

A Letter of Deep Apology to the Botanical Gardens of Saint Louis:

Dear Staff,

I am deeply sorry for running barefoot through the Japanese Garden. Witnesses may have described me as a young, (barefoot) teen wearing a transparent orange silk shirt that billowed out like a foxtail in the breeze. I left my sandals in the George Washington Carver garden, hidden in the gushing black fountain that always seems to be empty.

Then, I absolutely did run, not walk, to smell the lavender in the Persian garden, and it was a blinding sort of smell, like the taste of lemon or the scent of the cool mist rising from the fountains. I did not look a day under fifty then, but I wore ripped jeans and was sketching the water lilies.

I acknowledge that I did tickle the Venus flytraps with blades of grass to make them close their eyelid mouths, and I managed to cheat at the Victorian hedge maze. Some people think it is impossible to cheat at mazes, but I assure you, anything is possible when you shriek with laughter the entire time, ripping holes in the striped shirt my parents made me wear.

It was I, I was the one who left smudged fingerprints all over the greenhouse glass and made dents in the sleeping green grass next to Henry Shaw's mausoleum. I fished two copper pennies from the liquid manes of the water spouting fountain, and then tossed them back in for a recycled wish. Maybe then, I was pregnant at the time, and blushing over the honey-fire scent of the hyacinths.

Finally, I must confess to spreading malicious rumors to both children and adults that there was a giant squid in the reflecting pools in front of the Climatron. Right after I spread my fingertips across the hides of the trees in the German forest, spying a bird wing out of the corner of my eye. You have to forgive me, I was a father for the first time that day, and I held my newborn daughter amidst the azaleas... I digress.

I am sorry for glimpsing the foxes and the turtles in their hidden places from a carved bench, or for touching the petals of each flower with a finger-pad to feel how soft they were. I was so old by that time, with wrinkles to match the lake ripples, so familiar with these Gardens, knowing each daylily's ridiculous name...

I apologize for ogling over the bronze sculptures too long and measuring the sundial's copper arcs, and sneaking a *Fragaria ananassa* (strawberries) from the Kemper Center Gardens. I just was off work for an hour, and had somehow found myself here to de-stress for a bit...but I guess I got a little carried away.

I admit that I did pet the concrete sheep, every awkward one of them, and pretended to feed the smallest lamb a handful of uprooted grass. You might have heard me scream with sheer joy after that, totally soaked through by running through the fountain sprinklers. I was four at the time, too small to keep quiet at that age.

Sorry, I got off topic again; this is a letter of apology, is it not?

In summary, I apologize for loving this bit of garden that hides within these walls of a city, for finally understanding what a garden is, a palace to walk, touch, smell, plant, and encounter the things that are half-wild in ourselves.

Dear Staff of the Botanical Gardens, I am sorry for seeing beauty in the growing things, in the gardens and art of being alive. I am sorry that each time I walk in, be it barren winter or red-cloaked fall, or the high green of summer, I feel as if spring is the only season that lives here.

I am sorry about stopping to smell the flowers, and blocking the path.

From,
The Public of Saint Louis.