

SPOKEN WORD ARTIST AND CREATIVE WRITER:

META SARMIENTO

By Joie Ha

“DON'T EVER FORGET, THE DEPTH OF YOUR FIGHTING SPIRIT CANNOT BE CAGED BY THE MEASUREMENTS OF MAN.”

- **Meta Sarmiento**, *Finding strength in a world obsessed with size*, TedXMileHigh

It's hard not to talk to Meta for hours. He's the type of person that you want to hear all about. He is one of those rare individuals that are unabashedly themselves, exuding a type of sincerity that you don't often see. There are no false pretenses, no facades, just Meta.

Winner of multiple spoken word competitions, these awards and accolades are incredibly impressive, but the best thing about Meta is his authenticity and honesty. After talking to him for a few moments, you feel like you've been friends for decades.

Meta Sarmiento was born in Guam, a small island in the Pacific that is an unincorporated territory of the United States. Growing up as a Filipino American on a small island, he often had to negotiate his identity between these intersectionalities. He found himself often questioning whether he was Filipino or American- and what it meant to be from Guam, a place that many people knew nothing about. Poetry ended up being one of the tools Meta used to negotiate this identity and accept it in all of its intricacies.

In 2007, Meta was pulled out of his chemistry class to listen to spoken word activists in his high school library. He had read poetry before- things like Shakespeare and Robert Frost. But this was something different. Intrigued, Meta went to a poetry slam and his eyes were opened to the multitude of creative ways poetry could be used. He heard crazy poems, erotic poems, poems of every kind and from that moment forward, Meta knew he found his niche.

Although it started as a hobby, it became a tool for Meta to make sense of the world we live in. Whenever he is confused, angry, or sad, writing allows him an outlet to express himself and understand his emotions. It's not always about writing an amazing poem, but about



the personal, spiritual, and emotional process of writing.

Since that fateful moment in the library, Meta has been consistently writing and performing poems of international renown. In 2015, he was a winner for the Global Call for Climate Action's Spoken Word for the World contest. He was flown out to Paris, France to the United Nations Climate Negotiations to perform his piece regarding the connection between hyper militarization in the Pacific region and climate change. Hyper militarization has an incredibly large carbon footprint and Meta brought attention to the environmental damage that it propagated.

Interestingly, the poem was initially uploaded on YouTube but was taken down promptly two weeks after its posting. Meta remarks with a smirk that maybe his poem about the military was a tad bit too political- that maybe if he stuck with deforestation and melting glaciers then it would still be playing.

The accomplishments that Meta has achieved are numerous, from being a TEDx Speaker to the first Guam rap artist to be selected for Team-BackPack's contests to a Creating Writing teacher, Meta's experiences span literally around the world. However, when asked about his proudest accomplishments, he doesn't speak about any of these experiences. Instead he talks about his personal growth and the moments when he's brave enough to admit his mistakes.

The moments that resonate most with him surprisingly aren't on stage in the spotlight in front of an audience, but instead are in those quiet unspoken moments alone when his writing helps him discover more about himself.

In these moments, Meta pens down his journey in hopes that others will be able to relate to his experiences and not make the same mistakes that he did. Meta's poems often take his audience on an emotional journey where they can not only relate to the many bittersweet moments that he shares, but also learn ways to navigate their own personal challenges.

One of Meta's recent poems called "Momma's Boy" refers to his masculinity and how much of how he learned to love is shaped by brave brown women. Growing up in a gang culture, Meta had

internalized schemas of toxic masculinity. The poem allows him to reconcile this piece of himself, dismantling the patriarchy that he learnt. During the climax of the poem, Meta is escorted home by a police officer. When his mother is asked if Meta was her son, she simply replied no, she didn't recognize him. At that moment, he realized how much he hurt someone he loved. *Momma's Boy* explores masculinity, by closely following Meta's relationship with his mother.

At the end of my time with Meta, I realized that we had spent several hours talking about politics, art, and nothing in particular. Similar to the way Meta speaks with an audience, he was a way of pulling you in and getting you interested. His performances are both familiar and thought provoking, more of a shared journey and dialogue than a one-sided speech.

Since moving to Denver in 2016, Meta has continued to hit the ground running. He released a self-published book of poems titled "Tie Your Shoes Kid," a collection of pieces that explore childhood, family, migration, and love.

Additionally, Meta has released a rap album, "Apt 207," that is available on Spotify and iTunes.

To learn more about Meta, catch him at his next performance, or see more of his work visit www.reachmeta.com.

