

wasn't used to people being so nice to me. When you're in a gang, you think that nobody cares about you.

I told Ms. Gruwell to stay out of my business. But she kept at it. In my sophomore year, her words started to sink in. I began to see that there were other things out there besides gang life—that I could have a future, that I could graduate. I started thinking about getting out of the gang.

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For Ms. Gruwell's class, I had to read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, the story of a teenage girl hiding from the Nazis during the Holocaust. Anne's words had a major impact on me. I came across the line: "I feel like a bird in a cage and I wish I had the wings to fly away." I couldn't believe it. She expressed exactly how I felt—I wanted to get out of gang, but they don't let people out. They kill people who want out.

That book really changed my perspective. Before I read *Anne Frank*, I was prejudiced against anybody I didn't know. I thought if you didn't look like me, you didn't understand me. But here was Anne, who was so different from me—she was Jewish and she lived 50 years before me—yet we felt the same.

I remained a "bird in a cage" until the day of the trial in 1994.

When I was called to the stand, I said, "Paco did it." I said it for myself, to get out of my cage. I said it for my mother, and for Ms. Gruwell. I said it to end the horrible cycle of violence in my life.

Paco looked at me in shock. As they took him away to serve his 25-year sentence, he said, "Of all the people in the

gang, you're the last person I thought would betray me."

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I feel guilty to this day. I feel guilty

that Paco is in a jail cell because of what I said, even though I know telling the truth was the right thing to do.

After I testified, I left the gang. I got death threats. But no one came after me. I think they didn't kill me for what I did and for leaving because I have family in the gang.

My mother doesn't cry for me or my dad anymore—my dad got out, too. My mom's very religious, and she thanks God for Ms. Gruwell everyday.

Today, I am freshman at a college in California. I plan to major in English and then get my Ph.D. in education. I want to be the Secretary of Education and change the way kids get labeled in school as a "dropout" or a "slow learner."

If gang members could see that they have different choices and that it's never too late to change, maybe they'd get out too. I'm not a miracle. Anybody can get out.

#6 why does she feel guilty

#5 what does this mean?

#7 - why does she thank God for Mrs. Gruwell

#8 What do you think is the theme of this story?