ALWAYS RUNNING (excerpt)
By LUIS J RODRIGUEZ

Adapted for the Stage by José Cruz González

LUIS Ramiro! Ramiro! (Beat.) Late...December...Icicles hung from rooftops and windowsills like the whiskers of old men... My 15-year-old son...had been on a rapidly declining roller coaster ride into the world of street-gang America...I gave him an ultimatum. Yelling burst back and forth...Ramiro ran out of the house...

RAMIRO Leave me alone!

LUIS As I watched his escape, it was like looking back into a distant time, back to my own youth, when I ran and ran, when I jumped over peeling fences, fleeing vatos locos, the police or my own shadow in some drug-induced hysteria. I saw Ramiro run off and then saw my body entering the mouth of darkness...

(A park.)

LUIS Once my mother gathered up the children and we walked to Will Rogers Park. ...She spotted an empty...park bench. But as she sat down an American woman, with three kids of her own, came by.

AMERICAN WOMAN Hey, get out of there, that’s our seat.

LUIS My mother...didn’t know how to answer back in English.

AMERICAN WOMAN Look spic, you can’t sit there! You don’t belong here! Understand? This is not your country!

LUIS The first day of school said a lot about my scholastic life to come. I was taken to a teacher who didn’t know what do with me. She complained about not having any room, about kids who didn’t even speak the language. Although I didn’t speak English, I knew I wasn’t wanted.

POLICE We have a plan here. We detain every seven-year-old boy in your neighborhood.

YOUNG LUIS Detain them for what?

POLICE It doesn’t matter. Curfew, loitering. Whatever we can. Then we keep their names. Keep track of them over the years. Soon we’ve picked them up for other things -- stealing, fighting, mischief.

YOUNG LUIS And that’s how you get a hold of ‘em?

POLICE --Hey, you’ve got half a brain, huh? It ain’t hard to figure out that by the time some of the boys do something serious, they have a detention record a mile long and end up hard
time – juvey or camp. You guys just don’t know. You don’t know what you’re dealing with.

LUIS In the *barrio*, the police are just another gang.