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My Beloved World



Synopsis

The first Hispanic and third woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor has become an instant American icon. Now, with a candor and intimacy never undertaken by a sitting Justice, she recounts her life from a Bronx housing project to the federal bench, a journey that offers an inspiring testament to her own extraordinary determination and the power of believing in oneself. Here is the story of a precarious childhood, with an alcoholic father (who would die when she was nine) and a devoted but overburdened mother, and of the refuge a little girl took from the turmoil at home with her passionately spirited paternal grandmother. But it was when she was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes that the precocious Sonia recognized she must ultimately depend on herself. She would learn to give herself the insulin shots she needed to survive and soon imagined a path to a different life. With only television characters for her professional role models, and little understanding of what was involved, she determined to become a lawyer, a dream that would sustain her on an unlikely course, from valedictorian of her high school class to the highest honors at Princeton, Yale Law School, the New York County District Attorney's office, private practice, and appointment to the Federal District Court before the age of forty. Along the way we see how she was shaped by her invaluable mentors, a failed marriage, and the modern version of extended family she has created from cherished friends and their children. Through her still-astonished eyes, America's infinite possibilities are envisioned anew in this warm and honest book, destined to become a classic of self-invention and self-discovery.

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Customer Reviews

I did not quite know what to expect regarding this memoir by Justice Sotomayor of her pre-judicial life. As a student of the Court for 40 years or so, a lawyer for 35 years, and a trained political scientist, I have found judicial biographies and the few judicial memoirs highly insightful into the character and actions of particular Justices. Justice Sotomayor is certainly the least known of the current Court, at least to me, and I was pleasantly surprised how absolutely candid her book is. It tells one a great deal about her, her background, and her character. The only other candid and insightful memoir that compares with this one is Justice Thomas' "My Grandfather's Son," distinctive for its remarkable honesty and perspective on his thinking and the factors that shaped it. A number of her topics stand out: First, she affords the reader a remarkable perspective on affirmative action, which she readily admits touched upon her own life in terms of Princeton, Yale Law, and her selection as a U.S. District Judge. Her attitude is much more supportive of the concept than Thomas was in his sometimes angry discussion of the issue in his book. Sotomayor places emphasis upon affirmative action as providing an opportunity to work very hard, unbelievably hard, and to demonstrate what your true capabilities are. She discusses this concept several times at different stages of her book, and I am very appreciative for helping to develop my thinking on this important issue. Second, I found her story most fascinating because it is, in microcosm, the story of Puerto Rican challenges in Hispanic New York. I knew very little about this culture before reading the book.

My beloved World by Sonia Sotomayor, Spanglish Edition Whenever I review a famous person biography - or "memoir" as the Justice has decided to call it - I try to think how the book would read if the person writing it would be an ordinary person. The book opens with the Justice's diagnosis of juvenile diabetes at age 7 - "not yet 8" - and how Sonia learns how to give her insulin shots to stop her parents from fighting about it. We see a little girl who lives in the projects of the Bronx, raised by an alcoholic father - Juan Luis or Juli - and a nurse - Celina - who are constantly fighting. Her father dies soon after the beginning of the book, and we see Sonia raised in an extended family which includes her grandmother - abuelita Mercedes - and lots of aunts, uncles, and cousins. Sonia's best friends are her immediate family and her comfort and support are drawn from it. I found

this part of the book to be quite endearing - a la Junot Díaz way - with multiple use of Spanish words and phrases to remind the reader of the Justice's background and culture. However as we move past Cardinal Spellman High School and on to Princeton and Yale Law School, the book changes in tone. The Spanish words and phrases diminish in frequency, and the reader is presented with the more professional side of the Justice. This second half of the book I found tedious and boring. It becomes more of a who's who in the Justice personal life. The Justice apologizes in her introduction: "If particular friends or family members find themselves not mentioned...I hope they will understand that the needs of a clear and focused telling must outweigh even an abundance of feeling."

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