings explained that if Reymundo did not become a member of the gang, Lalo would be brutally beaten for lying to J.J. Reymundo agreed, even though it would involve two group members beating him to prove he is tough. He was exempt from proving himself by the usual act of violence, due to the attack on the Gaylords.

In Chapter 24, My Girl, Reymundo had sex with Morena, his best friend among the Latin Queens. He was afraid that it will destroy their friendship forever.

In Chapter 25, Prove Myself Worthy, Reymundo's initiation was set for the following Sunday. After a wild party the week before, he went on a mission with Loco, the stone-cold killer who was the head of the Kedzie and Armitage Kings. While Loco and a few others distracted the rival Imperial Gangsters, Reymundo spray painted the Kings' logo over the Imperial mural. For good measure he added his street name, Lil Loco and a five-pointed crown. In the brawl that followed, one of the injured Imperial Gangsters stumbled into the street where he was run down by a van.



Chapters 26 - 30

Chapters 26 - 30 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 26, Rape, Reymundo returned to the clubhouse with Loco, where Blanca has promised to have sex with him. After she has her top off, she refused. Morena insisted that Blanca follow through. If she does not, she would be disciplined by the gang for disrespecting the new member, Lil Loco. Blanca told Reymundo that she was a virgin and begged him not to take her. Drunk and stoned, Reymundo forced her to have sex with him, twice. Remundo has no idea how to load or unload a gun, but he has discovered that pulling the trigger is enough to get all the sex he wants.

In Chapter 27, Crowned, in the sober light of day, Reymundo was terrified of the police and no longer wanted to join a gang. But it was Sunday, the day of his initiation. At the business meeting, after a prayer, Pito took Reymundo into a separate room where three Kings his own age beat him for three minutes. He was officially Lil Loco, a Latin King gang member. Then one gang member, thirteen-year-old Slim, was fatally beaten for losing the cocaine he was supposed to sell. The Kings called it being "violating out", being kicked out of the gang and beaten, often fatally. It was the only way to leave the gang.

In Chapter 28, Violence Rules, on the way to Maria's, Reymundo and Papo confronted some Cobras who were spray painting walls and flashing gang signs in Lords territory. Papo shot two of the Cobras, and everyone fled in a van. One of the wounded gang members was a Latin Disciple. The Cobras shot an Unknown in retaliation, and soon there was an all-out gang war in progress. With another gang member, Papo and Reymundo ambushed a group of Disciples, killing one and wounding three. Reymundo wondered why his old rival Speedy was hanging around with the group.

In Chapter 29, Madman, Reymundo stopped by Jenny's house for sex, oblivious to her hatred after their last argument. Jenny informed him that she was pregnant, and shouts for her father when Reymundo tried to force her to have sex. Instead, Reymundo had sex with Cubana on the grass at Humboldt Park "like two dogs in heat", losing all respect for her. Instead of fighting the blacks or whites, the different Puerto Rican gangs were now at war with each other. Seven innocent bystanders were killed in the process. A Spanish Cobras chief was gunned down with his baby in his arms.

In Chapter 30, The Latin Disciples take over Maplewood Park by converting young people to their gang and having Latin King leaders arrested. With Paco and Loco, Reymundo was in a shootout against the Latin Disciples at a house where a grandmother and small children cowered in the bedroom. Reymundo spent less time at the King clubhouse because he now had to cross dangerous Disciple territory to get to it.



Chapters 31-35

Chapters 31-35 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 31, My Rosie, the beautiful, remote Rosie pretended to be in love with Reymundo. In fact, she was trying to lure him into Disciple territory for a hit by her gang boyfriend and brother. Rosie's friend Sheena warned Reymundo of the deadly ambush just in time.

In Chapter 32, Down Brother, Loco gave fifteen-year-old Reymundo two guns and a bag of drugs to sell, a huge vote of confidence for a Pee Wee Latin King. A brother named Weasel was arrested for the hit where the Imperial Gangster got run over by the van. Weasel wasn't even with them that night. Reymundo was ordered to make a hit on a new rival gang, the Orchestra Albany. He began to have nightmares of all the people he's shot or seen die.

In Chapter 33, Poor Rosie, Morena, Cubana and another Latin Queen attack Rosie outside Clemente High School as vengeance for her setting Reymundo up for a hit. She is badly beaten and stabbed eight times in the face and chest, requiring multiple reconstructive surgeries. Maria kicked Reymundo out of the apartment when his friends robbed her new boyfriend. Once again, Reymundo was homeless, crashing in the clubhouse or with Kings and grabbing a meal wherever he can.

In Chapter 34, Juni, Reymundo still played baseball occasionally with the Western Boys. A new eighth-grader named Juni had joined them. Juni had a stable family life in a home that radiated love. Reymundo stayed overnight with the family several times, and envied the security and affection. Juni thought the Kings were cool and bugged Reymundo to let him join. One night when the two were walking together, a rival gang shot at them. Juni took two shotgun blasts to the chest and died in Reymundo's arms. Determined to get revenge on someone, anyone, Reymundo and a Queen named Loca staged a hit on a bunch of Cobras.

In Chapter 35, Loca, Reymundo and Loca arranged an ambush at a local pool on four young men who might belong to a new gang called the Dragons. All the Dragons were killed.



Chapters 36-40

Chapters 36-40 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 36, Morena, RIP, Reymundo's best friend, his "big sister" Morena was killed in a drive-by shooting by Imperial Gangsters. Reymundo retaliated by shooting two Imperials. One was killed, the other crippled for life. King Dino was arrested and convicted of the crime. Under the code of the gangs, Dino must take the blame and could not inform on another member of the Kings, so he was sent to jail for twenty years for a crime Reymundo committed.

