Propositions

By Stephen Dunn

Anyone who begins a sentence with, “In all honesty ...” is about to tell a lie. Anyone who says, “This is how I feel” had better love form more than disclosure. Same for anyone who thinks he thinks well because he had a thought.

If you say, “You’re ugly” to an ugly person — no credit for honesty, which must always be a discovery, an act that qualifies as an achievement. If you persist you’re just a cruel bastard, a pig without a mirror, somebody who hasn’t examined himself enough.

A hesitation hints at an attempt to be honest, suggests a difficulty is present. A good sentence needs a clause or two, interruptions, set off by commas, evidence of a slowing down, a rethinking.

Before I asked my wife to marry me, I told her I’d never be fully honest. No one, she said, had ever said that to her. I was trying to be radically honest, I said, but in fact had another motive. A claim without a “but” in it is, at best, only half true. In all honesty, I was asking in advance to be forgiven.