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THIS
IS US

TEACHING ARTIST
Rosangelica
Lopez

FOREWORD

The poems found in *this is us* are written and spoken in the now. Urgency lingers between the lines of these poems, and the poets write as if there is no other time to speak but now.

Countless hours during the month of March have been spent on these poems—writing, editing, revising. We met our goal of five poems per collection, and I am proud to present Joshua, Telita, and Juan’s first chapbook.

With each poet’s collection we get a chance to see life through their lens—political, creative, sprinkled with humor. We are relieved, immersed in the works as if no other world exists, and within the same book we are abruptly called to action—called to wake up and be present in our reality.

this is us is a testament to living in the hood while existing and thriving as its own form of creative protest. Without forcing it, this chapbook became living and breathing proof via the voices of three dedicated poets.

Hopefully these works convey how much these young people truly are thriving. Congratulations on your first book. Knowledge is power, and I pray you continue to share your work with your peers. Your stories are very important and have opened my heart immensely.

—Rosangelica Lopez from the Bronx

LETTERS, FROM JUAN

JUAN
ROZAY

Letter from Melody

I didn't feel the Love
in my home

*she found love in the
wrong place she found love
in the arms of a gang banger*

I don't wanna live anymore
I don't feel the love, everyone
is against me

*After a few months into the relationship
he started to abuse her
hit her*

Best friend, I feel unwanted
the nigga that I love is an animal
but I can't leave him

*I say I don't got time for this and I hang up
She leaves a letter at my door*

For my baby girl Cherish. Sorry I had to write this letter to you
I didn't want you to see how I live. My house isn't a home.
Think about me when you near, think about me when you far.
Make mommy proud. I will always love you.

*I'm blowing up her phone
stop playing best friend, pick up the phone
she never picked up
next thing you know I hear a knock on my door
I ran so fast you thought I ran track
open my door and look down at my feet—I see a pretty little baby
with brown eyes
staring
right up at me yup,
suicide note*

Letter to Lula Mae Ward—also known as Scrap

I'm sorry it took me so long to write to you, but you know I'm missing you like crazy. Who would ever believe that on December 24th, 2004—you would gain your angel wings and leave me and the family.

I just wish you were here to see me graduate from high school—back in 2018—I did it for you so I can make you proud. Listen here, I'm the first man on this side of the family with a high school diploma. Best believe I'm gonna make it and go on to college.

Grandma, I'll be honest with you—ever since you gained your wings, the family ain't been the same. All we do is argue. Sometimes, I just wish you were here to help me put the family back together—it's not even the kids, it's the adults who hold the most grudges.

Me and Donovan had a little falling out but that's my like my little brother so you know we let that shit go. Now me and Nyzhah got something different—our bond changed over the years—we still good. You got 2 more great grands that came to the world—Milan and Amir'e.

Grandma your babies are not babies no more. To this day, I always thought losing you was hard but it wasn't. What's hard is trying to live life without you cause if it wasn't for you and your tough love, me and my cousins would not have that brother and sister bond.

Fuck having three wishes if I had one wish I would bring you back into this world just so I wouldn't have to feel a bit of sadness.

I love you as if you were still here where no time or space can divide us.

Life Ain't No Joke

Being a young black man raised
in the hood
Wasn't easy—I seen shit
At a young age
Changed me

Family and friends said
I wasn't gonna make it to see 18
But I'm here
It's sad
How the people I love
doubted me

So here I go making these
rhymes
To show that I belong here
I'm gonna make Mommy and
my old man
Proud of me
Get them
A nice big house with a balcony

'til that day come
I'm gonna work hard
Keep rapping 'til my last
Breath
I'm a Christian and I curse
Are you mad yet?

I made some choices in my life
Wish I hadn't made
Since I'm black—my life at stake

I know there's gonna be a time
When I go
I just can't predict when
But best believe I will not leave
Until the world hears my story

Being a young black man raised
in the hood
Ain't easy
Being a young black man raised
in the hood
Ain't easy

If you ever walk a mile in my
shoes
Watch your back
I had a lot of shots come my
way
They didn't know I was
bulletproof

A new chapter just opened up
My life is a blessing—after all
the shit I did in the past
Where would I be?
Dead or Alive?
I guess, I have God to thank
for that

Legend in the making
I'm making history by writing
My truth

Just know when I achieve
greatness
Mommy and my old man can
say

Our son did it on his own

Dear Chicken

Sorry it took me so long to write to you, but you know

<i'm not good with writing letters>

It's crazy how they took you in November
Not enough memories to remember
Sometimes I think—why the doctors couldn't stop the bleeding?
You in a better place now that you're free

<we always talked about living in these streets>

I know we didn't mean in a body bag—now I see
You are not bulletproof
All you wanted to do is play basketball
Why they had to take your dream at 18?

