



Heart of the Matter

A publication by Renee Owen
Executive Director
September 24, 2015



Truth

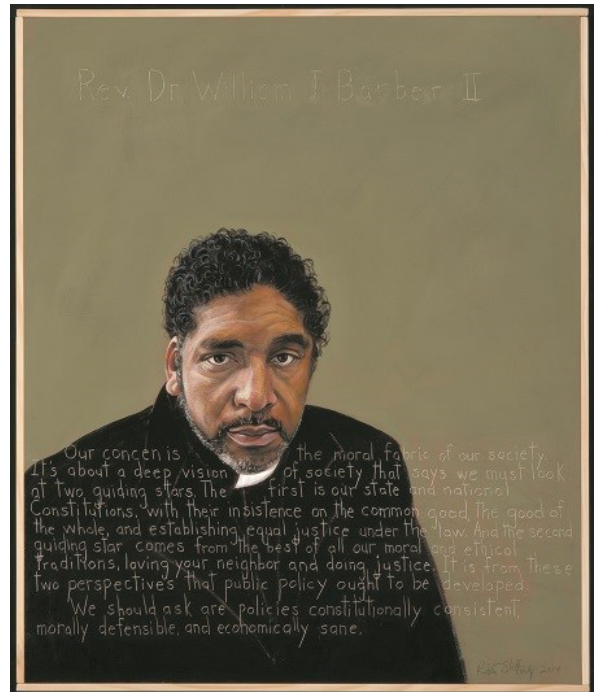
Through the eyes of an educational activist.

Reverend Barber's portrait was unveiled at the YMI Cultural Center in Asheville last weekend. I was there. I felt the truth. On Monday, portrait artist Robert Shetterly spent the morning with Rainbow's 5th – 8th grade students. Our students engaged in dialogue with Mr. Shetterly about the courage it takes to tell the truth. We learned why he has painted 216 portraits of Americans Who Tell the Truth, and we were touched by their stories.

Our students learned that Rosa Parks didn't refuse to give up her seat on the bus because she was tired (a lie told to most school children). In her own words, "The only tired I was, was tired of giving in." The truth is she was poised for civil action.

They learned about Chief Joseph who asked the great white chiefs, "...where they get their authority to say to the Indian that he shall stay in one place, while he sees white men going where they please."

They learned that before Helen Keller spoke the truth, people with physical and mental differences were locked away from society without rights.



Rev. Dr. William Barber, the newest portrait by Robert Shetterly in his Americans Who Tells the Truth series, now on exhibit at the YMI

They learned who Sojourner Truth was, and why she chose her own name. They learned that the original constitution was not written for her, nor for anyone who was black or a woman.

When asked how the Truth feels and sounds to our children, they had a lot to say.

Truth feels like passion.

Truth feels like strength.

Truth feels free.

There are three things you can't hide for very long: the sun, the moon, and the truth.

Robert Shetterly's personal story of Americans Who Tell the Truth

Robert started painting portraits of Americans Who Tell the Truth because he was angry about American leaders who take advantage of the power and trust they have been granted by lying to the people they are supposed to be serving. Robert explained he was angry with the press for not having the courage to tell the truth. As an artist he decided he could make a difference by painting Americans Who Tell the Truth, and giving all the portraits away. The children learned it was their job to tell the truth. And they learned that they cannot wait until they are grown-ups to speak the truth. Just like lying becomes a habit, truth is a habit they need to practice now. They were inspired by stories of children who told the truth and made a difference. Children such as Claudette Colvin, Barbara Johns, and Samantha Smith.

Our students spoke up. "Out of the mouths of babes." They talked about how they see old people polluting the earth because they won't be around to deal with the destruction. They talked about slavery and racism. They talked about greed. They talked about people being too lazy to do the right thing. They talked about injustice. They talked about hypocrisy. They told the truth.

What's Wrong With our Children?

