Thank you, Speech to Donor Family and Friends
Madeline Huey, MD Class of 2021

Good evening, and welcome, donor family and friends. On behalf of the Medical school class of 2021, I am honored to be here with you today, celebrating the lives of your loved ones.

Medical school starts with learning the human body – the fundamental cornerstone to medicine and a piece of our learning that will be carried in our white coat pockets no matter the path we ultimately choose. Looking out among my classmates today I would hazard a guess that many of us first had a desire to go into medicine because we wanted to care for people, and second, because we were fascinated by the human body. I remember, when I was younger, falling on my bike and scraping my knee. While upset at first, I would later be amazed at the scab that formed; wondering, what was happening, and how was it happening?

You know, I would guess that your loved ones also had a fascination for these bodies we inhabit. So, they gave us a gift, one pure and rich. A thoughtful gift. A selfless gift. A gift precisely what we needed at that moment. Other medical schools have changed the anatomy lab by cutting the amount of time students spend working with the donors. Other medical schools have replaced anatomy with three-dimensional modeling. Other medical schools teach the anatomy lab with virtual reality.

Looking back on my experience, it’s hard to fathom another way. The wonder that came from uncovering the brachial plexus found here in our arms. The meticulous care to separate arteries from veins and nerves as they cross paths; intricately woven into a network of information highways. I would go home after lab in awe of the human body. Even if your loved ones taught me anatomy it would be enough, but, they taught me much more.

They say that our patients are our greatest teachers. They say that we serve our patients best when we listen to their stories, when we briefly step into their lives and share their experiences in order to help them. Our donors taught us compassion and empathy, and they reminded us that with life, we balance death. They taught us that we can hold space in our day-to-day to celebrate both.

My donor taught me that the best way to honor someone’s life is to know it. My donor fought a battle against lung cancer, I know this because I held her lungs in my hands and saw the cancer slowly dismantling her ability to breath. I thought about how her story was likely filled with pain and suffering matched by resilience, love and gratitude.

Now, when I think of my own narrative, I think of my donor, and how her life intersects with mine, and how her life will intersect with my patients because my experience in the anatomy lab will certainly influence how I treat my first, second and one-thousandth patient.

So, sure change curriculum. Give me the textbooks and fancy technology, but I won’t be a better doctor. I won’t be a better doctor because it wasn’t just anatomy that your loved ones taught me. It was the humanistic side of being a better person.

With grace, your loved ones took up a pen and agreed to be a donor. With death, they gave and will continue to give for as long as we carry their stories. Thank you for allowing us to share in knowing them.