In typically illogical gang thinking, the Kings decided to take revenge on a coalition of other gangs for Morena's death, rather than taking revenge on the Imperials who killed her. They reasoned that this would prove they were not afraid of anybody. The coalition consisted of the Cobras, Disciples and a new gang, the Latin Jive. Among the group attacked was Reymundo's old friend Speedy, who tried to shoot him. Unarmed, Reymundo dashed around a corner to find himself confronting a shotgun held by his old friend Julio. Instead of killing him, Julio told him to run, creating a diversion that saved Reymundo's life. Climbing into the car, a bullet whizzed by, scratching Reymundo's lower leg. He was proud of this first battle wound.

In Chapter 37, NRA? Lucky's Death, Reymundo acted as lookout while Lucky bought \$5,000 worth of M-1 rifles and pistols from two burly white guys from southern Illinois. The white guys' car had an NRA sticker on the windshield. Reymundo thought that the NRA was another gang, one he might like to join. Before leaving, the white guys gave Reymundo a pistol as a tip. Like most of the gang leadership, Lucky had used drug profits to move out of the neighborhood, to safer areas free of gangs. Lucky had also started shooting up heroin, a violation of gang rules. He began acting unreliable and confronting gang leadership — behavior Reymundo would repeat when he was older. One day when Lucky was walking down an alley, he was shot in the head with an M-1, killed instantly with one of the gang guns he purchased. It was the King's way of dealing with internal personnel problems.

In Chapter 38, Crazy Ways, Reymundo began to visit Latin Kings in different parts of the city with the gang leaders. In Chinatown, he met Cindy or Chineta, a girl who was not in any gang. Cindy tried to convince him to quit gang life and get an education. Over the next few years, she pointed out how pointless gang violence was. At sixteen, Reymundo was offered the position of president of the Peewee Kings, and declined it for a second time. Then he was promoted to Junior King, selling marijuana and committing burglaries with Daffy.

Hundreds of Kings disrupted the funeral of the Imperial Gangster accused of killing Morena, throwing the body in the street in front of the funeral home and riddling it with bullets. Many older members of the Kings were in jail or dead and the clubhouse at Armitage and Kedzie had shut down as the Cobras gained strength. However, young



boys in the 'hoods still wanted to join gangs for protection. Each night, bloody scenes replayed themselves in Reymundo's nightmares

In Chapter 39, Disciplined, a carload of Kings confronted some young boys playing baseball in the Disciple 'hood. All the boys except one ran. King Duce pulled a gun to shoot the ten-year-old boy, but Reymundo stopped him. Although he had killed many times, Reymundo was reluctant to murder an unarmed child who probably was not even a gang member. Reymundo and Duce traded blows over the boy. At an emergency King meeting, Reymundo was found guilty. He was sentenced to a "three-minute violation", being beaten by three Kings for three minutes without fighting back. The beating was painful, but the enforcers did not do any permanent damage because they were prohibited from hitting sensitive areas like the head, hands or groin. Even so, after the beating Reymundo could not get off the floor for thirty minutes. Reymundo became disillusioned with gang life, but saw no way out. He began dropping acid regularly.

When Reymundo's sometime-girlfriend became pregnant by another man, Agila, a King from the South Side, taunted him unmercifully. Finally Reymundo had enough and shot Agila in each kneecap. Agila had both legs amputated at the knees, and over one hundred stitches to his head. The Kings put a hit on Reymundo — he was to be shot on sight by any King.

Loca, a Queen in her twenties, had taken over Morena's role as Reymundo's "big sister" and mother figure. She convinced Tino, the King leader incarcerated in Stateville prison, to hear Reymundo's appeal. Tino spared Reymundo's life, but ordered another three-minute violation. Under house arrest until the punishment, sixteen-year-old Reymundo passed the time by having sex with the daughter of the family, who was only twelve. Years later, he realized how wrong this was, but at the time it did not seem like rape. The day after the punishment, Reymundo's friends took him to the hospital with broken ribs, internal injuries and alcohol poisoning. He was questioned by the police but told them he was drunk and remembered nothing.

In Chapter 40, No Lesson Learned, on his seventeenth birthday, Reymundo was partying in the middle of the street when three beautiful girls picked up him and King Pietro. Making out with the girls, Reymundo suddenly realized they were being driven to an ambush in Cobra territory. As they ran away from a crowd of Cobras, Pietro was shot in the leg. Reymundo flagged down a police car to get help for Pietro. Then he falsely accused the Cobra leaders of being the shooters, to get them sent to jail. That winter a cop kned Reymundo in the groin during questioning, causing an injury that kept him out of commission and on pain pills for two months.



Chapters 41-45

Chapters 41-45 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 41, *Spread the Violence*, Reymundo began to hang out with the King leaders, the older members who ran the gang's drug operations. He realized that the real purpose of the gang was to sell drugs and commit other crimes. He earned a few perks, like attending fewer meetings. Reymundo was a King wherever he stood, meaning not subject to any section leader. He took orders only from the highest leaders, most of whom were in the penitentiary. When the police began looking for him, the head honchos dropped Reymundo, but he kept his status.

Only July 4, the Kings and Cobras got into a shoot-out at Wisconsin Dells, resulting in the death of several innocent bystanders. In the middle of another summer gang war, the head honchos ordered the gangs to form two coalitions. The Peoples included the Latin Kings and their former arch rivals, the white Gaylords and the African American Vicelords. They fought the Folks, consisting of the Latin Disciples, the Spanish Cobras, and affiliated gangs. This meant the gangs leaders had the power to negotiate a peace agreement with each other if they wanted to. For the first time the gangs expanded to white, middle-class kids in the suburbs. Although the suburban kids wanted the glamor of gangbanging, they were unwilling to risk their lives.