When Robert completes a portrait, he scratches a quote from the subject on the surface of the painting. Of the 52 portraits on display at the YMI, the portrait I stood at the longest, and the quote that most moved me, was Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, "*What's wrong with our children? – Adults telling children to be honest while lying and cheating. Adults telling children not to be violent while marketing and glorifying violence... I believe that adult hypocrisy is the biggest problem children face in America.*"

As an educator, trusted with the lives of children, I must tell the truth. I must honor the sacredness of childhood-- the sacredness of all life--with the truth. Even when it is hard to hear, I must have the courage to tell the truth.

Here is a truth that may be uncomfortable: Many of the teachers at Rainbow Community School are

amazed they work at a private school – at a school that charges tuition, thereby excluding those who cannot afford to attend. By the very fact we charge tuition, our population of families are incredibly privileged. We are the fortunate ones. I hire teachers who got into teaching because they want to change the world. Are they hypocrites for working with the privileged?

Marian Wright Edelman, founder of Children's Defense Fund. Portrait by Robert Shetterly



Why we work at Rainbow Community School

Our teachers are empowered to tell the truth. Our teachers are allowed to be humans who are free to express their passions, personal interests, and beliefs. I refuse to work at a school where teachers are oppressed. I refuse to work in a school system where teachers have to tell lies to children, or hide truth, in order to stay employed. I refuse to work in a school system where children are used as "objects" of scientific data in order to compete with other countries. I refuse to take part in one of the largest social engineering schemes ever conducted – the massive standardized testing movement. One day, I believe it will be seen as a human rights violation. It is a violation of human nature to make a nine year old

endure 19 days of testing. In the future, how will we view the drugging of millions of children* in order to “help” them sit and concentrate for hours on end? It is a lie to tell the American people that standardized testing is to help children. The truth is that standardized testing is to help perpetuate a system, and those who most benefit from it are *not* the children. Our educational system is set up to help prepare children primarily for the marketplace – to make them “marketable.” And parents are so *fearful*, so afraid their child will not be “marketable,” that they abide.

A teacher in another school system recently asked our fourth grade teacher, “Are your students prepared to function in the real world?” Without hesitation Susie replied, “No, I think they are prepared to *change* the world!” That’s why we work at Rainbow Community School.

Educating Changemakers

The youth from Soulspeak (a slam poetry group that was founded by a Rainbow alumni student and parent) told the truth at the YMI this weekend. They said “Truth” and “Trouble” are synonymous in America. Every portrait on the wall was of a trouble-maker. Brilliant trouble-makers. Noam Chomsky, Dr. King, Howard Zinn, John Lewis, Fredrick Douglas, James Baldwin, Amy Goodwin, Cesar Chavez...all trouble-makers. That’s what we are educating your children to become: troublemakers! At Rainbow, we call them *changemakers*, and we weren’t honored as a National Changemaker School for nothing.

When you decided to enroll your child at Rainbow Community School, what did you feel? Did you know you were being courageous? Did you feel you were doing something right for the world? Did you feel you were empowering your child to have the intelligence and courage to tell the truth? Were you admitting the truth to yourself when you *knew*, deep in your soul, that this was the *humane* way to educate your child?

Truth does exist. It is a living spirit. How do I know? I can *feel* it. When someone speaks the truth, I am

Exeperience Robert Shetterly’s
Americans Who Tell the Truth Exhibit
September 19 — November 7
YMI cultural Center
39 S. Market Street, Asheville

*More information about Americans
Who Tell the Truth can be found at
www.americanswhotellthetruh.org.*

moved. The first time I heard Dr. Barber speak at a Moral Monday rally, I cried. It was such a relief to hear someone speaking the truth in public. What a rare blessing. It felt like the cork being popped off a giant bottle – relieving the bottleneck of our own self-inflicted oppression. *Why is truth so rare?* Reverend Barber speaks about

the hypocrisy of the lawmakers who cut taxes for the wealthiest, while cutting services for the needy. He speaks about the injustice of our new voting restrictions – clearly engineered to reduce the turnout of African-American voters and the made-up “voter fraud problem” that justified the lie. As one person said this weekend, Reverend Barber is cold as steel when talking about justice, but warm-hearted when talking about love. He speaks of love. When we love one another, we take care of each other.

