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I Hope The Person Who Keeps Stealing From My Family Reads This

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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Dear person-who-is-stealing-plants-from-our-front-garden,

I hope you are enjoying the autumn weather after such a hot and dry summer. The brilliant sedums blooming in your garden must be lovely! I'm not just making conversation. I know you have sedums and I know they're lovely. You stole them from our family.

A few times now my family has come out of the house in the morning to be greeted with a hole in the front-yard dirt where a plant used to be. One time, you even stole a good-sized boulder. My kids are baffled by this transgression, as am I.

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“Where did they go?” they ask.

“I don’t know.” I respond. “Someone took them.”

“Why did they take them?”

“I don’t know.”

Can you tell them please? Perhaps the pressure from your neighbours to maintain an award-winning, perfectly plotted garden was too much to bear.

Perhaps there is a thrill in prowling through the night air with a shovel on your shoulder that the rest of us will never understand.

Perhaps I was not appropriately committed to the attention plants need to thrive and you were, in fact, liberating them from my injurious care.

Some time ago someone stole my three-year-old daughter’s push-bike from our front stoop (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/stealing-from-a-three-year-old-kid-is-bullst>). It made me mad enough to use swear words my daughter had never heard before.

"Perhaps the pressure from your neighbours to maintain an award-winning, perfectly plotted garden was too much to bear."

But I understood that transaction: I owned some private property and someone unilaterally transferred that right of ownership to themselves. I console myself by imagining that the thief’s daughter is happily riding around town on a new, red, streamer-festooned push-bike. (Have you seen *The Bicycle Thief*? I feel like you might get it).

But can you ever really own a plant, man? They are part of our Earth’s biosphere and literally make the oxygen that flows through our lungs. Plus, with only sunlight and water they create more of themselves, a superpower that delights everyone! Here’s a tip: next time you steal a plant, maybe just take half. That way we all get some.

Some mornings when I find myself gazing at a newly-formed earthen pit in our garden, I imagine you showing off your impressive garden to houseguests. Do you pretend that the rich selection of foliage is the result of years of hard work with your hands in the dirt? Or is the nontraditional provenance of your flowers part of the story you tell?

I imagine you and your neighbours throwing back your heads in laughter over a white wine spritzer at all the suckers who paid for their own plants.

My family is not composed of particularly avid gardeners, but twice a year during the cool bookends of the summer we plant some stuff and see what happens. Part of the fun is getting dirty. The equation dirt + water = mud is a postulate the children never tire of testing. And when, in a few weeks, or months, or sometimes years, a living thing pokes its head out of that erstwhile mud, they get a look on their faces like they've seen genuine magic.

In our garden we've got sorrel and roses and kale and dogwood. We have something called a "butterfly bush" that is little more than a stick.

Every year they point out that the gaillardias, when they bloom, were my late father's (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/heart-health-for-parents-and-conversations-about-health-history-with-kids>) favourite flower even though they never met him.

They like to pick dandelions, not because they're weeds, but because they're yellow and smell good and in French their name is "piss-in-the-bed" which makes them howl.

Joseph Wilson's daughter has three very distinct personalities. Read about how he's navigating them here

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/joseph-wilson-three-personalities>).

My mother comes over every spring to direct us all in a mad scramble to clean up the feral plants: dead-head this; transplant that; this is dying in the shade...

So, plant-thief, don't take that away from me, OK? Don't take that away from us.

On second thought, by taking our plants you're not taking what's important. What makes a real garden is the stories that emerge from the greenery and the time we spend as a family watching it change. So go ahead and plant your stolen goods in your hollow, ersatz garden — you'll never have stories as good as ours.

Sincerely,

Joseph Wilson

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