In Chapter 42, *Enemies Near*, Reymundo was shot in the arm during a firefight with some Cobras. The arm became infected and took more than five months to heal. Seventeen-year-old Reymundo learned to drive a car. He and Daffy started pulling armed robberies, using Queens to lure male victims out of bars. Peewee Kings were also selling marijuana for Reymundo in return for a few dollars. Reymundo was no longer impressed by Loco and other leaders who exploited younger gangsters to afford their new cars, flashy jewelry and gorgeous women. He wanted out of the gang, but could see no way to make that happen.

In Chapter 43, *Disowned*, Cindy told Reymundo that she cannot believe he would choose gangs and drugs over her. She pointed out that the Kings were not his real friends. When he was in bed with the groin injury, or almost lost his arm, none of the Kings visited him or showed support. She pointed out that the gangs just perpetuate violence, usually on other Latinos. Reymundo relieved his inner turmoil the only way he knew how, by staging an attack on the Imperial Gangsters. He dashed into the Kings clubhouse at Courtland and Whipple to hide from the Imperials. The Kings were angry that he would lead a rival gang and the police to their sanctuary. No longer welcome at either of the Kings sections, Reymundo began hanging out in Spanish Lords territory.

In Chapter 44, *The Way It Is*, the Cobras and Disciples had taken over Roberto Clemente high school and the surrounding area. They waged war on any young man living in Lords or Kings territory, even if he was not a gang member. Reymundo, Flaco and Pothead hit a group of Cobras. Pothead was arrested for the shooting, and got fifty

years in jail with possible parole after twenty. Homeless since leaving the Kings, Reymundo lived on the streets for eight months. He was filthy and unfed, and girls were no longer interested in him. When a homosexual man named Freddy propositioned him, Reymundo agreed to an affair, just to have a place to stay.

In Chapter 45, Another Addiction, Reymundo headed back to King's territory in Humboldt Park near Kedzie and North, where the gang members seemed happy to see him. With King Cano, he began dealing cocaine and soon was addicted himself. Now eighteen, Reymundo had a stable of coke whores who would do whatever he wanted, as long as he provided them with drugs. With the money from drug dealing, he gained status and sponsored neighborhood barbecues. Some of the worshipful parents allowed him to have sex with the daughters, girls as young as thirteen, in their own homes. The only women he had any respect for were the members of the Latin Queen gang.



Chapters 46- 50

Chapters 46- 50 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 46, Reymundo began using more cocaine than he sold, and the drug business fell off. He began doing burglaries again to earn money. With some other Kings, he hit a new gang, the Latin Lovers. Reymundo was hit in the head with a brick, kicked and knocked down. The Latin Lover held a gun to his head and demanded that he shout, "King Killer!" or he'd pull the trigger. Reymundo knows that he would be shot anyway, so he shouted, "King Love!" The Lover pulled the trigger. The gun jammed and did not fire. The police came, and the gang member ran away. When the police questioned him, Reymundo falsely accused everyone who appeared to be a gang member of the attack. For the first time, two gang crime division detectives offered to help Reymundo if he wanted to get out of gang life.

In Chapter 47, The Law, Reymundo started dealing cocaine again and was arrested. In the Cook County jail, he bumped into a childhood friend, Jorge. Reymundo learned that his friend, and fellow dealer Spanky, a King, betrayed him the police. He also learned that the Kings had ordered a hit on Spanky in retaliation. Reymundo was caught with three ounces of cocaine, \$2,000, an unregistered nine-millimeter pistol and an Uzi submachine gun. He could receive fifteen to thirty years in prison for the drug crime alone, or plead guilty and only serve three years. Eventually, Loca visited and the Kings hired a lawyer for Reymundo.

In Chapter 48, Free?, Reymundo was released on bail after five weeks. He stayed with Loca for a few weeks. Loca was working as a bank teller and roommate Cubana was a welfare mother. Reymundo started dealing marijuana and cocaine again, and using both. Although he was having an affair with Cubana, he started having sex with Loca.

In Chapter 49, Older Woman, eighteen-year-old Reymundo began a serious relationship with twenty-nine-year-old Loca. Because of the age difference, her neighbors were scandalized that he was living with her and her two young sons. Loca supported Reymundo, cooked and cleaned for him and insisted he take GED classes.

Reymundo's case was switched to a different judge, and for \$2,000 in cash, the charges were dropped. Loca said the attorney paid off the new judge. Gang member Mago stole a small amount of drugs from another King. The leaders had decided that he would be punished by having one kneecap shot off. Reymundo was ordered to do the hit, and did. By this time, Reymundo wanted out of the Kings but he was afraid of the final beating, the "violation out". He had seen several people beaten to death when they requested a violation out.

One night, Reymundo walked Loca home from her bank job, laughing and joking. A car came by and flashed gang signs. Reymundo flashed the King's sign, and shots rang out. Loca was hit in the leg, a serious injury. Reymundo flagged down a passing car to



take her to the hospital. That night he did two grams of cocaine in the hospital while waiting. He passed out and nearly died of an overdose. When he returned home, the Kings demanded that he come to a meeting of the Beach and Spaulding section.

