

Andrew Foley
Medical Student
Class of 2021
Anatomy Reflection

Learning anatomy from a human body donor is much like receiving a Christmas present from a complete stranger. When we receive a present, it comes in a box wrapped with colorful paper, maybe with a ribbon or bow for decoration. We see the gift, and our first instinct is to wonder what's inside. If we're mindful, we'll thank the stranger who gave us the gift, but our hearts are still set on figuring out what's inside that enigmatic box. Once the box is open and the mystery unraveled, we'll turn to the gift giver and finally express true gratitude for the item they thoughtfully and graciously shared with us. In this way, the body donor is comparable to our strange benefactor, and their gift, a first-class education that can never be re-gifted.

Unfortunately, my metaphor unmask a flaw far too common in the recipients. When receiving a gift, our focus quickly shifts to what's inside, rarely to the thoughts and decisions made leading up to the gift exchange. The gratitude we express targets the gift itself, instead of why we were chosen to receive attention and care of the gift giver. There's nothing wrong saying thank you the way we do. After all, gifts are rarely given just to receive gratitude in return. However, trust me when I say, the experience is so much grander when we expand upon that for which we are thankful.

I reflect now on the thoughts and decisions our donors may have experienced before they ever knew me or my peers:

They knew we would be inexperienced, our hands green and our tools sharp. They knew that try as we might, mistakes are inevitable. Thankfully, they decided to let us learn from those mistakes.

They knew our minds would be insatiably inquisitive. They knew we'd explore every nook and cranny, every recess, every space, every inch of their bodies, leaving no sacred area. Thankfully, they decided the modesty they might lose was less valuable than our education.

They knew we would uncover secrets hidden deep within them no one else ever discovered. They knew we would hold their hearts in our hands, uncover their brains, and visualize every physical aspect of their beings that shaped their minds. Thankfully, they decided to use this intimate relationship to shape our minds in return.

They knew we were still fresh in learning to care for others. They knew we could not perfectly preserve every piece of themselves they left in our custody. They also knew our education would shape the way we provide for others in the future. Thankfully, they decided to be the implements used to pave our futures as health professionals.

I'm not just thankful for the incredible physical gift our donors give to us. I'm also thankful for how well they knew me without ever meeting me. The careful considerations and powerful decisions made by these incredibly selfless people astounds me. Who could possibly provide such a perfectly calculated act of benevolence for a complete stranger? I'm thankful not just for their donations, but also the trust and care they used in making those donations.

In return for their gifts, I promise to practice medicine with the same level of selfless thought as demonstrated by our donors. I will consider the level of trust my patients place in me while only knowing me on the professional level. I will use the knowledge they've given me to provide the highest quality of care I can. Finally, I will not only value the interactions I have with my patients, but also the consideration my patients use in trusting me with their care.