



SERVING AND SAVING CHILDREN BY JULIANNE MALVEAUX

Antanae Horton is an awesome girl. She is cute, smart and spunky and she has a propensity to challenge authority. She talks loud, talks back, and is more than a handful. She is also a Junior Bennett Belle, one of three young women who took to the stage at my installation at Bennett College for Women in March of 2008. With her girlfriends Diamond Herring and Jasmine Hamilton, they spoke to the plight of girls, to the pipeline, and to their support of me and of Bennett College for Women. Antanae is the product of the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center in Washington, DC. She has been supported and mentored by the Recreation Wish List Committee of Washington, DC, an organization that I am proud to serve as treasurer. Through the RWLC I have come to know Antanae so well that I brought her and one of her mentors, Miracle Howard, to Greensboro so she could "study" me and portray me in a Blacks in Wax celebration at the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center. She told a reporter that she had not thought of college in her future until she came to Bennett College, and now she is certain she will go to college.

In bringing Antanae to Greensboro, I was modeling a mentor of my own, Dr. Maya Angelou, who brought Diamond Herring and Cora Masters Barry to her home in Harlem so that Diamond could study her and portray her in the Blacks in Wax black history celebration. Words can hardly capture the richness of a program that had children portraying everyone from Frederick Douglas to Cornel West to President Barack Obama to Sojourner Truth (Tierra Holloway) to Shirley Chisholm. The Southeast Tennis and Learning Center does more than offer recreational services. It offers educational programs and grounding in African American history that provides critical dimensions of cultural knowledge for young people. This work is done because Cora Masters Barry, the founder and President of the Recreation Wish List Committee is on site and on point. She is the brain behind the programming, the bridge that students cross to get to folks like Susan Taylor, Maya Angelou, Dorothy Height and so many others. She has a Rolodex to die for; and she uses her Rolodex to make sure that young black people are connected with our elders. Barry also uses that Rolodex and her political acumen to raise money, hundreds of thousands of dollars that support the Wish List and the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center. Absent the six-figure contributions the RWLC makes, the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center would be just another recreation center, struggling to survive in cash-strapped Washington, DC.

Now Cora Masters Barry and the Recreation Wish List Committee are being threatened with eviction from the house they built. Why? Washington Mayor Adrian Fenty says it is a "technicality" and that the organization's corporate registration has lapsed. But the organization signed a lease that said if the registration ever lapsed there was a 30-day correction period. The eviction papers offer no cause for the eviction, and the lapsed registration has been corrected. Still, the notice to evict has not been rescinded. How is it that an organization that does nothing but good for young people is being put in peril?

For some, this may seem to be a local issue, a DC skirmish that has nothing to do with lives in Memphis, Seattle, Indianapolis, or Detroit. I stand with my sisterpresident, Dr. Beverly Tatum, of Spellman College, who speaks of starfish washing up on a beach, and the person that has the patience to throw some of the

starfish back in the ocean. The savior comments that she can't save all the washed up starfish, but she can save some. Cora Barry and the Recreation Wish List are saving some, saving Antone, Diamond and dozens more young people who are utterly transformed by the hands on work she does.

Hands on makes a difference. That's why Susan Taylor has so fully embraced the magic of mentorship with her National Mentoring Cares Movement. That's why Marian Wright Edelman advocates so forcefully with the Children's Defense Fund. That's why Dr. Dorothy Height puts her hands on young women and helps shape their lives. I love them all because they help develop the pipeline of young women who will eventually come to Bennett College for Women, the oasis where we educate and celebrate women and develop them into twenty-first century leaders and global thinkers.

Wherever you live in this nation, if you care about the pipeline, you will care about the Recreation Wish List Committee of Washington DC, and the eviction that makes no sense. They are saving and serving children at a time when too many are turning their backs on our precious future. They deserve celebration not condemnation or eviction.
