

(Excerpt from 'The Boy in The Bin' – Charles W. Massie)

Raphael arrived at his class called Humanities 5-A, right after lunch. The class began as a lecture and continued with practical application. Humanities, in general, dealt with music and art; two subjects Raphael liked. During the practical part of the class, he showed off his drawing skills, dramatically improved over the last few years. Sometimes, the other kids would mock him because of his cleft palate, but he mostly ignored them; even when they called him 'Hair-lip'.

The scheduled classes ended with Science. Raphael was happy being with his cousin again. The teacher appeared as an older, gray-haired man named Mr. Whitslow. Unlike most of the other teachers, he dressed in a suit and wore a pair of black rimmed glasses. He announced today's lesson would be dealing with Earth Science; namely Gases. He revealed a chart on the wall called a Periodic Table. The table gave the chemical symbol for all the elements.

Raphael found the lecture interesting because this class reminded him of a TV show his Daddy tuned in on the Discovery Channel.

"Today," Mr. Whitlow promised, "I'm going to show you kids some of the properties of gasses. Oxygen is all around us and we, as humans, need Oxygen to breathe. Keep in mind though, this gas has many other uses which I will demonstrate. I want everybody to come up to my desk and take one green balloon, one red balloon and two paper clips. Who wants to volunteer to help me?" he requested.

Everybody's hand went up at once and he picked Johnny as his assistant. He instructed him to fill the green balloons with Oxygen, placing a paper clip on the end to seal the gas inside. He also wanted him to fill the red balloons with Acetylene gas and paper clip the end also.

He explained how when he lights the green balloon, the Oxygen will give off a loud POP while burning. There would not be any odor because Oxygen is odorless. He went on to explain when he lighted the red balloon; the class would be treated to a bright flash of light and a soft POP.

"With the red balloon," he noted, "you will also detect a foul odor, like rotting meat."

He directed Johnny to come up to the front of the class and begin filling the balloons. Johnny glanced at Raphael and said 'This should be fun'.

One by one the students brought their green and red balloons, with the paper clips, up to Johnny, where he filled them with the appropriate gas. When Raphael approached, Johnny filled the green balloon with Oxygen, the red balloon with Acetylene, PLUS a little Oxygen in the same balloon. Raphael didn't question the action because he wanted to see what would happen when the teacher lit them up.

As soon as the balloons filled, everybody formed a line in front of the teacher. First he would take the balloons from them and unclip the ends. He held a Bic lighter in front of the tip and released the gasses individually.

"POP!"

The Oxygen burned from the green balloon and as the teacher said, the gas gave emitted a loud pop.

"Whoosh!"

The Acetylene from the red balloon ignited and as described by the teacher, the gas gave off a small bright flash and a foul odor.

This exercise repeated with every student in the line. Finally, Raphael stepped up to the desk. He handed the balloons to Mr. Whitlow and stared in rapt attention.

"POP!" went the first balloon, filled with Oxygen. The same result occurred as with every other student. But when he ignited the red balloon Johnny filled with two gasses, everyone got a big surprise.

"BOOM!" ... a minor explosion erupted. Black smoke filled the air; smelling like burning rubber. The explosion went off so violently, Mr. Whitlow's glasses cocked sideways on his soot-covered face. The class broke out in riotous laughter. They had no idea burning Oxygen and Acetylene together, would produce such a violent effect.

Mr. Whitlow stood with black soot all over his face and his fancy white shirt. His stern body language indicated his displeasure. He specifically glared at Johnny and Raphael. He turned on one heel and headed straight out of the classroom. He followed the hall down to the Men's room, to get away from the class and to clean up.

"Wow man," Johnny shouted, "What a cool explosion. Wow."

"Why did nthat happen?" Raphael marveled, "the balloon didn't do nthat before nwith the other students?"

"My neighbor is a welder," Johnny snickered. "He told me he pulled the same stunt when he went to school. I thought the prank sounded funny and wanted to experiment for myself."

Mr. Whitlow came back into the room. He washed his face and straightened his glasses, but his shirt still bore the stains of soot. In his hand, he carried a flat wood board with a handle on the end; shaped like a small cricket bat.

"Johnny Rivero and Raphael Hernandez," he commanded. "Would you come to the upfront, please?"

Uh, Oh. This sounded like trouble. The boys left their seats and came up front.

"This is how I deal with smart asses," he proclaimed to the class. "Bend over you two."

"What for," Johnny cried. "What did we do?"

"Your little trick didn't impress me at all," he boomed. "You deliberately mixed the two gasses together ... and you, Hernandez; you acted as a partner in the crime. NOW BEND OVER."

"WHACK!" the paddle sounded when colliding with Johnny's bottom. "WHACK!" again on Raphael's rear end.

"Now both of you smartasses can head down to see the Principal. I don't want you back in class until you bring me an apology."

Raphael and Johnny left the room and went to their destination. Raphael thought this turned out to be a crappy start of the new school year. He liked his cousin, but he couldn't help thinking how Johnny acted as the cause of him getting in trouble. He believed he'd been conned or abandoned by his cousin and he didn't like the feeling at all.