



June 21, 2021 (would have been the first day of camp on the schedule from the old days)

Greetings St Albans Summer friends,  
all 19 of you, plus a handful of parents!

40 years ago this spring I answered an ad in the U of Md Diamondback newspaper or the Washington Post from St Albans, looking for summer day camp counselors. I had never gone to camp myself, but the previous summer had worked 8 weeks at a sleepaway camp in West Virginia and loved it. In 1981 Paul Herman was head of the summer camp at St A's, and interviewed me in his office which I can still see in my mind's eye. I had played and coached sports through high school and also had some drama experience so was applying for any and all positions that might be available. Was working as a waiter as well so the day camp hours suited me. After some chat Paul took a bat out of his closet (baseball bat, not a nocturnal one to be tossed at me and tangled in my hair!:) and said, Ok, I am a little kid, help me to bat. So I did, and Paul was either impressed or I was so bad at it that he hired me to help with the drama program instead, which I am pretty sure was my first choice anyway.

I worked with a woman name Virginia on the drama classes, and we put on The Japanese Cricket and The Emperor's New Clothes. Virginia and I did not see eye to eye on some things, and after the first session Paul kindly heard me out and entrusted me with the younger drama group while Virginia did the older group. I directed The Dragon Hammer, a Chinese tale, which Virginia had already chosen and I had no time to look for another. I cannot recall what play she did second session, I was not involved. I wrote a couple of songs each for the first three titles, a couple of which I will attach to these musings. In the cast of the Japanese Cricket was Damon Maida, who 10 years later became a St A's counselor, and we have stayed in touch over the years, he even wrote a song for one of my musicals here in Japan, One of the younger boys was in a DC youth choir that participated in the 10th anniversary production of Leonard Bernstein's Mass ( I just found it on Youtube!! I think the boy's name was Ian; he is one of many in the chorus. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL96d80DJRI>). I went to see that.

I wrote my first ever song in the summer of '77 at 17, a love song for a gal I still know and love today :) (No connection to St A's). For the sleepaway camp in '80 I wrote my second, which about five years ago my co-counselor from that time found a cassette tape he had recorded and digitized it for me, was amazing to hear that after all those years! I have attached it for your listening pleasure. 41 years later I think I should have added a bit more melody and a bridge but we got nice applause at the end, must have been for the choreography. \*) I wish I had done audio and video recordings for all my plays of the St Albans days - I do have a few ancient videotapes but some of them have not stood well the test of time. Someday I will try to watch.

Helping Paul run the camp were J Adrian Verkouteren and Chris Sinderson. Am still in touch with Paul and Adrian. Others I recall but no longer have a connection are Jonathan Engel (I think his brother was a counselor too) and Mr Grant, who if I am not mistaken ran the swim program forever. I do not think he was a counselor per se but he was in charge of summer camp swimming. Jacquie Crittenberger taught tennis. We caught up a bit on

Facebook some time ago. Hey Paul, why did we never take staff group photos?! :) I cannot swear that we did not, but I have always been more of a hoarder than a tosser so I think I would have them if we did. :) I do well remember the orientation for staff held in the refectory, so exciting each summer to see new faces and reconnect with the old.

In 1981-82 school year I studied in Austria, and the program ended too late for me to work at camp in '82, but Paul kindly hired me back in '83, the first of five consecutive summers. Maria Harris was the other drama teacher, I think perhaps that may already have been her second summer there. She ran the older drama, I the younger. I wrote a lot of songs for all her shows over the years, as well as of course for mine. It was that summer that I wrote my first original shows, and was off and running, still doing the same here in 2021. Maria and I got along great, and worked together all those five summers, and have been lifelong friends. She was the drama director at South Lakes High for many years before retiring. Her high school students put on one of my St A's shows in the 90's (Moonlight Madness), and I did a Japanese comic theater workshop at her high school about 10 years ago. In the summer of 1984 I did a show called Bears in the Woods, which needed an adult in a gorilla costume which I planned to rent, so I asked the teacher of magic, who I did not yet know well, whether he would play the role. Sure, he said, when do you want me to bring in my costume? From that moment on our friendship was assured - Mr Andrew Wood! Drew was at St A's from 83-86, and returned for one day in 1987 when I restaged the Bears show and he, yes, donned his gorilla suit once again. Claudine was a camper in '83 and beyond whose mom worked with my sister, and we have kept up a friendship to this day. Alexa was a star of Maria's shows, and we are Facebook friends. Paul was in '80s shows and I kept in touch with his mom, who kindly hosted members of my theater when we visited DC in 1999. Paul and his mom and I still stay in touch via FB. April was Lady Ziffemone in a summer show, and years later I ran into her in a Baltimore cafe and we have kept in touch on and off.