In Chapter 50, Love Lost, when Loca got out of the hospital ten days later, Reymundo was put on house arrest by the Kings. On Sunday, they came to get him for the meeting. The section leader was Chico, a well-dressed, college educated Latin King. The Inca, the head of all the Kings, had designated Chico to handle this problem. Reymundo was unjustly accused of being an intravenous drug user, hooked on heroin. In fact, although he was addicted to cocaine, he had never injected drugs. Reymundo was given a choice between a vicious head-to-toe beating or being violated out of the Kings. Frightened for this life, Reymundo pulled a gun on the other Kings and escaped. Loca was furious. By defying the Kings, Reymundo had endangered her life and the lives of her children. She began desperately calling King leaders, seeking forgiveness for Reymundo. At the very least, she begged them not to harm her family. Loca kicked him out but before he could leave, gunfire erupted. Reymundo, Loca and her two boys huddled on the floor in the bedroom, trying to avoid being shot. They told the police they didn't know who blasted the house, busting all the windows with shotguns.



Chapters 51 — 53

Chapters 51 — 53 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 51, Lesson Learned, finally, Reymundo's rebellion sparked a rift in the gang. King Tito, the Inca, took Reymundo's side, saying that no one else could take Reymundo's crown, meaning kick him out of the gang. Still, the young gangbangers on the street were no longer completely obedient to the leaders in the penitentiary, and Reymundo knew he must solve the problem himself. Loca's sister Luisa got Reymundo a data entry job at the local university. He briefly became obsessed with getting a degree, and reconnected with Cindy, who was attending another university nearby.

In Chapter 52, Crownless, Reymundo confronted the Kings at Beach and Spaulding, telling them he wanted out of the gang. Chico was in jail. The new leader, King D.J., tried to convince Reymundo to stay in the gang, but he refused. Reymundo was violated out of the gang, beaten for three minutes. However, the beating was nowhere near as severe as the other violations he had endured. Reymundo had been a Latin King for six years. When he finally stumbled away from the beating, Reymundo had lost the only true family he every knew. But it still felt like the right thing to do.

In Chapter 53, Tragedies Continue With or Without Me, Reymundo stopped by the park to tell Spanky and Loca goodbye. He noticed with disgust that Loca had one of her little boys hiding cocaine in his socks for her. As he walked away, Spanky cried, "Once a King, always a King." A few moments later, hots rang out. Reymundo ran back to the park to see that Loca had been hit. Her little boy Angel ran to his wounded mother and was shot in the back. He died in Reymundo's arms. Reymundo vowed to avenge Angel's death but realized that it would only perpetuate the cycle of violence.



Characters

Reymundo Sanchez

Reymundo Sanchez is the pen name of the main character, a member of the feared Latin Kings gang in Chicago. The memoir traces Reymundo's development from a toddler to quitting the gang before his nineteenth birthday. Reymundo's elderly father died when the boy was just four. His teenage mother quickly married another man, leaving Reymundo and his two sisters with her aunt while she was on her honeymoon. Reymundo was brutally sodomized by his much older cousin Alberto and tortured by his cousins. When the family moved to Chicago, two successive stepfathers beat Reymundo, with his mother's cooperation. Eventually Reymundo retaliated against his stepfather Pedro, in an effort to stop the beatings.

At thirteen, despite the violence at home, Reymundo was reluctant to shoot at rival gang members on his first hit. He got a reputation as a coward. When he refused to have sex in public with a much older woman, he was branded as a faggot. In order to save his social standing and be accepted by the group, Reymundo got high on marijuana and drunk on beer and wine. Intoxicated, he found it much easier to kill others. His street name became Lil Loco. This made him one of the coolest kids at his school and in the gang, with all the attention, praise and sex that come with it.

As Reymundo matured, sex and drugs were important payoffs for violent behavior. When he was high, it was easy to be violent. Attacking other gangs made him irresistible to girls, including the Latin Queens, the Kings' female counterparts. After committing violent hits, he was rewarded with more drugs and alcohol, and the cycle continued. For many years, Reymundo believed that it was necessary to avenge every injury or slight to the Latin Kings. Eventually, with most of his friends in jail or dead, he realized that no one wins when gangs were at war.

Reymundo's Mother

Reymundo's mother was only sixteen when she married his father, a seventy-four-year-old man. After Reymundo's two younger sisters were born, his father died, before Reymundo's fifth birthday. His mother was young and beautiful, but completely uneducated and illiterate. She was left with little choice except to marry again quickly in order to provide for her children. She married Emilio and gave birth to their daughter just a few months later. The family moved to Chicago. As soon as Emilio's daughter was born, he began abusing the older children. Emilio was soon arrested for scamming the Social Security Administration and disappeared. She found another husband, Pedro, and the cycle repeated itself. The couple had two daughters of their own. As soon as his first child was born, Pedro began abusing the older children. He was particularly violent with Reymundo, the only boy.



After the birth of Pedro's first daughter, the family decided to move back to Puerto Rico. They lived in a nice concrete block house with indoor plumbing. However, Reymundo and his oldest sister plead to stay in Chicago. When the boy became completely unmanageable, his mother sent him back to Chicago to live with Hector, her husband's grown son, a drug dealer.

Morena

Morena was an older teen girl who was Reymundo's best friend in the gang. She was a prominent, powerful member of the Latin Queens, the female counterpart to the Latin Kings. When Reymundo went on his first ill-fated hit against the Cobras and was frozen with fear, Morena picked up an automatic and started blasting anything that moved. She saved his life, but more importantly, she did not ridicule him for his failure. Instead, she coached him to get drunk and high next time.

Morena became a sort of foster mother for Reymundo, taking care of him and allowing him to sleep in her house when he had no place to stay. She took care of him when he was injured, and pleaded on his behalf with gang leaders. Even one night of sex did not entirely ruin his relationship with Morena, who continues to act like a big sister. In a sense, Reymundo at thirteen or sixteen was still a young boy and Morena, Maria and Loca were stand-ins for his mother.

