

Bugsy and Isaac Newton by Lori Tsutsui

Bugsy stood, feet spread apart, arms at his side, fists clenched. He glared up at "Big Jim". Bugsy was breathing hard. He fought back the tears that wanted to flow down his brown cheeks. Big Jim pounded his right fist into his left palm, again and again.

"You know why they call you **BUG**...sy? Because you're no bigger than one."

Bugsy's glare softened and he smiled. "If I'm a bug, you're a snail!"

Bugsy continued to walk to school. He rubbed his stomach where Big Jim hit him and now he let the tears trickle down his face.

' Jesus, I'm sorry I said a bad thing about Big Jim. Maybe he can't help the way he is. Soft and fleshy like the twinkie he likes to eat.s. I don't know why you made me small. I'd like to know why. Ms. Marshall, she say some things we take by faith but I think it would be better if I knew.'

Bugsy passed through the gate of Christian Redeemer Elementary school. Johnny pointed to Bugsy and laughed. Then Johnny squatted while Big Jim pretended to hit him. Johnny acted as if he were in pain while they all laughed. Before Bugsy looked away, he caught a glimpse of Big Jim's face.

Mama says the eyes are the windows of the soul, Bugsy thought, What do his eyes say?

Bugsy reached the lockers and began to put his things away. Big Jim and his friends came down the hall and Big Jim pushed Bugsy as he walked passed.

"Hey," said Bugsy, "You throw a mighty mean punch."

"Any fool could do that to you," said Big Jim.

Bugsy opened his mouth but shut it tight. Nope. He wouldn't say that Big Jim was any fool. "Guess you're right."

Mama, his eyes say he doesn't know what to think of me.

Ms. Marshall was the fifth grade teacher. She did her best to make things simple. Most things Buggy understood. Sometimes he didn't understand why Ms. Marshall said some things but that day's science lesson stayed with him forever.

"Isaac Newton," said Ms. Marshall, "was a man that saw things and those things made him ask questions. And he was a man that would look for answers. The answers he found became famous laws in a science called Physics. Newton said if you put something into motion, it would stay in motion until something else stopped it. He said, the harder you push on something, the faster it would go but it depended on how big the thing was. Smaller things would move faster. And last of all, she said whatever size force you use against something, it will come back to you."

Buggy got a little confused about then and looked around. Even the smart kids looked a little confused. Ms. Marshall had seen that look before.

"Push against your desk," she said, "Did you feel something?"

Desks rocked and chairs screeched against the floor as the class tested Newton's theory.

"You could only feel something if it were pushing back. Think about it. The harder you push, the more you feel pushed back."

Buggy's eyes got big and his mouth almost formed the word, 'wow'. *What had Big Jim felt when he hit me? thought Buggy, that's like what Reverend Halsey says. What you plant is what you harvest so plant something good. If I were to punch Big Jim, my fist would more 'n likely crumple into my arm. But does that work for niceness? If I do something nice, will it come back to me?*

"...action, reaction; the law of action and reaction." Ms. Marshall's words broke into Buggy's thoughts. She was playing with a yoyo, throwing it out and watching it twirl back up.

"Like a pogo stick," said someone. Suddenly the class was alive with other suggestions. Johnny said everyone knew that the harder you threw the basketball against the backboard, the harder it would bounce back.

When the school day was over, Buggy waited until all the other kids were gone. "Ms. Marshall, what happens when a big kid punches a small kid?"

"Hearts are about the same size, Buggy. And you know, if you are smaller, your heart doesn't have to work as hard to keep your body going. It can spend its energy on other things. Maybe that's why you get picked for football and baseball games and Big Jim doesn't. Your heart helps your feet go like lightening."

Buggy was half way home before he realized Ms. Marshall hadn't answered his question. But it didn't matter. He understood enough. Big Jim's eyes told him. What pushed back at Big Jim was Buggy, the Buggy that Big Jim wanted to be like. Buggy wondered what Big Jim would do if Mama baked chocolate chip cookies for the two of them, and then maybe Big Jim wouldn't feel like punching him, so hard...*I guess there are a lot of things I could do, maybe should have already done*, thought Buggy.

"Mama," said Buggy as he threw open the kitchen door. "Mama, could you bake some chocolate chip cookies for me to take to school?"

"Sure, honey. How was school today? Learn anything special?"

Buggy took off his coat and hung it up. "There was this man named Isaac Newton who asked a lot of questions and found himself some answers..."