VIEW FROM THE THIRD ACT:

# The Last Baseball



By Darren Somsen · Founder & CEO | Third Act USA, Inc.

Growing up in Utah, we often felt overlooked. It seemed as though the national chain restaurants and big department stores we heard about were always somewhere else. We had our own institutions, including ZCMI, Zions Cooperative Mercantile Institution[1]. To me, those familiar names were part of what made home feel like home.

As the state grew, people came to set up shop, seeing an opportunity or simply falling in love with the place. Among the people who left their mark was Maurice Warshaw, a Jewish immigrant whose businesses included Grand Central[2] department stores and Warshaw's grocery stores. My father was assistant store manager at the Warshaw's location at 3900 South and State Street. My dad loved Maurice, and from the way he talked about him, Maurice genuinely seemed to love his employees.

As a kid, though, I was always looking for signs that the rest of the world had noticed us.

I remember feeling that pride when I saw a Darren McGavin movie with scenes I recognized from Utah. This was before I understood how many classic Westerns had already put Southern Utah on the screen. Those were what my grandfather watched, so I hadn't paid much attention. I was looking for places I could identify myself.

Then came Fletch. There was our Utah, with Ogden standing in for Provo[3]. The geography didn't matter to me nearly as much as recognizing home. When you grew up with the Wasatch Mountains in your backyard, seeing that landscape on a movie screen meant something.

And of course, there was SLC Punk! I see my teenage years in that movie: the music, the circles that overlapped, the familiar places. And yes, I saw guys panhandling outside the Main Street doors of Crossroads Mall. That part wasn't something Hollywood had to invent. I went there with friends, and sometimes I wandered over between banquet shifts at the Marriott through the corridor connecting the hotel to the mall.

1. Zions Cooperative Mercantile Institution: https://www.preview.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/
2. Grand Central: https://utahstatecapitol.utah.gov/maurice-warshaw/
3. Ogden standing in for Provo: https://www.ksl.com/article/news/entertainment/5-more-of-the-best-films-ever-made-in-utah/24761924


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But the movie wasn't a documentary of my life. I was a punker and a new-wave kid, and I was also working forty hours a week between three jobs during my senior year of high school. I delivered Domino's pizzas around Taylorsville in my yellow '67 Volkswagen Beetle, through snowstorms and summer heat. I worked as a runner for an electronics manufacturer building equipment for those early "portable" computers that were about the size of a suitcase. And at seventeen, I was a banquet waiter at the Marriott, where Johan Schwarz personally trained me in fine dining and trusted me with real responsibility.

I loved the music. But learning to work, earning that trust, and carrying adult responsibilities mattered just as much. Those jobs paid for my car and bought my freedom. I worked my ass off, and I loved it.

That didn't mean you wouldn't find me at two in the morning in a back booth at Denny's, Bill & Nada's, or Lee's Cafe in Bountiful, drinking coffee, smoking clove cigarettes and then Benson & Hedges Menthol 100s, and rehashing the concert we'd just seen. KCGL was part of the soundtrack. That was my teenage life, too. The work and the music weren't competing identities. They were both mine.

I loved knowing that other people could see something of the place I called home. But the movie connection that always brings a smile is The Sandlot, because it leads me back to Nick Smith.

When I worked for Phonex Corporation, Nick was COO. He personally promoted me from Customer Support Manager to Marketing Programs Manager. We used to go for lunch at Vincent Drug in old downtown Midvale, where you could get a hot ham and cheese sandwich and a perfectly mixed chocolate malt.

There was the soda fountain and the short-order grill. And there was Mr. Vincent, perched in his pharmacy cage a couple of feet above the floor, looking out over his domain. The shelves held items in packaging that looked as though it could have gone straight into a mid-century museum. The place wasn't decorated to look nostalgic. It simply hadn't gotten around to becoming modern.

That was the store where the boys bought baseballs in The Sandlot[4]. But Nick told me something the movie didn't tell you: according to him, the production team brought the baseballs themselves.

4. the boys bought baseballs in The Sandlot: https://www.visitutah.com/plan-your-trip/recommended-itineraries/sandlot-fans-guide-to-utah


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Nick told me the rest of this story personally. I think it was as we were driving away after lunch one day. As I remember him telling it, he had taken his grandson to Vincent Drug because the boy loved The Sandlot and wanted to buy a baseball from the same store.

There was just one problem.

Nick went up to Mr. Vincent and asked where the baseballs were.

“I don’t sell baseballs.”

Nick pointed out that they had sold them in the movie. Mr. Vincent’s answer, as Nick related it, was that Hollywood had done that. He didn’t sell baseballs.

It was so much Mr. Vincent. And what happened next was so much Nick.

Rather than disappoint his grandson, Nick went to a sporting-goods store, bought a baseball, and brought it back. With Mr. Vincent’s cooperation, he put it on the shelf so the boy could come in and buy it.

> *“The store didn’t sell baseballs. This time, it sold one.”*

I miss Nick. He was an amazing mentor and a wonderful friend, and I learned a great deal about leadership from him. He recognized my abilities, and when he became CEO of I-Sim, he invited me back to his team. I was fortunate enough to work for him again.

I will never forget him, and I will never forget his story about the last baseball.

And that’s my view from the Third Act.

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