Loca

After Morena's death, Reymundo lived for a time with Loca and her two young sons. At first he was sexually involved with her roommate, Cubana. Eventually Reymundo and Loca enter into what was perhaps the most emotionally intense relationship of his life so far. While Reymundo used other girls for sex, he and Loca talked and giggled like lovers. Many people in the neighborhood disapproved of the relationship that flowered when Reymundo was eighteen and Loca was twenty-nine. She provided him with food, clothing and shelter, supporting him by dealing cocaine and working as a bank teller. The relationship ended only when Reymundo rebelled against King Chico, putting Loca and her children in danger. In the tragic climax of the book, Loca was injured and her young son Angel killed by a rival gang just after Reymundo quit the Kings.

Jenny

Jenny was Reymundo's girlfriend from the time he is thirteen to fifteen years old. One of the reasons that Reymundo wanted to return to the U.S. at thirteen was because Jenny had said that if he did, she will have sex with him. Eventually he returned and she kept her word. However, after he was reluctant to shoot people, Jenny informs him that she cannot have a boyfriend who is a punk. One of Reymundo's primary motivations to be in a gang was to have sex with lots of girls, in this case, especially Jenny. After his first hit, Jenny admired him and soon he was sneaking into her bedroom through the window almost every night. He enjoyed sex with her nightly, and this also gave the homeless



youth a safe, warm place to sleep. Throughout their time together, both Reymundo and Jenny were having sex with other people. Eventually Jenny became pregnant, and ended the relationship. It never occurred to Reymundo that the child might be his.

Cindy

Cindy was a young girl from Chinatown that Reymundo also called Chinita. Cindy was determined to get a college education and end her family's cycle of poverty. Her brother belonged to the Chinatown branch of the Latin Kings. Cindy was always trying to convince her brother to leave the gang, and tried to persuade Reymundo as well. Although the two never became sexually involved, Reymundo remembered Cindy's arguments about the hopelessness and inequalities of gang life, even years later.

Julio

Julio was Reymundo's friend at Von Humboldt School, during the idyllic first year in Humboldt Park when they played baseball and football with the Western Boys sports team. Other team members included Jorge and Noel. Years later, a Spanish Cobra confronted Reymundo with a shotgun. It was Julio. The two teens recognized each other and Julio let his friend escape. Jorge was not so generous, firing shots at his boyhood friend.

Papo

Papo was one of the first Latin Kings that Reymundo met, a boy a year older who became his partner in many crimes.

Pedro

Pedro was married to Reymundo's mother, her third husband best known for beating the children regularly. He moved the family back to Puerto Rico but sent his unmanageable stepson to live with his grown son, a heroin dealer named Hector.

Juni

Juni was the younger brother that Reymundo never had. Reymundo loved to spend the night at Juni's house, which was suffused with a sense of love. He did not understand why the younger boy with a stable home life was infatuated with the violence of gangbanging. It was all a game to Juni. Although Juni was not a gang member, one day while walking with Reymundo, he flashed the King sign at a passing car. Cobras in the car opened fire and Juni bled to death in Reymundo's arms.

Maria

Maria was an older woman who lived in an apartment with her teenage daughter and her daughter's two friends. All four women had the reputation for being willing to have sex with anyone who would get them high. Maria thought she was doing Reymundo a favor by having sex with the fourteen-year-old boy. It was Reymundo's first time, and it amounted to sex abuse. Eventually Maria regretted her actions and allowed Reymundo to live with her when he was homeless. Acting as a mother figure, she made sure he had food, a bed and even registered him in high school.

Alberto

While Reymundo's mother was on a honeymoon with her second husband, Alberto viciously beat the four-year-old boy. Even worse, he raped Reymundo on his own mother's bed one afternoon. Alberto told Reymundo that he would kill him if he told anyone of the attack. This was Reymundo's introduction to a life of violence.

Freddy

One winter while Reymundo was a homeless teen, he met Freddy. Reymundo agreed to have an affair with the closeted homosexual, in return for a place to live. When Freddy had guests for the weekend, he gave Reymundo money for a hotel, to conceal their relationship.



Objects/Places

Puerto Rico

Reymundo was born in Puerto Rico, although he had very few memories of the island and none of them are pleasant. At thirteen, he was crushed when his family decided to move back to the island, tearing him away from his friends and school.

Chicago

Reymundo's mother and Emilio moved the family from Puerto Rico to an apartment on the south side of Chicago. Reymundo loved the city, with its snow, "L" trains, ethnic neighborhoods and bustle.

Humboldt Park

When Reymundo's mother married Pedro, he moved the family to the Humboldt Park neighborhood. At first, that part of the city was mixed Latino, white and African American, but by the end of the saga, the neighborhood was almost entirely Puerto Rican. The area is centered on a beautiful park with baseball diamonds, fields, and a lake for swimming in the summer and ice skating in the winter. Reymundo loved Humboldt Park because for the first time he had good friends and attended a good school. That ended when he joined the gang.

Roberto Clemente High School

The new high school in Humboldt Park was primarily the territory of the Latin Kings when Reymundo first attended it, making him one of the cool kids. He dropped out when he was sixteen, and the school was soon primarily Latin Disciples and Cobras. The animosity between the gangs at school made it almost impossible for anyone to get a quality education.

Gang Clubhouse at Kedzie and Armitage

Reymundo's section when he first joined the Kings was the Kedzie and Armitage division. Because he had no real home as a teen, Reymundo spent many nights getting high or sleeping in the clubhouse. It was also a convenient place to hide out from the cops.



