

Benjamin Olson

First Year Occupational Therapy Student

To my Donor and his family,

There are no words that I can say or write to truly express the level of gratitude I have in my heart; nor could I possibly begin to empathize with your loss. I want to first thank you for letting me at least try.

Although this will fall short, please know that I mean every word of this.

The expectations leading up to my first day of anatomy lecture were more misconstrued than any other preconceptions that I can recall. I say that at the risk of sounding grandiose, but I truly believe it. At that point in time, graduate school had been a lifelong aspiration for me. The idea of working and collaborating with similarly-minded students at a high level was a dream that was only topped by the progression towards my career. I mention these things because they help illustrate what your gift has meant to me. I am someone that has had to work extra hard to get to the level of education that I am at now. Some have even called me an overachiever. To become the best occupational therapist I could possibly be, I exhausted the opportunities I had as an undergrad student through both school and work avenues. It was from these experiences I gained the confidence in my abilities that would allow me to be an effective therapist. There had always been one looming fear however, and that was anatomy. My past anatomy classes were always my biggest struggle, and that created a fear I could not shake no matter how much I tried to prepare. How would I be able to get through a graduate level Gross Anatomy course if I had a hard time coping with my past anatomy classes? Even worse, was I fooling myself thinking I had what it takes to be a therapist? Anatomy forms the foundation for this career, so before I had even started my dream I was already thinking about how it could shortly come to an end. *That was before I met my donor.*

It didn't take long for me to appreciate the gravity of the opportunity I had been given. This was far more than an added supplement for enhanced learning of class material, which were honestly my ill-conceived notions. Rather, this was a selfless teacher; someone deeply loved and adored. Not just my first patient, but a teacher that was able to empower me in a way that no other had been able to. This was a wise mentor giving me confidence in an area that was considered one of my greatest weaknesses. This may seem small to some, but the thought of it brings me to tears. When I got my first exam scores back, they didn't just demonstrate that I had learned the material from the unit but that I have what it takes to make it through to graduation. I could do it, and my donor was instrumental in changing my perception of myself and my abilities. It's a gift I can never possibly repay. Being able to study and learn in this way gave me the perspective I needed to fully grasp what was previously unreachable. My donor helped me conceptualize a wealth of information that had always managed to elude me.

Writing this now is the first time I've shared with anyone this powerful experience. It is both an honor and comforting to be able to share this with my donor's family. Even now I feel a small sense of guilt and selfishness for receiving such opportunities, and writing in such a way that focuses on the success I have received from your gift. It's hard to comprehend what I did to deserve it. I hope you can find some joy in knowing how much you mean to me, and how I plan to spend the rest of my life empowering others like you have empowered me. When I mentioned earlier that some have called me an overachiever, I used to fully agree with them. I don't anymore. How could anyone be over-achieving when they are supported by such incredible people like I have been? If I can come even close to being the generous and loving giver that my donor *is*, I will be successful.