Summary

The book *Unbillable Hours: A True Story* by Ian Graham presents two storylines of men who were real individuals. The author describes the events that indeed took place in lives of those people, and this fact makes the story even more fascinating. They had strength and courage to cope with all the difficulties and achieve their aim. They had a purpose in their lives, which reveals that the protagonists are people with strong spirit and mind. While following this story, the reader contemplates the process of Ian and Mario’s life-changing events. These people are fighting for freedom and truth with a belief in future success. The story of Mario’s achievement of freedom is admiring and worth high respect. Graham’s visits to prison made him understand the value of freedom, and they both fought for it to the end.

After graduating from the law school, the author of the book, a young lawyer Ian Graham, started his career. He got a job in one of the largest law companies Latham & Watkins. Working for this prestigious Los Angeles firm provided him with perfect earning and promotion opportunities. As a newbie attorney, he, together with his colleagues, was accustomed to the good life.

However, he remembers the time in this company as the case of a lifetime, as he did not feel satisfied working there. Nevertheless, it does not mean that a lawyer’s job is not worth taking.
On the contrary, the author raises a problem of simple making money out of this profession and emphasizes that lawyers lost the passion for the law and forgot their real vocation. When he worked on Mario’s case during his unbillable hours, he understood what the lawyers need to do. The ambition to help people is higher than all material goods in the world, but rarely one appreciates this. Moreover, the author opens the law firm culture, which is interesting to explore for lawyers as well as people of different profession.

As a result, the author stayed in the company for five years only to finish the struggle for a case of innocent Mario Rocha. He was a young Latino boy, wrongly imprisoned for the crime he did not commit. Being a sixteen-year-old boy, he was convicted of the murder of another Latino, and got a double life sentence. At the neighborhood party, somebody had killed a young man, but all accusations were against Mario. The two gangsters were at the party, and the police arrested them as well. However, some person pointed at Mario, and as his family did not find a good attorney, the jury sentenced him to life behind bars. Despite the fact that it was almost impossible to overturn this conviction, Ian did not stop. Mario had no possibility of parole, so those people who worried about him fought for the case. There was also a Sister Janet Harris, a Roman Catholic nun, who made all possible efforts to help young people in need. After she met Mario and understood that he was undeniably innocent, Sister Janet started looking for a lawyer to deal with this case. Eventually, it appeared to be almost impossible, and she brought the Rocha’s case to Latham & Watkins. It was obvious that there were almost no chances for success. However, thanks to the efforts of nun Harris, the company took it on pro bono and the process started. A senior partner assigned Ian Graham to work on this case. What is more, he started being engaged in it more and more. However, he did it not to get money and even not to
gain more experience, but to save a person’s life. This case changed everything and made Graham understand real human values.

After that, the writer’s life was divided into two parts. There were his billable hours, when he worked for the company, and the weekends or other free hours devoted to Mario’s case. The result of these attempts was life or death for Mario, and Ian increasingly thought about the criminal justice system and his place in the law. As a result, he received more investments for Rocha’s case and, therefore, paid less attention to his billable hours. Time spent in the office was extremely boring, and that routine made him feel frustrated. By that time, Graham understood that the law associate’s job was not for him and decided to work there until the end of Mario’s case. However, he never accused Latham & Watkins of anything. Indeed, they were the only company that agreed to take this case pro bono and paid all the expenses to accomplish it.

At last, after ten years of imprisonment, Mario Rocha was released and Ian Graham left the job, which was unpleasant for him. Up to the end of the story, he realized that it was simply not his thing to do in life. When they won the case, Ian also became free to do what made him happy. Today, they have the very thing they struggled for, which is a freedom.

Nowadays, Mario Rocha studies at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Ian Graham does not get a six-figure salary anymore, but he is free to be occupied with meaningful things that make him feel satisfied. When he was not busy writing this book, Ian worked with producer of the film about Mario Rocha, as well as spoke in law firms or public defense groups.

Characters

Among all characters, I liked Mario Rocha best of all. This character is the most appealing to me because he never gave up, even in such unfair situations. He remained kind and
honest, and believed that the real murderer would get his punishment. He did not accuse justice or people, but was able to find good sides even in this awkward system. Mario said, “The injustice brought those of us who believe in justice together” (Graham 239). He was not alone. He was with his friends, and their belief turned out to be the most powerful weapon.

Ian Graham provoked my interest as well. This case opened his eyes to injustice, and he risked losing everything to get freedom for the victim of the law. Ian admitted, “The case unlocked the golden handcuffs and freed me to see a world and live beyond the confines of a big law firm” (Graham 241). The big salary is dangerous for the majority of people, as they may forget about the actual tasks of their job while chasing more and more money. Due to this case, he opened his eyes to the world and filled his life with real human values.

The writer lets us compare different people. We see the prison workers who hated everyone and the convict who was innocent intelligent man. It makes readers think over our role in life, changing the attitude towards others. Ian does not say it directly, but he makes the reader remember about humanity.

**Evaluation**

There are two main plot lines in the book. The first one concerns its author Ian Graham, a lawyer who managed to bring the hopeless case to a successful end. The second one is devoted to the case of Mario Rocha, a boy misjudged at the age of sixteen. It is unbelievable how these two different people became engaged in one story. While Mario risked his life in the prison, Ian risked everything he had in his life. They both had one aim and did not look back.

It is difficult to find disadvantages in this book, but if they exist, they are related to some professional terms. As the writer used real court documents, sometimes it is challenging to
follow the special term language. It is comprehensible for the lawyers, but average readers can little understand these parts.

The book appealed to me emotionally. This story gives us numerous lessons. It teaches to value other people’s lives and appreciate friendship. I admire the dedication of nun Janet Harris and all those people who believed that Mario will be free one day. That moment was a time of their glory. If somebody believes in the person and worries about him, this story is likely to have a happy ending.

**Recommendations**

I would certainly recommend this book for people studying or being engaged in law. However, I suppose it would be interesting for the general public as well. I advise it to future lawyers as it will be useful for them to find out specific peculiarities of work in a big law company. The author gives us a perfect description of the law school recruiting process, the Law Company’s culture and life of a big firm in general. What is the most important, he enhances the volition to serve people and perform this job in the best way possible. Despite the fact he found himself unwilling to work in a big company, Graham is still a lawyer and has a private practice. For other potential readers, it is a good thought-provoking writing. It shows the struggle for truth and freedom. The book also describes how these two men became real friends, and the friendship is one of the biggest values we must appreciate. The world of gangs makes the story more intriguing, and the reader worries about the protagonists much more since they were real people and experienced these events indeed.

Before others read this book, I will tell them that these events happened in reality with the same people as we are. The convicted boy Mario had no connection to gangsters, but the jury misjudged this case and put him in prison. It can happen with anybody in this world, as nobody
can protect us from troubles during our lives. The law system is not perfect, and the lawyers tend to think only about their well-being. However, there is a person who did everything possible to save the life of an innocent convict without getting any reward for it. There are different people in our world, but still kind and courageous ones make the best part of it. Money is not everything in life and people must search for happiness, not for wealth.

This book gives you strong impressions and affects the reader’s inner world. It would be interesting to find out how *Unbillable Hours: A True Story* can change the perception of life and attitude to others. It can definitely influence the career choice and increase the will to serve others. Moreover, I must admit that Ian Graham is a talented author, who managed to present his life in a book where he seems to be a hero. We are also heroes of our lives, and we need to control our deeds, assess whether we are happy and make all possible efforts to achieve something significant.
Works Cited