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## Prayer

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## Prayer

It was picture day. Me: a first grader. I was all ready.  
Hair combed. Shirt tucked in tight. Tie clipped on.  
Mom's orders were clear:

    No getting dirty or messing up my hair  
    No riding my bike. No playing in the sandpile.  
    No playing outside at all.

Those were all the things, especially being forbidden,  
I needed to do that day. I had already learned about  
The spirit of the law; how it lets us forget the inconvenient parts  
    and mostly obey.

So I went to the playhouse, a shed in the backyard,  
    furnished with a child-sized pantry, table, chair.

It began to rain consequences:  
The things you don't plan for, but choose.  
Afraid, hair and clothes already soaked in my mind,  
    I said a prayer.  
Not a rain prayer I had heard before, not the asking or  
    thanking of desert people for moisture.

It was the prayer now most familiar to me:  
Let me not bear the bad thing I deserve.

The rain stopped. It stopped abruptly.  
The thought "coincidence" might have occurred to an adult,  
    logical, sterile-minded.  
That adult might have offered tepid thanks:  
    "if You did that for me, I am grateful,"  
    as a scientific explanation fretted in the mind's back room.

Not me. I knew I had seen the finger of the Lord.  
Despite all those farmers' pleas—for me—He stopped that deluge.  
I walked across the backyard and inside,  
My eyes, like small stones, burned by that revelation.

—Shawn P. Bailey

*This poem won third place in BYU Studies 2006 poetry contest.*