Hector's Apartment

When Reymundo was thirteen, his mother sent him back to the states to live with Hector, her third husband's adult son. Hector was a drug dealer whose apartment was filled with junkies day and night. He couldn't care less if Reymundo came home or not.

Maria's Apartment

Reymundo lived for a time with Maria at her apartment in Humboldt Park. Originally Maria's daughter and her two friends also lived there, but by the time Reymundo moved in, only Maria and her daughter shared the apartment.

Loca's Home

At the age of eighteen, Reymundo moved into Loca's home, living with the twenty-nine-year-old woman and her two small sons. One night members of the Latin Kings who were angry at Reymundo shot out all the windows with guns, as a threat to the family. Reymundo realized that he had to leave in order to protect Loca and the boys.

Jenny's Room

For more than a year, Reymundo slipped through an open window into Jenny's room almost every night so they could have sex while her unsuspecting parents sleep in the apartment.

Freddy's Apartment

One winter, Reymundo regularly stayed with Freddy in his apartment.



Themes

Violence

Violence is the villain of the memoir, driving all the action. As a young boy in Puerto Rico, five-year-old Reymundo was brutally beaten by his aunts and cousins while his widowed teenage mother was on her honeymoon with her new husband, Emilio. Even worse, Reymundo's eighteen-year-old cousin raped him, brutally sodomizing the boy. It was Reymundo's last memory of Puerto Rico. The family moved to Chicago. After the birth of Emilio's daughter a few months later, he began beating Reymundo, Reymundo's mother and his three sisters. When Emilio left the family, Reymundo's beautiful, illiterate mother found another man to support them. The routine of beatings soon began again, this time with Pedro. They became even more violent when the family moved back to Puerto Rico. Eventually, when Reymundo was thirteen, his mother gave up on him and sent him back to the U.S. to live with an older stepbrother who sold heroin.

Reymundo began hanging out with gang members to find the acceptance and support he did not get at home. Initially Reymundo was reluctant to shoot at other people, and gained a reputation as a coward. In an effort to overcompensate, Reymundo got drunk and went on a "hit" with other gang members. Soon he learned that as long as he was drunk and high on marijuana, he could be a ruthless killer without any regrets. It is only later that the nightmares began, dreams of the youths he had killed and the comrades who had died in his arms.

Reymundo's six years in the Latin King gang was one long spree of violence. All summer, and on most weekends during the winter, the Kings travelled to the territory of other gangs to shoot as many gang members as possible. When they were successful, the other gang retaliated, wounding or killing Kings. The Kings then avenged their fallen comrades, in an unending cycle of violence.

Gangs

My Bloody Life is an expose of gang life, especially of the Latin Kings and rival gangs in Chicago. The gangs were secretive, and gang members who gave out information including gang signs or colors were harshly disciplined for betraying their brothers, sometimes put to death. Initially, Reymundo hung out with the Spanish Lords, but eventually joined their allies, the Latin Kings. The Latin Disciples are another affiliated gang, and the Insane Unknowns are a secret offshoot of the Latin Kings. When Reymundo first joined the gangs, the Kings' rivals were the white Gaylords and the African American Vicelords. Later, the Latino gangs begin to fight among themselves, with the Kings against the Spanish Cobras, the Latin Disciples, the Latin Jazz, and the Imperial Gangsters.



Initially, the rift between gangs was racial. The white Gaylords had a huge mural with their motto: The only good Puerto Rican is a dead Puerto Rican. The white Chi-West gang seemed to share that attitude. Later, the gang wars became bloody annual disputes over the rights to sell drugs in a particular neighborhood.

The gangs were not always violent. The fall after the Spanish Lords declare war on the Spanish Cobras, the entire neighborhood had an egg fight on Halloween. The Lords and Western Boys were on one side, while the Cobras and the La Familia sports team were on the other. Eventually, they decided to join forces and throw eggs at the rival gangs, the white Gaylords and African American Vicelords. It was all good natured fun and no one was seriously injured or killed. After Reymundo's first year with the gangs, the Halloween tradition was abandoned. Instead, the gangs spent Halloween launching hits on each other.

The Latin Kings had a long and proud heritage as a civic group created to protect Puerto Rican immigrants in Humboldt Park from persecution by other ethnic groups. The Kings were divided into sections, with a leader for each section. The highest leaders of the gang were in the penitentiary. Only in Reymundo's generation has the group turned primarily to illegal activity. When Reymundo first joined the group, the Kings had a booklet of Nation Literature and every new King was required to memorize a prayer within a week. Group members chipped in \$5 per week for drugs, guns, bail and to care for those who were incarcerated. By the time Reymundo left the gang, all these traditions had been abandoned.

The Need to Belong

Reymundo was driven to join the gang primarily by the basic human need to be accepted by a group. As a boy, he had nothing. He had no family of his own, his mother beat him regularly, and by thirteen he was homeless in a strange country. Reymundo craved the love, affection, praise and approval of a family or peer group. He found that in the gangs. After an act of violence, other gang members allowed Reymundo to stay in their homes, prepared special food for him and showered him with praise. He felt he was finally accepted. Only gradually did Reymundo come to realize that the gang members did not care about him, they cared about what he could do for them.

Promiscuity was one way that Reymundo handled the profound need to belong. He had sex with any woman who was available, regardless of age. Several times he forced himself on unwilling or underage partners. At the height of his gang career, Reymundo was making many thousands of dollars per week dealing cocaine. He was generous with his money, buying cars for people in the neighborhood and throwing lavish barbecues for everyone. But when he developed a drug habit of his own, and was no longer making money, Reymundo realized that no one truly cared for him.