Better not get into detailed accounts of every summer or this letter will take forever :) General memories are the excitement on the day of the shows, with kids wearing stuff I had picked up from mad weekend yardsailing and thrift shopping..doing make-up with a touch of color on each of my fingers and depending on the role of the player giving them a dab on the nose or cheek (aliens - green cheek, farmer - red cheek, clown - red nose obviously!)... working late into the night at the Trapier building sets (I was entrusted with a key, as I also ran the Late Afternoon Program for several 1980's summers) .... carrying the lunches down to the fridge (or instructing CITs to do so) ... kids playing on the green field at lunchtime.... the enthusiasm of all the campers, who in drama class worked hard to put on a show in 3 short weeks with only an hour or two rehearsal a day.... the excitement of the first day of camp, on which I was always sure to be on the sidewalk opening car doors and greeting new and returning campers ... wearing various silly hats and costumes throughout the summer (a couple photos attached). I was not costumed daily, but certainly at least had on a different lid each day. I remember one particular day when I had decided to dress as Captain Kitchen, with a checked plastic tablecloth as a cape, a colander as a helmet, and various kitchen utensils dangling from my neck and belt. At lunchtime, two kids got into a scuffle, and I was the nearest counselor so leapt, rattling and clanking, into the fray to separate them - Captain Kitchen to the rescue! :) I loved the annual counselor kickball game, as kickball was the only sport I was any good at as a kid, though I played several. Good fun goofing off and also getting my foot onto the ball for a couple of home runs. Years later when my son was in 5th grade his baseball team had a parent-kid game, and my son struck me out. Oh well, so much for glory. Now had it been kickball...

In 1987 I got a job teaching English in Japan, so knew I would not be returning to camp the next summer. Adrian penned a singalong and performed it with the kids at an assembly a day or two before the end of the second session. The next day, a camper came up to me and said - Hey, you are still here, I thought we sang goodbye! :)

After three years in Japan (as a teacher) and a yearlong theater program in California (as a student) I returned to summers at St A's from 1991-93. By then, Paul was no longer heading the camp. I suddenly realize I cannot recall who was! signs of old age... Damon, who had been in a 1981 show, was a counselor. Sometime in those three years Beth, who had been in my shows in the mid-1980's, was a counselor too. Adrian was no longer involved with summer camp, but I certainly remember Tim and Tiffany! Also Jeff, who later taught in Japan and then despite my letter of recommendation went to the same California theater school I had attended, Dell'Arte. Seth, who had been a star in mid-80's Garts shows, was back as CIT and possibly junior counselor. he has been a great friend and we enjoy keeping up on FB, and have met a few times. Lori and Megan did drama and storytelling. (actually I think Megan was there in 87 and Lori in the 90's, things are fuzzy!) The absolute queen of the Trapier those three summers was Georgia "Jazz Hands," wowing all with her dance teaching and her fabulous, positive personality. A standout camper from those years was Shirin, whose parents were very kind to me and still are. They also hosted a Japanese guest in 1999, and I had dinner with their family several times way back when, and look forward to the next time.

In 1991 and 1992 summers I occupied a room in the school dorm, so literally lived at camp! For me it was not a day camp! :) In '93 no rooms were available so Paul was able to procure me free lodging in the carriage house on the estate of a camper's grandmother quite close to the school. It was a lovely apartment, and my hostess was very gracious. I think she must have been in her 80's but went into the office daily to oversee the family's business, which was quite a substantial one.

I returned to Japan in fall 1993 to take a university teaching position, and have been here ever since. When I took my Japanese community theater troupe to Washington DC to perform at the Smithsonian in 1999, we took an afternoon to do an assembly at the Trapier and visit the Cathedral. It was not until January 2014 that I was able to visit St Albans again, and Paul as Lower School head gave my family a tour of all facilities old and new, mostly new since I had last visited. Already 7 years have passed since then...

I want to thank each and every one for your part in making St Albans' summers great, not just for me, but for every single camper and counselor who spent a session or summer there. Five or so years ago I got an email out of the blue from a little boy named Shelby who had long since become a man, but I knew him when he was in my first original show there in 1983. He remembered the old days and decided to google me and reach out. Thanks Shelby! Even if we are not googled, we are surely remembered, and all did our parts to shape the future of the children, be shaped by children and counselors, and shape our own futures as well.

With much love, I close with my favorite greeting -  
Heeyyyy campers!!!!!!  
-Gart

PS - attachments include a few photos, a list of shows and songs, and the sheet music to a song I wrote for the first day of camp in 2011 but had never recorded. Also a video link to me singing the song in my rec room, a former garage for farm equipment that is part of my home and a great space for rehearsals and fun! I have added a link my theater in the hills,

which I have been renting year round since spring 1994. My community theatre was founded in 1995 and we are now in our 27th year. There is room at my home for visitors, so I hope to see some of you, or even the next generation, welcome anytime!



here I am with some happy campers in 1981!

PPS - why did I never find the secret portal to lead the campers to this stage so we could perform?! <https://www.enjostalbans.com/listing/roman-theatre-of-verulamium/>

PPPS- one more story - Every single spring I have a recurring St A's dream - it is show-time, all the kids and parents are in the audience and the drama kids are in the wings - and I realize I have not yet written the show!

I did have one brief braindead moment at an actual summer show (probably more but this is the one I remember ) - it was in the show The Pied Piper of Jabberwocky and when I played the next song, nobody went out onto the stage. I kept vamping, playing the intro over and over and hoping they would go out and sing, when a camper came up to me and said, "um, Gart, you are playing the wrong song!" And sure enough I was!! So I swung into the proper song and everyone went out and sang, and I hoped that the audience thought I had just been playing a musical interlude...:)