

### **Donor Memorial Service**

What does it look like to learn but never fully understand? To experience but never fully grasp the magnitude of the situation? To empathize with no words ever being spoken?

These are the questions I, along with my fellow classmates, can ask when reflecting upon our experiences when working with our donors. It was an experience which was brand new to me, and one I do not think I will ever forget. I will never forget the first day down in the lab seeing our donor for the first time. Our donor became real, not just something discussed. Our donor became tangible, not strictly a concept. Our donor became. . . our first patient. As our first patient, we began to understand our roles as future health care providers, and how respect for all patients, is not only a good concept, but should be a guiding way of practice. She had given herself to us in order to help us become better providers for our future patients. In that moment, the donor had transformed from not only our first patient, but into the greatest teacher we would ever have. She would show us things no book could ever fully capture and no lecture could fully explain. And as we worked with our donors, they showed us more and more about the mystery of the human body, and how much we still have to learn. Bill Gates said it best when he said, "The human body is the most complex system ever created. The more we learn about it, the more appreciation we have about what a rich system it is." And what a rich system indeed. The more we explored and the more we discovered, the more questions were raised. And it was through these questions where the greatest learning was done.

As we worked, I could not help but think of everything our donor had experienced in her lifetime. The places her feet had walked. The work her hands had done. The memories her eyes had seen. The thoughts her mind has dwelled on. Her body had experienced so much, and working with her, even if it was for this short time, allowed us to get a glimpse into what her life was like, though we will never completely understand the fullness of the life she had lived.

As I look into the future for my professional career as a physical therapist, I get brought back to my experiences with my lab group and the knowledge I learned from my donor. It is one thing to discuss in class the different muscles and how they provide either stability or movement to the body. It is another thing entirely to see how they connect to the body and begin to understand the importance of why strengthening these muscles helps our patients improve. We also could see how the body's many different systems are connected and how treating patients should always be a team-oriented goal. Whether we are physical therapists, occupational therapists, physician assistants or doctors, we all need to have the same goal of providing the best possible care for our patients.

Our donors have taught us so much, and they most likely have taught us things we are not aware of. But in their role as both a teacher and a patient, they taught us so much more than simply anatomy. They showed us what it means to be a quality health care provider, and how to respect every one of our patients, no matter who they are or where they come from.

From the classes of future physical therapists, occupational therapists, physician assistants, and medical doctors, we would like to say thank you to both the donors and their families for providing such an impactful experience on our professional careers. We will never be able to fully put into words how meaningful the gift of their own bodies was to the growth of both our knowledge of the human body and of our patient care. From all of us, again, we say thank you.