



### “Sanctuary”

Short True story by Michael K. Primavera

“Children shouldn’t play with matches.”

Summertime meant playtime every day, often with Louie. He was six and I was nine. Always happy, Louie was the ideal playmate. One sunny morning we set out, seeking adventure. Our journey led us to a neglected field. We had stopped near the bottom of a steep hill, where the grass was tall and dry. That day was a scorcher too, soon to become much hotter.

We were standing in front of an old couch when Louie exclaimed, “Look Mike, matches!” He asked if we could light and throw them at the couch. It sounded cool but wouldn’t turn out to be...

It was fun at first. The matches would catch and we would kick them out. Suddenly though, flames exploded from the couch! Kicking them proved useless. I grabbed a discarded cardboard box and started slapping the flames but it caught too. Then, the hill caught fire and at its crest stood our apartments!

The flames grew fast and the burning hill was out of control! I grabbed Louie’s hand and we fled. The two of us shot away like bullets in hot sneakers! Poor little Louie was filled with fear. His short legs were flicking like bicycle spokes on a fast-moving wheel!

I wondered where we should go. Suddenly, it came to me. My teacher the nun, had prepared me for this day. She once told me, “If you are ever in trouble, go where you are always welcome and forgiven. You won’t be turned in, nor will your sins be repeated. Go to the church, for Sanctuary.” And as if heaven sent, it was directly ahead!

We flew in like the wind. As the doors closed behind us, we stopped. The empty church was cool and peaceful. A rainbow of soft beautiful lights illuminated through the stained-glass windows. Candle flames serenely flickered in the distance, so unlike the ones we had just left. Sanctuary became evident.

Louie and I knelt in the back row. I urged him to pray hard that we didn't get caught. This became easy with the approach of blaring sirens. It didn't take a prophet to foresee their destination. We prayed for a long time before our courage caught up with us. We promised each other not to tell and I took him home.

Later I returned to "the scene of the crime." Our adventure had devoured much of the hill before being extinguished. Never again would I play with matches but other fires would come...