

Read and annotate according to given directions

4-1 "I Escaped a Violent Gang" A Memoir as told to Cate Bailey

** When "Ana" was 11 years old, she joined a hard-core gang in California. Below, in her own words, is the dramatic story of how she got out. She asked that her real name and the real name of her gang not be used because she is still fearful for her safety as well as the safety of her family**

Gang members don't snitch on each other. That is the motto I was raised on. My dad once went to jail for something he didn't do because he wouldn't turn in a "brother." So when I was called to the witness stand that fateful summer day, I was planning to lie.

Paco, my main man from our gang, was on trial. I'd seen him shoot and kill a teenage boy. John, a member of a rival gang, was also on trial. John was innocent. I was the only witness, so what I said would decide which one went to jail.

The lawyer started asking me questions. I saw Paco sitting confidently at the defendant's table. He was calm because he was sure I would lie. I looked at John, and then John's mother. She was crying because it looked like her son was going to jail for a crime he didn't commit.

I started thinking about my mom and all the times she cried - when I got beat up, when my brother was arrested, when my dad got stabbed and shot at. I forgot about gang wars and racism. John's mother's tears became my mother's tears. I just wanted my mom to stop crying. ~~4-2~~

My eyes got watery and something happened inside of me. It went against everything I'd ever been taught my whole life. I told the truth. I said, "Paco did it!"

That was in 1994, when I finally got out of the gang. I couldn't go back after testifying against Paco. I was 15. But my story starts way before then.

I was raised in gangs. My father was in a gang; my brother was in a gang; my uncles and cousins were in gangs. I didn't know anything else. I thought drive-bys, drug deals, and beatings were normal.

When I was 5 years old, I saw one of my uncles shot and killed by a member of a rival gang. It took me a while to understand what had happened. I'd seen many people get shot before, but they were always taken to the hospital and then they came back. But my uncle didn't come back. At his funeral, I still didn't understand what was happening. I saw my mom crying, and she finally told me, "Your uncle's in heaven now."

After that, I got used to all the death around me. I attended many more funerals

of loved ones lost to gang violence. And I watched my mom cry many more times.

I officially joined the gang when I was 11 years old. I got "jumped in," which means beat up by the other gang members. First, three girls surrounded me and hit me hard over and over. Then, all the girls in the gang made a circle around me and hit me and kicked me more. Then, the guys came and about 20 guys lined up on one side and about 20 girls lined up on the other side, leaving a path down the middle. I had to walk through that path, as they punched and kicked me. And I had to be standing by the time I got to the end. ~~4-3~~

When I started down the path, my arm was already broken. It hurt so much. As I walked, they kept punching me in the ribs. Every time I fell down they'd kick me. I thought I was going to pass out. Toward the end of the path, I fell and they stepped on my leg and broke it. Somehow, I managed to pull myself up and limp to the end of the line.

That was what I had to do to prove that I would do anything for them, even if that included dying.

A lot of people say that people join gangs because they want to fit in, but to me it was more of a survival tool. In my neighbourhood, you have to be from somewhere to be able to back yourself up. There were rival Asian and African-American gangs after our territory.

Before I turned 12, I'd been arrested for carjacking, ignoring curfew, and drug possession. Each time I was let go on probation. But when I was 13, I was arrested for having weapons. I got sent to boot camp for eight months.

Boot camp was the worst experience of my life. We had to get up at 5 a.m. and take cold showers and the rooms were always cold. The guards would stand right in front of me and scream stuff like, "You may be something on the street, but you're nothing in here."

For months, I had a bad attitude. I got into fights with other girls and talked back to the guards. They wouldn't let me see my mom until I improved my behaviour. In the eight months I was there, she could only visit me four times.

When I got out on probation, I knew I never wanted to go back there. I had to attend school regularly, otherwise I'd be violating my probation and get sent back. I hated school. I'd started "ditching" in the third grade. By junior high, I almost never went to school. I planned to drop out as soon as I got off probation. To me,