Style

Perspective

My Bloody Life is told in first person narrative, in past tense. This gives the feeling of a mature Reymundo telling anecdotes about his life in the Kings, perhaps from a jail cell. Sanchez has gained enough distance emotionally, and enough time has passed, for him to see some events in a clearer light. He now recognizes that the sense of complete acceptance he felt with gang members was fueled by drugs, especially alcohol and marijuana. He knows that gang members are not willing to die for each other, if they ever were. Most of all, he has come to resent a gang system in which older members earn enormous amounts of money from the short, violent lives of younger members. By the end of the book, Reymundo sees education as the only way out of this quagmire.

Despite this growing maturity, Reymundo still retains several early prejudices including racism, hatred for the police and resentment of his mother. Reymundo naturally resents his mother for not protecting him from beatings by his cousins and her boyfriends. Yet, he seems oblivious to the fact that she and Pedro became much more restrictive after he began hanging with the Spanish Lords, probably in an attempt to keep him away from the criminal gangs. In true macho fashion, Reymundo supplies few details of life as a homeless teen for half a dozen years, sleeping wherever he could and catching a meal with whoever would feed him.

Tone

The tone is factual, dispassionate exposition, a recounting of events long past that does not glamorize violence. Despite attempts to be impartial, Reymundo still sees racial strife between whites, African Americans and Latinos as natural and expresses much more regret over hits against Latino gangs.

Reymundo's greatest contempt is reserved for the police. Twice he sees a Chicago Police Department detective or sergeant being paid off by a drug dealer. Gang members regularly throw bottles and rocks at police cars, or fire weapons in their direction. They constantly lie, falsely accusing members of other gangs and refusing to give accurate information on violent crimes against their own gang. Yet, Reymundo is surprised when the police react with violence, pushing him down or hitting him. Even with two detectives from the gang crimes unit give Reymundo advice and offer to assist him in getting out of the gangs, he has only contempt for them.

This slant continued, with Reymundo convinced that judges, prisons, lawyers and the police all choose to perpetuate gang violence because they benefit from it financially. Reymundo believes that the police intentionally perpetuate gang violence by deliberately picking up gang members for questioning and dropping them off in another



gang's territory, so they will be killed. His view is that the police do this because it results in a lot of overtime for officers.

Structure

The memoir is divided into fifty-three extremely short chapters, each dealing with events during a specific period of the author's life. There are no flashbacks and little of the events are presented in scenes with dialogue and setting. The narrative is primarily exposition in summary, arranged in strict chronological order, a system of organization that often interferes with the flow of the narrative. This means that the story of Morena's death is in one chapter, while the story of the Kings disrupting the funeral of her accused killer is in another. In between, is an unrelated narrative about an additional incident of violence against another gang.

Chapters are extremely short. Many are just three pages long, while the longest is fourteen pages. One of the longest chapters is Chapter 27, *Crowned*, which relates Reymundo becoming a member of the Latin King gang. Other chapters with major events, such as the deaths of Juni and Morena, are still only six or seven pages.

Author Reymundo Sanchez, who used a pseudonym, has also changed the names of characters in the memoir. Many of the brutal events have an almost dream-like quality, omitting many specifics and details. This may be an intentional effort by the author to avoid glamorizing violence.



Quotes

"The asshole had take off his leather belt and hit me with so much force that the skin in the places where he struck me was either black and blue or gone altogether. On my legs were the red, black and blue stripes reflecting the help my loving mother gave me with the extension cord."

p. 20

"Even with all the hatred I felt for my mother I felt the need to come to her defense when Papo called her a bitch. That's just the way it is. Honor thy mother no matter how much pain and suffering she inflicts on you."

p. 22

"I was learning to think about myself and myself only. All the problems of the world were unimportant compared to mine. Feeling sorry for myself also became an excuse for accepting failure. Like my mother, I blamed everything and anything. Nobody felt the pain I felt."

p. 33

"They covered the body, picked him up, and threw him in the back of a paddy wagon like a sack of potatoes. I didn't understand why the police treated Afro's body with such disrespect. And why did they take Rican away instead of letting him be with his dead brother? The reasons for the hate and fear that Puerto Rican youth had for the police were becoming more apparent to me."

p. 40

"That was how all Latino youths seemed to classify each other — gang member first, human being second."

p. 42

"Gang colors are precious to their members. Gang members are willing to maim, kill and die for colors that have a special meaning only to them. It would be one thing if they kept this practice among themselves but all too often an innocent bystander gets involved in this stupid game. At any given time someone could get shot, beat up, or killed because of the color of the clothes they're wearing."

p. 65

"There is a very fine line between being welcomed by and being in danger with a gang. Even those closet to you can become hostile in an instant. Being an actual member has its advantages, but these can disappear at any moment."

p. 70

"I was supposed to ignore and even laugh at the screams for mercy and the terror. Death was supposed to be a normal thing that would make me a leader — a leader, not a follower. I would hear this phrase many time sin my life. Only later did I understand



that it never fit the occasion."

p. 73

"Jenny's words —'You can't be my boyfriend and be a punk' — were prophetic. Being violent was required not only by the gangs but also by girls. Why a girl would desire a guy who could kill in cold blood is beyond my understanding."

p. 77

"I did just as Hercules had instructed: pump and shoot, pump and shoot. People were screaming and running all over the place. I ran up on the curb and saw a couple of people pleading for mercy as they bled to death. Some guy came running out from the back of a car. I reacted by turning toward him and pulling the trigger. The shots hit him in the back and head; he fell forward and lay there motionless."

