I Was a Fool vs. I Am a Fool

"I'm so sorry for the way I acted. I was a fool."

I've had some times when I've had to admit to other people (or to myself) my foolishness. I've looked back on times in my life when I was so sure I was wise and so wrong about that – and tried to admit my mistake.

Exhibit A: high school, when I was too cool and too smart for my town, my church, family, etc.

When I meet folks from this time, I sometimes feel compelled to apologize for how I acted or seemed back then. Usually when I've had these conversations, though, I've made a mistake. I've said "I was a fool."

The mistake here is not saying (accurately) that I *am* a fool now. I've seen enough revolutions around the sun to know that my understanding is constantly developing, and that every six months I can look back with embarrassment on the "me" of six months ago.

Given that embarrassment and growth in self-knowledge is coming down the line, I probably shouldn't speak in any way to suggest that foolishness is a one-time mistake on my part. Instead, when I apologize for my foolishness, I should recognize the foolishness of now as well as the foolishness of the past.

"I'm so sorry for the way I acted. I am a fool."

This is probably the most honest way to put it, and the most realistic. As even Socrates is said to have understood, we know nothing or very close to it. No use pretending that our path to wisdom is a one-failure-and-done kind of affair.