November 20, 2014

Dear Friends,

What does the Arnold Arboretum mean to you?

As someone inspired every day by the beauty and intricacy of nature, I value the Arboretum not only for its abundant meaning to science, but also because of what we can learn about ourselves and our place in the world from this landscape and its remarkable plants. The continuing history of the Arboretum weaves into our own personal stories, eloquently contributing to our celebration and understanding of life and the living things around us.

These stories are both special and universal, just like each of our 15,000 accessioned plants. Many friends tell me they visited here as children with their parents, roaming the “forest primeval” on Hemlock Hill or racing down a snowy Peters Hill on a sled. Others have recounted enjoying Mother’s Day among our lilacs, coming here to leaf-peep in the city each fall, or walking among our majestic trees during especially difficult times to reconnect with what really matters. Life, in all of its beautiful complexity, growing and adapting and—as we see time and time again—evolving before our eyes. A spectacular gathering of trees that would not exist without the affection, participation, and support of the people who treasure it and appreciate its many graces. An oasis that is always here when you need it, and in turn, very much needs your help to sustain its brilliance.

Personally, I think the Arnold Arboretum is the greatest institution of its kind on Earth, and I have plenty of evidence to back me up. Part of my reasoning lies in the fact that ours was the first public arboretum in North America, established in 1872 through generous gifts of land (from Jamaica Plain farmer Benjamin Bussey) and capital (from our namesake, New Bedford merchant James Arnold). Founded as a living museum of natural history, the Arboretum stands out through our unique partnership between a respected institution of higher learning and a major metropolitan park system, and by virtue of being free and open to all. Besides, what other arboretum can claim to be among Frederick Law Olmsted’s best-preserved landscapes?
Since we are part of Harvard University and included in Boston’s tapestry of public parklands, many assume that the Arnold Arboretum doesn’t need public support. However, like all institutions that live within Harvard, the Arboretum operates entirely by means of its own income and endowments. And though we are the penultimate jewel in Boston’s Emerald Necklace, the Arnold Arboretum is, to the best of my knowledge, the only public park in the City of Boston that receives no annual funding through this affiliation for the care of its landscape and plants.

For 142 years we have relied on only one source of revenue to cultivate this great institution—you and others like you who have loved the Arnold Arboretum as a part of your lives, as a pastoral escape, and as a landscape for learning and enjoyment. The reason it means so much extends directly from the generosity of people who gave an annual gift, became a member of the Friends, created an endowed fund, or remembered us in their wills; all with the intention that people today and tomorrow could benefit from this special place and collection. Had James Arnold and Benjamin Bussey not considered the study of horticulture to be the most important legacy they could share, none of us would delight in this marvel today.

Our many friends who contributed to the Arnold Arboretum over nearly a century and a half have left a marvelous gift in our care, one which not only becomes more valuable with each passing year but also depends on our stewardship to keep it growing. As we close 2014, I hope you will consider what the Arnold Arboretum means to you, what it means to Boston, and what it means to the world. I also hope you’ll honor its significance with your contribution to sustain both the Arboretum we love and depend upon today as well as the Arboretum we will leave as a gift to future generations.

With thanks and best wishes,

William (Ned) Friedman

P.S. Your 2014 Annual Appeal gift will directly benefit our landscape and living plant collections—from our plant exploration efforts that source these collections, to our propagation and cultivation work at the Dana Greenhouses, and especially the care and preservation of the trees, shrubs, and vines that make your every visit an experience to cherish.