p. 88

"'It's only niggers,' I reassured myself before committing the crime. 'Only Niggers.' I wonder how many times the Gaylords rationalized in the same manner before lilling a Puerto Rican. I'm sure the Gaylords said, 'It's only a spic,' after slaughtering a Puerto Rican. It's that racial blindness we all live with."

p. 89

"She tried to talk some sense into me. She said it was stupid for me to go with the Kings. She reminded me about our dreams for the future and how I could get killed or go to jail. All I could think about was being thought of as a coward; my macho pride was more important than anything else."

p. 110

"Things were happening fast. In one night I had a confrontation with Speedy the Gaylords and the Cobras. I was digging my own grave because I wanted to be accepted. I wanted to be looked up to. The only way I knew of achieving that status among the gang members was to commit as many violent acts as possible. That's how it worked. Do unto others, then do unto someone else."

p. 114

"The last words she said to me were, 'There's more to life than hanging on the corner and getting high, so don't be stupid.' I'll never forget them."

p. 117

"I wasn't worried that the police were looking for me or that a human being might have been killed because of my actions. No, I was worried about getting high and getting laid."

p. 131

"I had proven my worth on the battlefield and through initiation. I had earned the right to war the colors, hold up the hand sign, and be an ambassador of the Latin Kings. With that honor came public labels. I was now officially a bum, junkie, drug user, dealer, criminal, thief, stupid, violent, good-for-nothing, two-timing snake in the grass. The Latin



Kings became my new family."
p. 140

"The police officers I had met in school as 'officer friendly,' the ones I used to look up to as heroes, were now my most feared enemies."
p. 153

"I couldn't do anything against the police. I had always been aware of the dangers of being a police officer. What I hadn't known about was the abuse inflicted on unarmed individuals without a shred of evidence when the cops assumed they had done something wrong. I now understood why the people in the community felt so alienated."
p. 153

"'You know something,' Soni began again in a calm voice, 'it was once an honor to be a Latin King or Queen. We helped our people by fighting those that were victimizing us. We didn't rip our people off, didn't feed them poison. We did nothing to hurt our people's chances to succeed.'"
p. 182

"Gang members believe that a dead comrade will not rest in peace unless their death is avenged. A gang's honor and reputation are at stake if every action taken against them is not met with a worthy act of retaliation. Most of the anger in the hearts of gang members stems from the memory of dead comrades. It is this anger that binds members and keeps the gang like a family."
p. 201

"The gang scene got even more out of hand. More and more King brothers were getting killed or locked up. Our numbers were being depleted big time. The arrogance I had demonstrated because I was a King became fear. Many brothers and sisters started turning against the Kings for some reason or other. There was no one to trust anymore. I got lost in my own little violent world."
p. 226

"I began meeting a lot of the Kings who ran the gang's citywide operations. They liked me because of my violent nature. It was then that I realized the wars between gangs were not about colors or revenge but about drug turf. The Latin Kings was not just a street gang run by local thugs; they were a drug empire run by adults who were rarely seen. These people were getting rich while kids were being shot on street corners thinking they were fighting for some honorable cause."
p. 232

"Cindy told me that of all the guys she had ever met I was the one who came closest to being special to her. She didn't appreciate that I chose gangbanging and drugs over her and my own education."
p. 240

"The hit was a success. It was time to rejoice in the violence. We were so proud of ourselves! Our action made others treat us respectfully, welcoming us into their homes,



feeding us, giving us all the beer and marijuana we wanted, and plenty of ego-boosting praise."

p. 245

"At one time beating the right fist upon the heart meant 'I will die for you'; now it was just a meaningless gang sign."

p. 254

"Most people in the neighborhood worshiped me because I gave money away and did nice things for people. I often bought hundreds of dollars worth of food and held big barbecues for the neighborhood. Even the adults got into the worshiping act. Many of them turned the other cheek when I had sex with their daughters, even those who were only thirteen or fourteen years old. Sometimes we had sex right in their homes while the parents prepared food for me to eat after I finished fucking their daughters."

p. 256

Loca waited for me to be released and drove me back to the 'hood. She said I could stay with her or a while until I got myself together. Get myself together? How? I was uneducated, homeless and unskilled. The only think I knew how to do was gangbang."

p. 276

"I had been a Latin King for six years. Although the relationship had long ago soured I couldn't help but feel as if I had lost something. I felt as if I had lost my family."

p. 297

"If we don't do something to change the law of revenge that gangs live by, the killing will never stop. I thank God for giving me the courage not to avenge Loca's little boy Angel."

p. 299



Topics for Discussion

When Reymundo was four or five, his older cousin Alberto did something terrible to him. What did Alberto do?

Are Reymundo's memories of his stepfathers Emilio and Pedro good or bad? Why?

Reymundo's mother and Pedro are completely illiterate because they have never been to school. How does this impact their lives? How does it impact Reymundo's life?

Why does Reymundo like Humboldt Park?

How does Reymundo finally become proficient in English at Von Humboldt School?

Is Puerto Rico an island paradise for the thirteen-year-old Reymundo?

What negative effects does domestic violence have on Reymundo's life?

When Reymundo first learns of gang violence, it seems normal to him that teens would use guns to resolve a difference of opinion. What in Reymundo's life has led him to accept this violence?

How does the death of Juni affect Reymundo?

After Reymundo quits the Latin Kings, as he is walking away, Loca is shot and her young son Angel is killed. Why does Reymundo eventually decide not to seek revenge for Angel's death?

Are there really any winners in the endless cycle of gang violence?