<i know when the sun is shining you are smiling through>

I know you playing ball up there in heaven. Save a place on the
starter 5 cause I miss you and love you cousin—I got you. The bros
got Staxks tatt'd in ink. I had to get you on my chain. I got a bullet
in a gun for every time that I cry but I still see your strength in your
mom.
Just spoke to your brother Bam—he said he coming home just
gotta be patient and wait.

Sometimes I wish I never got that phone call

<keep calling your phone hoping that
you pick up to this day>

I will never forget November 11th, 2011—Staxks Season For Life

letter2thoselivinglife

as a child i thought and spoke as a child but once i became a man
at the age of 13 i had to put childish things away and look at life
from a different point of view/ this world we live in ain't safe/ lots
of people can't fight or stay strong/ in this world people lost their
life because of the world/ i had struggles with life at an early age/
lost too many loved ones to this hard life

life has a way of making you into something different than what
you thought/ it can change you and break you/ i'm here to say life
changed me by throwing obstacles my way just to see me fall/
thinking of my loved ones makes me work more/don't give up be-
cause this world won't only change you it will make you stronger/
you got this/
i got this/

i got too many haters that wanna see me down but i'm gonna be
like an eagle/ just watch me soar/ my heart is so cold rotten to the
core/ this world made me into a beast/ you know a nigga is always
ready to rumble/ i was not raised with a silver spoon/ i had to work
hard to be where i am today/

grandma always told me you gotta watch who you call your
friends/ i keep my circle small i'm here shining with my brother/
if i got a plate i guess you need a plate too/ if you my friend you
gotta keep up because there's no slowing down/ can't wait for the
day God brings me home because when i die i did not die a hero i
died a legend and if you don't know about legends we don't die

my memory will live forever—love, Juan

THIS IS ME

TELITA

THIS IS ME

I know you're wondering what I'm about to say...

<I am>

Talented
you wouldn't want to debate me

Energetic
never stop

Loyal
to the ones that are close

Intelligent
as Maya Angelou

Theatrical
like a puppeteer

Amusing
as Kevin Hart

They say I'm confusing but...

THIS IS ME AND MY ART

politics
creativity
overcoming
knowledge of self

The World I Live In

There's a political tornado in the land
We have this man as a "president"
But he is so racist and unfair
We have a flag that is red, white, & blue
With stars on them too
But, I don't care

Flag symbolizing freedom
But are we really free?
Blood is dripping in the street
All over our feet
I'm like Martin Luther King
I had a dream that we would be free
But it doesn't feel that way to me

We work a 9-5
We go to school for 8 hours
For this "*president*" to be the boss of our tower
Will this land ever be ours?

If I Were

If I were an animal, I wonder what I'd be
A fierce lion or energetic puppy
If I was a pig, turkey, or chicken
I'd be finger licking
I'd be finger licking

If I was a dove I would be looking down from up above.
If I was a Pigeon I would doodoo on you
If I was a bear I would cuddle with my friends right here.

If I was a skunk I would spray those who do us wrong to have their
way.

If I was a Zebra I would be black and white, and it would be alright.
If I was a bee I would be the Queen, cause that's just me.

If I was an elephant, I'd pick my people up with my trunk and uplift
us all.

If I was a fish, dolphin, shark, or whale, I'd swim in the sea happily.
But I am nun of these.

I am me.

What else am I supposed to be?

N.A.S

He said he loved you
He said he cared
He said he loved you
But never was there

When you was going through struggles
He was playing games
What a shame
Only there to fight and call you names

Can't even try anymore/you gave up
Tired of feeling like you're not enough
Bet you had no clue he'd put you through
All this stupid shit

Got you in the streets looking like an idiot

Niggas ain't it
I swear niggas ain't shit
And never will be

They get on they knees and beg please
Expecting us to accept their apologies
Saying bitches are dogs
That's why they call
us bitches
...woof woof then, but you're a dog too

Part 2: Letter to You

If I'm a dog you a dog too
Your soul is on a leash
Chained to your endless greed
Can't shine cause your light caged
Thinking you young & free
What's free?

