

Death. Mortality. Unescapable realities we must face. Who will remember me? Who will miss me? Can I change a life for the better even after I am gone? What purpose will my body have when I no longer need it? Will it be a burden? Will it be a gift?

These are all questions that cross our minds at one point or another. Some choose to lay their body peacefully in the ground, some choose cremation so they can continue to be next to their loved ones, but a very selfless minority choose to donate their bodies to teach the future generation of care providers. The generation that may well be responsible for one day helping their loved ones they left behind when they departed this earth. It is those who gave the most sacred gift of their own bodies that will make me into the best physician I can be.

I am forever grateful for my donor, for sharing with me the vessel in which they carried through life. The brain, filled with memories of childhood, love, family, and passion: the very structure that made them who they were. The heart that raced in times of joy, in times of fear, that pumped the blood which gave them life. The feet which danced and carried them through all of life's splendid adventures. For some, the legs which walked on foreign soil to fight for their country. Their hands, which were used in the most beautiful, precise movements, unique to humans; the hands that held those of their young children as they crossed the street. The arms. The arms that embraced someone they loved or someone hurting. The eyes. The eyes which took in the beautiful sights around them. The sights of mountains, forests, and streams. The sights of a loved one's smile. The lungs which inhaled the fragrance of flowers, of prairie harvest, of a newborn baby's scent, and their favorite meal being prepared. The lungs which moved air to speak and to sing; and that exhaled deeply after a long day.

You see, it is not just their body that my donor shared. It is the story of their life. So, my donor—my teacher—thank you for revealing this gift to me. The gift that granted me a

passenger-seat ride through the marvels of the human body. No book, artist, nor scan can deliver the detail of structures that you showed me. Your gift, your teaching is what I will remember when I try to preserve or restore the vision of a patient so that they may continue to take in life's beauty. The lesson that taught me to understand how to maintain and preserve an airway, so that my future patients can continue to breathe in sweet aromas and exhale precious laughter. The gift I will remember as I piece back together the hand or leg which was disfigured in an accident: so, they too can dance in joy and hold the hand of their loved one. Not only have you forever changed my life, but also the lives of my future patients for the better. Thank you.

And for you family and loved ones: thank you. Thank you for sharing your family member with me. For gazing into those eyes, holding those hands, walking beside those legs, and admiring that brain which they so graciously used to teach me. Thank you for loving them and respecting their decision to donate their body—a decision not everyone may understand. It is because of their gift that my education is enriched and thus are the lives of my future patients, patients that could be you, a family member, or friend.