Welcome donor family and friends. We, the University of Colorado School of Medicine Class of 2019, are honored to have you here today, and welcome the opportunity to take some time to honor your loved ones, the donors who have helped us learn our foundation of medicine. It is true that anatomy is the foundation of medicine, and to illustrate this I would like to tell you what learning anatomy did to my perceptions of the world.

First of all, you should know that for medical students, anatomy begins the first week of school, and it is quite an abrupt beginning. When you enter the shadow of medicine, you do it with the knowledge that you will one day have to face hard truths, reflect on your personal beliefs, and foster a relationship with death. And when you turn on the fluorescent lights for the first anatomy lab, you realize that day was closer than you thought. For nine weeks, as we built our foundation, anatomy was all we did. We were so immersed that by early September I was seeing anatomy everywhere in the world around me. In the curve of the road, in the bend of a staircase, I saw bones. Ribs and hips and femurs. Curtains became sheets of ligaments, power cords became nerves, chairs became the mortise joint between talus and tibia. The world is full of these anatomical surrogates, it has always been full of them, but my brain was suddenly picking them out of the background noise.

This, at its core, is what learning anatomy does. It transforms your brain, allowing you to separate the signal from the noise. It gives you a language with
which to understand what is affected by disease, wounded by injury, and responsible for death.

But this is not an easy task. Once named, the body grows to massive proportions. Where there was once just a “face,” there are muscles, tendons, nerves, arteries, veins, lymph nodes, glands, cartilage, and bones. There are landmarks and embryological origins and important anatomical relationships. And for all these structures and concepts, there is Latin, Arabic, and Greek: the ancient languages of anatomy. The body, once named, becomes a world, with both rich history and expanding future.

You should know that fathoming this world and all its complexities would have been impossible without the donation made by your loved ones. I cannot imagine trying to learn, as we are now, the thousands of disease processes that can befall a body without having first looked upon it with my own eyes and held it with my own hands.

There was a moment during anatomy block when I looked at my cadaver and realized that she just might be the most beautiful and generous gift that I have ever received. I’ll never be able to tell her that or thank her, and this is why it means so much to be able to share this sentiment with you today.
Body donation is a truly unselfish gift, because it cannot be reciprocated. All I can give in return to the woman who donated her body to my education is one of memory. So if I could, to my donor I would say this: I see your body in the world around me. I picture your muscles dancing when I see someone dance. I trace the origins of tendons along your tendons. When I think of arteries, they are your arteries, hearts are your heart. You are my foundation of medicine.