

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
(one against one
three strikes you're out
one out 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
while the other kid swung
at something no longer there.

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
before I started home
a few miles down the road,
a fastball away.