*Free is **not** under the control or in the power of another;
able to act as one wishes.*

Sounds more like me
Doing as I please
I am exactly who I'm supposed to be, now
Let the light shine thru me

The future and past impacts
What I am to be
Today
Choosing not to follow but to lead

THIS IS ME

NO HOT WATER TONIGHT

JOSHUA
NEGRON

Arrive

Middle of winter
20 degrees outside
Out here shivering,
Walking past the snow

Hearing the crunch
Feeling the wind makes my eyes cry
Arrive at the projects and see a kid complaining

“Mommy I’m cold”
“Don’t worry baby, soon you gon’ be feeling warm, once we enter
the building”

Walk up to the porch
Unlock the main door
And someone starts knocking—
It’s locked, he don’t have the keys

Cold getting to him / I open the door for him
Got inside the elevator / I reach my apartment
Arrive at my floor / my dog starts barking
Running around / happily jumping

Still cold
Sitting in front of the radiator
Didn’t feel the heat from there
Maybe it needs some time
I give it some time
Still won’t work now
Won’t work later

Hop in the shower
Wanting to enjoy some good hot water
Pressure is low
Doesn’t seem right
Felt the water
Then I realize
No hot water tonight

Truth She Spoke

I pay too much money for this bummy apartment
And ya can't give us immediately what we wanted

It's 20 degrees and my children are cold
I'm freezing too, can't even feel my toes

The rumors about your disrespect are nothing but true
You only care about the money
You don't care what you do

My lightbulb been busted for 2 years now
You ignore what I'm saying?
Sorry bunch of clowns

I call every 3 weeks
You tell me you'll send someone
No one ever shows up
You charge me as soon as I get my tax income

The game that you play is dumb
It leaves me feeling stupid and numb
Wish I could move out and then be done
But I don't have enough money cause you charge so much

Don't even have support from my children's father
Thinks he's doing a good job when he should try harder

Now please do a good deed for once in your life
Just fix the hot water that we don't have tonight

Questions and Answers

*"Is this the area where you want to stay?
For the rest of your life?
If you do then your head ain't right
The secondhand smoke getting to your brain
Boy you better get your head on right
Do you want to live here when you become a man?
Or do you wanna grow up and have a damn plan?
Do you wanna be successful and live in a better home?
Or do you wanna live in a area cops always patrol?
Do you wanna make me proud and buy me a house?
Or do you wanna see me hustling just to put food in your mouth?
Do you wanna grow up and start living a good life?
Or do you wanna live here with no hot water tonight"*

The questions got me thinking
Started picturing
What would be going on in the projects when I get older
For all I know I could become a drug dealer
Selling packs of weed to my customers
Making profit in a neighborhood where police patrol daily
Then one night the cops would spot me
Arrested for trying to survive

The questions got me wondering
Who will I become
I wanna be somebody
I wanna develop my talents
I wanna make money and buy a house for my mommy
Beautiful yard in an area that's always sunny
No more sap from trees it's time for honey
Gonna get out of the projects and make some money

The answers I present
No, I don't want to live here forever
Yes I love my home but I enjoy nicer weather
I want the sun to shine on my shoulder
And grow up to be successful
Happily ever after
The Payback

Pay her back

everything she did for me

*Without any help from the father
See, he was always immature*

Pay her back

all the things she bought with her money

*While she was working her ass off
She still had time to go to the store*

Pay her back

what she did before and after babies was in
her tummy

*Went through all the detours
Heart is extremely pure*

Pay her back

making food that is yummy

*Parenting has no brochure
Father didn't do nothing*

Pay her back

taught me to think smart and not be a dummy

No longer obscure

Pay her back for all the suffering she endured.

Hot Water Tonight

i.

No more waiting for the delayed bus
No more starting all the fuss
No more cold cuts, it's enough
No more struggling in life, just love

Everything mom ever wanted for us
My name is Joshua: let's discuss

ii.

Mom, you raised me through tough times
When I become successful I'm gonna buy you a home
New address
Treat you like a queen about to sit upon the throne
No more stress
I want you to be proud of me
Proud of my success
Pool in the back
Nice yard in the front
Full access
A place that you fully own
Forever bless

iii.

This life I'm picturing
Is gonna be alright
My mind growing
As fast as my height
Working for what I want
Starting a few fights
Because soon you gon' be living in a house
Where you can finally say
We have hot water tonight
Every night

