

The role of relationships literature review

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Justice Sonia Sotomayor's My Beloved World](#) \n \t
2. [Notes](#) \n \t
3. [2Sotomayor, p. 11](#) \n \t
4. [Work Cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

In

Justice Sonia Sotomayor's My Beloved World

In her recently published memoir, *My Beloved World*, Justice Sonia Sotomayor narrates her personal story, from her childhood growing up in a Bronx housing project up to the time she first becomes a judge. Focusing on the events and persons that made her the person she is today, she recounts how she becomes a successful lawyer and judge, overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles, such as chronic juvenile diabetes and limited English language skills. She weaves an engaging story where many of her relatives and friends such as her paternal grandmother (Abuelita) and her Yale mentor José Cabranes come to life as they help her make sense of the complex world she lives in.

Sotomayor's memoir resonates with many readers because she touches on many issues that not only minority individuals but mainstream Americans must wrestle with as they forge a meaningful path. The themes of friendship, isolation, quest of identity and biculturalism are skillfully incorporated in the narrative to present the human side of one of the most brilliant Associate

Justices of the Supreme Court.

Sotomayor's childhood world was shaky and unstable. Her family of Puerto Rican immigrants lived in a poor Bronx housing project. She and her brother Junior were strictly forbidden to use the stairs to climb to their apartment, because of the constant presence of drug addicts and the imminent danger of being mugged. Sonia's father was an alcoholic who frequently had violent fights with his wife. In response to her husband's alcoholism, Sonia's mother avoided being at home preferring to work long hours at Prospect Hospital, where she is a practical nurse. In response to the insecurity she felt around her, Sonia learned to be a keen listener, to pick up on cues, both spoken and unspoken; she felt her security depended on knowing what was going on with the adults in her life. The unreliability of her parents gave Sonia the drive and determination to learn to give herself the insulin shots essential for her survival for she was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes when she was seven. In retrospect Sonia reveals that " the disease also inspired in me a kind of precocious self-reliance that is not uncommon in children who feel the adults around them to be unreliable. 2 An important exception to such perceptions of her adult world is Mercedes, her paternal grandmother, whom she affectionately calls Abuelita. In her grandmother's home Sonia found the love, stability and protection she did not have at home. In the author's opinion, having a loving adult by one's side cannot be overly emphasized: " I have come to believe that in order to thrive, a child must have at least one adult in her life who shows her unconditional love, respect, and confidence."

3

Attending Princeton thanks to affirmative action was a daunting experience

for Sotomayor. She soon discovered she would have to make up for many gaps in her education and in her knowledge of life if she wanted to be at a par with her classmates. She often experienced feelings of inadequacy and isolation. She drew great comfort from spending endless hours devouring books at the Firestone Library. Sotomayor also found support and comfort from the minority student groups housed in the Third World Center. As nurturing as these groups were, Sotomayor offers an important piece of advice to minority students: “ I would warn any minority student today against the temptation of self -segregation: take support and comfort from your own group as you can, but don’t hide within it.”⁴ Undoubtedly, Sotomayor’s success as a lawyer and judge, come from this willingness to open to the larger community.

During her freshman year at Princeton, Sotomayor discovered that there were significant gaps in her education as well as in her knowledge of life: “ I came to understand during my freshman year that many of the gaps in my knowledge and understanding were simply limits of class, and cultural background, not lack of aptitude or application as I’d feared.”⁵ This realization gave her some relief and motivated her to compensate for her deficiencies, while admitting to herself that she would always be a student for life. Thus, Sonia devoted her lunch hour to the study of English grammar and vocabulary. In her journey of self -cultivation she had the help of two valuable friends. One was Mary Cadette, who guided her to read the literature classics such as *Alice in Wonderland* and *Pride and Prejudice* that are a part of privileged students’ cultural baggage. At home, the only books available for Sonia were the issues of *Reader’s Digest* to which her mother

had subscribed and the Encyclopedia Britannica her mother had purchased at great sacrifice. It is important to note that in spite of her awareness of her cultural gaps, Sonia understood that she had been exposed to some aspects of life of which her privileged classmates were hardly aware. This knowledge compensated in some measure for the things she had missed. Another generous friend was Felice Shea. The daughter of two college professors, she knew the ins and outs of academia and was able to help Sonia accept her membership to Phi Beta Kappa. Unaware of the significance of this honor, Sonia was about to toss out her letter of acceptance if had it not been for Felice.

At Yale, where Sotomayor attended law school she had the support of four intelligent law students who became her closest friends, her “ compadres,” as she affectionately called them.: Felix Lopez a Puerto Rican, Drew Ryce, a member of the Mohawk Nation, Rudy Aragon, a Chicano from New Mexico, and George Keys were smart and possessed worldly knowledge beyond any of Sonia’s experiences. Unlike Princeton, where minority students made an effort of making recent minority arrivals feel comfortable in their new academic environment, minority students at Yale were not as welcoming to new minority students. At Yale, Sotomayor “ found more Latinos and members of other groups who seemed determined to assimilate as quickly and thoroughly as possible, bearing any attendant challenges and psychic costs in private.”⁶ While respecting this point of view, Sotomayor admits she could never have taken this course of action, having received so much nurturing from her cultural group. Reflecting on identity issues, Sotomayor realizes that language is a powerful code that can unlock the literature, the

music and history of a country, but it can also be a prison that can prevent you from seeing the world in different ways, especially when living within a dominant culture which is not your own. When Sonia meets José Cabranes, an expert on U. S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans, she discovers the value of a mentor relationship. She discovers the benefit of sustained dialogue with someone who embodies the kind of person she strives to become. On the importance of mentors and role models for everyone, but especially for minority students, Sotomayor offers an important reflection:

When a young person, even a gifted one, grows up without proximate living examples of what she may aspire to become—whether lawyer, scientist, artist, or leader in any realm—her goal remains abstract. Such models as appear on books or on the news, however inspiring or revered, are ultimately too remote to be real, let alone influential. 7 (p. 179)

It becomes apparent that close relationships, whether between family members, teachers, or close friends, made all the difference in Sotomayor's personal and professional achievements. Reading *My Beloved World* provides a window, among many, which allows readers to see how one minority prominent public figure deals with important issues such as living in a bicultural world while being an integral part of mainstream American society. I believe such personal issues need to be resolved early in one's professional career in order to be a well-adjusted person and to be successful professionally.

Notes

1Sonia, Sotomayor, *My Beloved World*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

2Sotomayor, p. 11

3Sotomayor, p. 16

4Sotomayor, p. 149

5Sotomayor, p. 135

6Sotomayor, p. 175

7Sotomayor, p. 179

Work Cited

Sotomayor, Sonia. *My Beloved World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 2013.