Why We Don't Play Stickball Anymore

When we played stickball
in the dust of the back lot,
we only had two gloves. One
for the pitcher, and sometimes
one for the catcher.
The other boys used their mother’s oven
mitts
to guard against the sting of the hit.

Some say, that the worst sting
came from Mickey Spinelli’s fastball,
which,
in its nascent form, wasn’t so much hard
as it was off-center.

And on days when the sun was hot,
and our mitts stuck to our skin,
a young hitter would connect
with one of the fastballs that Mickey threw
in a beeline to the fat tip of the bat,
not the sweet spot, not the strike zone.

And the whole game became off-center.

The ball ricocheted to the outfielder’s glove;
so when little Johnny looked down into his
mother’s mitt,
he thought he saw roses, in the off-center hit
that stings a burning hole into his hand.

-Alicia LaMagdeleine