

Old Number One

Saw them playing stickball at the old school
on a day not long ago when
I couldn't think in present tenses
and the future held no future--
so I went back
to see how the past was doing,
and I saw them
(two against two
three strikes you're out
two outs a side)
the way it used to be.

Only he wasn't a lefty,
the skinny kid with the white t-shirt
and mop of hair no comb could solve, firing
his fastball, Old Number One, at
the other kid with the red baseball cap,
wiggling the yellow broomstick,
guarding the strike zone.

But could he pitch--
and I smiled each time he hurled
the pink ball into the box,
kicking up a chalky puff,
because I remembered
how it was.

Then the pitcher said,
"Hey mister, wanna play?"
so I took the ball,
stretched a ten-year kink
out of my shoulder,
let loose
my best fastball,
old number one,
low and outside--

And he socked it,
the kid with the red baseball cap,
out of the schoolyard,
out of sight.

So I bought them sodas
and a new ball,
and I thanked them
for the chance to visit the past--
before I started home
to the future, a few miles down the road,
just a stone's throw away.