

The kids were running the bases; play-acting a double play, sliding into home. A few moms had set up a blanket in center field for a picnic lunch for the little league team that I coached. It was a beautiful summer day in July and the team was in Cleveland. "It's ok" I said. "Are you sure; are you really sure, can I really go out on to the field?" "Yes" I said, completely puzzled as to why this man would not walk through the gate and on to the field at Tiger Stadium.

The grandson and son of one and the father of three took a step filled with hesitation as if walking out on thin ice, trying not to make a mark, trying not to disrupt the sand. He entered the field by the bull pen between third base and the left field foul pole. He moved slowly and to the right heading "home". He never strayed more than three feet from the railing. That same railing that had separated "them" from "us". Behind the plate he paused for a moment and remembered; Johnny Bench, Thurman Munson, Duke Snider and "the play" with Lou Brock and Bill Freehan. He moved slowly as if re-playing every game he had attended while staring intently, although at nothing in particular, into the visitor's dugout. Now, holding the railing for support, he moved toward right field. His eyes were fixed on the spot but could not let go of the rail. Smiling now, he glanced into the right field corner; he could hear the crowd but wondered where they were.

It was time. He knew the exact location. He knew, not from memory, but from the tears. He looked into the stands where his father and grandfather were sitting. "Frozen rope" was their favorite saying. He motioned to his kids to have them join him in this special place. He shouted, but his voice was overwhelmed with the cheering of the crowd. He looked to his left and saw the ball rattling around in the corner. His movements were methodical yet the number six was just a blur as he wheeled around. A "frozen rope" of a throw from the left field corner to third base. The crowd verified that the runner was another victim of the greatest right fielder that ever played at Tiger Stadium.

"Wanna play catch dad?" "You bet I do". He glanced into the stands one last time and trotted towards the infield. It was, after all, the third out of the inning.