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Becoming Maria: Love And Chaos In The South Bronx



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Synopsis

Set in the 1950s in the Bronx, this is the story of a girl with a dream. Emmy award-winning actress and writer Sonia Manzano plunges us into the daily lives of a Latino family that is loving--and troubled. This is Sonia's own story rendered with an unforgettable narrative power. When readers meet young Sonia, she is a child living amidst the squalor of a boisterous home that is filled with noisy relatives and nosy neighbors. Each day she is glued to the TV screen that blots out the painful realities of her existence and also illuminates the possibilities that lie ahead. But--click!--when the TV goes off, Sonia is taken back to real-life--the cramped, colorful world of her neighborhood and an alcoholic father. But it is Sonia's dream of becoming an actress that keeps her afloat among the turbulence of her life and times. Spiced with culture, heartache, and humor, this memoir paints a lasting portrait of a girl's resilience as she grows up to become an inspiration to millions.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 9 UpÃ¢â ¬â •A groundbreaking Latina educator, TV personality, and award-winning children's book author shares a poignantly written memoir about growing up in the South Bronx. Manzano, known to many as Maria from Sesame Street, relates events from her youth with candor and childlike curiosity as she tries to find her place within her Puerto Rican family and the dominant white culture. Beginning with fragments from when she was a toddler and ending with her

life-changing audition for Sesame Street, the book includes vignettes that offer glimpses of a singular coming of age that will resonate with many young people, regardless of socioeconomic background or culture. Moving from a cockroach-infested apartment to one riddled with rats was a common occurrence, and her father's violent outbursts continually threatened the safety of the family. Still, music, laughter, food, a network of cousins and friends, and a love of performance shone a light in Sonia's life, and glimmers of the beloved character she made iconic peek through the trials of an impoverished but warm upbringing. Phrases in Spanish and gritty details of urban life in 1960s New York City add authenticity to this work. Nuanced depictions of racism and sexism will be eye-opening for some readers and all-too-familiar for others. The author shows great restraint, never tinging memories with adult rationalizations or nostalgia, but infuses each episode with age-appropriate language and forthrightness. Lyrical passages, such as one about her first trip to Puerto Rico, are filled with vivid imagery, and the scenes touching upon her burgeoning sexual awakening ring true with sensitivity and subtlety. VERDICT As timeless as Esmeralda Santiago's When I Was a Puerto Rican (Vintage, 1994) and Jacqueline Woodson's Brown Girl Dreaming (Penguin, 2014), this memoir will strike a chord with teens and adults alike. [See the Q&A with Sonia Manzano on page 16.Ã¢â ¬â •Ed.]Ã¢â ¬â •Shelley Diaz, School Library Journal --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Praise for THE REVOLUTION OF EVELYN SERRANO *"This wry, moving debut novel does a great job of blending the personal and the political. . . while the family drama and revelations continue right up to the end."--BOOKLIST, starred review *"Characters of surprising dimension round out the plot and add to the novel's cultural authenticity. . . A stunning debut."--KIRKUS, starred review CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS "Thisnovel is meant to be savored in delicious bites. I loved its snap and down-home-El Barrio-in-your-face-tell-it-like-it-is tone."--Oscar Hijuelos, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love "The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano should be placed on proud display with the literature that enriches our multicultural America. History will come alive for young readers who will identify with how a great historic moment can affect one girl and her family."--Julia Alvarez, Pura Belpre Award-winning author of Before We Were Free and How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents "I love this book! It's smart, real, painfully funny, and filled with the wisdom of a writer who can get to the hearts and souls of her readers. Sonia Manzano, standing ovation! (Encore, please!)"--John Leguizamo, Emmy Award winning actor-comedian. "An important story about activism, acceptance, and love.Sonia Manzano vividly portrays a neighborhood in turmoil, with embraceable characters who change history."--Pam Munoz Ryan,

Pura Belpre Award-winning author of The Dreamer and Esperanza Rising "The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano underscores the struggle that triumphed in the lives of Latinos. Here is a book that creates indelible political awareness."--Nicholasa Mohr, National Book Award Finalist, author of El Bronx Remembered "Thank you, Sonia Manzano, for capturing important moments for Puerto Ricans, and for reminding us that history doesn't just happen, we live with it and with its consequences."--Esmeralda Santiago, Alex Award-winning author of Almost a Woman and When I was Puerto Rican

What a fascinating and affecting memoir. I grew up with Maria from Sesame Street being one of my earliest, closest, most trusted Puerto Rican role models so of course I was intrigued to read about her. It's a bit of a culture shock to go from Sesame Street to Sonia Manzano's real life growing up in the Bronx with an abusive father, but ultimately it makes me respect the actress even more. Sonia's memories of her thoughts and feelings growing up put you right in the picture and--darn it--I wish the book were longer. I don't want to stop reading.

Personally, this book was like going home. She describes it exactly as it was. Conflicts and fights within the family and yet moments of love and forgiveness. Growing up in New York gave some of us the opportunity to enjoy museums, summer camps, Broadway shows, in other words culture that other impoverished children are not afforded in this country. These opportunities opened our eyes to the outside world of the ghettos inspite of the prejudices that forced us into them. Even as a child I could see that there was a chance to live differently with education. From one Boricua to another, thank you for taking me back.

Interesting read about someone I thought I knew since my kids saw her everyday. Would love to have her share more about her life after she was hired to Sesame Street.

I read this during choose an autobiography or memoir month for my book club. I found it slightly dull. When she got to high school it got better. The last line is, "because there was nothing else to do but wait for the next thing to happen." I felt like I was waiting for the next thing to happen the whole book. Just waiting, nothing really happened. Now a book that picks up here where she becomes Maria might be better.

I read this book as part of Las Madres Book Club. I'm hoping for more by Sonia.The book covers

snippets of her childhood and into the very beginnings of her adulthood. I can relate to a lot of what she dealt with, her struggle and questioning of things.

It’s filled with funny, tragic and surreal moments, and provides not only a compelling look at how she got to Sesame Street but a vivid portrait of South Bronx life in the 50s and 60s as well. Really awesome...

Very honest and moving account. As someone who loved watching Maria with my kids, I enjoyed it tremendously.

Great book! Highly recommend!

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