Love is why we work at Rainbow Community School. I will not deny love. I will not deny spirit. I cannot work in a school system where I cannot name Love, where I cannot speak of Spirit. There is something that makes all of us alive, and it isn’t just molecules. We don’t use any particular religion to name spirit at Rainbow, but we celebrate it, honor it, and live it. The spirit of life is what keeps us alive. Life is sacred, and that is a truth children must not be denied. That is why I work at Rainbow Community School.

Why do adults lie? That is what our children wanted to know yesterday. Robert Shetterly told the truth. He explained that concern about our economic well-being is most often what keeps adults from having the courage to tell the truth. We have been oppressed by a systemic lie -- brain-washed into thinking that we cannot survive if we whistle-blow on ourselves. We all want to survive, but I want to do *more than survive*. I want to raise a generation of children whose purpose in life is to do more than merely stay alive. Why do I work at Rainbow Community School? Because I want our children to truly *live*.


When Marian Edelman names adult hypocrisy as the biggest threat to children, she isn’t just speaking about education and moral degradation. She is

talking about the lack of rights given to children – the right to be healthy, for example, and the adults who justify children’s poverty, hunger, and educational dearth with political lies. The U.S Congress spends \$737 billion a year on defense. It would cost an estimated \$30 billion a year to end world hunger. The simple truth is that is not moral. I may not have the money to cure poverty, but I can tell the truth -- and if all of us told the truth, the money it would take to wipe hunger off the face of the earth would appear within moments. In truth, there is hope.

We still have the right to tell the truth. Let’s make sure, as Robert Shetterly said to our children, we also have the right to *hear* the truth. Today, please take the time and the courage to speak a truth – even if it is uncomfortable, or it makes you sound angry, or it makes you sound trite. Witness how liberating the truth makes you feel. The truth can set us free.



Portrait of Samantha Smith, by Robert Shetterly. *“If we could be friends by just getting to know each other better, then what are our countries really arguing about? Nothing could be more important than not having a war if a war could kill everything.”*

 Rainbow Community School sponsored two portraits to help bring Americans Who Tell the Truth to Asheville: Samantha Smith and Helen Keller.

~Disclaimer~

This Heart of the Matter is my words, and my truth only. Please accept my sincere apology and regrets if this Heart of the Matter offended you in any way.

I recognize that telling the truth creates trouble, because not everyone will agree with you. We are taught to be polite, and telling the truth makes people uncomfortable. Most school administrators are afraid to speak their truth because they don’t want to offend anyone. I have been guilty of the same. I empathize with all Americans who have unwittingly promoted lies by withholding their own personal truth.

Another barrier to speaking truth is our fear that we are not worthy. Will I be able to abide by my own truth? Do I have the power to act with unblemished integrity? The simple answer is no. The truth is that I cannot live by my own standards. But none of us can. So let’s not use that as a reason to *not have high standards!* Instead of being ashamed of ourselves, let’s lift one another up.

***Note:** I would like to address the mention of “drugging children.” In the course of the last 15 years, attention deficit disorder went from a little known learning difference to a national epidemic – with more than 6.4 million children now diagnosed. As an educator, I have witnessed children with serious attention disorders – children who are suffering from low self-esteem and a host of other issues as a result of their learning difference – emerge as confident learners, blessed with the ability to focus as a result of prescription drugs. These are the children who biologically have very serious attention issues and truly benefit from the medical help. Unfortunately, when looking at the metrics, and based on my own observations, I believe that the vast majority of children diagnosed with ADD or ADHD were not born with a biological disorder – they have been diagnosed because of societal issues – overexposure to media and violence, poverty, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, and what Richard Louv calls “nature deficit disorder.” When these children are prescribed a drug, they are being given something to mask the symptoms, without the cure.

- borgenproject.org/the-cost-to-end-world-hunger/
- <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/>
- <http://healthland.time.com/2013/04/02/understanding-the-rise-in-adhd-diagnoses-11-of-u-s-children-are-affected/>