
Entertainment

Sonia Sotomayor discusses newest children's book at Texas Book Festival

By **Luz Moreno-Lozano**

Posted Oct 27, 2019 at 6:26 PM

Updated Oct 27, 2019 at 6:37 PM

Years ago, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor was giving herself an insulin injection in a restaurant bathroom when a woman walked in and saw her. Sotomayor said she didn't think much of it and went back to her table to enjoy her meal.

But as she was leaving the restaurant, the woman who saw Sotomayor give herself the injection whispered to her dinner companion, "She's a drug addict."

At first, Sotomayor said she felt ashamed, but then decided to do something about it.

"I turned around and went back to the woman, and said 'I'm not a drug addict, I'm diabetic and the injection you saw is the medicine that keeps me alive every day,'" Sotomayor said. "Why do you presume the worst in people when you see them doing something different? Why don't you just ask them what they're doing?"

Sotomayor, who also is an author, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when she was 7 years old, and for the last 58 years she has given herself daily insulin injections.

She shared a similar story about her young friend Julia, who suffered from Tourette syndrome, a neurological disorder that can sometimes involve repetitive movements or unwanted sounds. When the girl suddenly started to spin out of control, a woman came up to her and said "Don't you have a mother that can control you?"

"That story showed me that so many kids, like me, with life conditions are still being stared at or looked at like they're strange and people don't ask questions and don't talk to them," Sotomayor said.

The only ones who do, she said, are young children. So she took this idea and turned it into a children's book "Just Ask!: Be Different, Be Brave, Be You," which was published in September.

Sotomayor discussed the book Sunday during a Texas Book Festival session with young readers and fans of all ages in the House Chamber of the state Capitol.

Using her own experience as a child with diabetes, the book explores the challenges children face with being different. As the kids work together to build a community garden, asking questions of each other along the way, this book encourages readers to do the same.

"I hope this book will open up the minds of children about how to talk to each other," Sotomayor said.

Genevieve Rodriguez-Quiñones, an elementary school literary coach who attended the session with her 7-year-old son, said she planned to take the concept of empathy and asking questions back to her students.

"I liked a lot of what she had to say," Rodriguez-Quiñones said. "It's about giving kids the space and encouraging them to ask questions."

Following the session, Sotomayor signed copies of her book for thousands of readers. Some, who could not attend the full session, waited outside the Chamber for a chance to meet the author. The line stretched from the second floor House Chamber through the second floor rotunda and down the stairs to a first floor hallway.

Sergio Lozano, who waited in line for over an hour with his two sons, said the wait was worth it, commenting on the example Sotomayor sets for his children.

Coming from a low-income and Hispanic community, Sotomayor also talked about the values of hard work and commitment that lead to success.

Lozano said they are the values he works to instill in his children and said Sunday's session was a good reminder of that.

"She is a great example of getting things done," Lozano said, "and if you have the commitment and you work hard you can pursue anything."