It is hard to put into words what learning from our silent teachers has meant to us. One day in lab, one of my classmates expressed to me how learning from the silent teachers was affecting her. She explained how each silent donor holds a lifetime of memories and experiences. What she so eloquently was pointing out was that this was not just a body, it was a person. What it means to be a person is to have thoughts, memories, emotions, loved ones, and experiences. It is an important concept that can sometimes get lost in the practice of medicine, or in the classroom, or even in how we treat one another in our daily lives. I can guarantee you, though, that when we are in the lab learning, we are aware of and grateful to the people who are our silent teachers. This is where the experience of learning from a silent teacher is unmatched. A plastic model can teach structures, but it cannot teach empathy. It cannot convey the humanity of what it means to age or suffer. And empathy is the most important quality to have as a health practitioner, teacher, or person.

My personal reason for coming from sunny southern California to CU Denver was not just for the novelty of snow, but to pursue my dream of becoming an anatomy teacher. I hope to inspire the love of the human body as it has been inspired in me. As a student at community college studying plastic models, I could not wait to see what these structures looked like in the human body. So I applied to the Master’s Program in Modern Human Anatomy here at CU Denver. For me, it has been one of the best things I have ever done in my life. My classmates and I have been fortunate to learn the exquisite details of human anatomy to better prepare us for our careers. I bring this up because I want you to understand that our program would not be possible without the selfless donations made by your loved ones. My class would not have been inspired the way we have been in anatomy were it not for the kindness of you and your loved ones.

What I love about teaching is that it can be a selfless art. We don’t teach because we want to show off our knowledge. We teach because we hope we can make what seems to a student like an insurmountable obstacle (perhaps anatomy class) manageable, meaningful, and if we are really lucky, enjoyable. We teach because we want to inspire. We teach in the hopes of making a difference in the life of another. We teach because we can see outside of ourselves, and recognize that good teaching betters our society. I have said several times that your loved ones have been our silent “teachers.” They fit all the criteria I have mentioned of a teacher. Most importantly, perhaps, that of seeing beyond themselves. They were willing to give themselves so that we could learn from them, and were willing to trust us to respect the honor of their gift and pay their kindness forward.

We have all been touched by the experience of learning from our donors. I have so appreciated the respect with which my class has treated our silent teachers, and I truly believe we will be better health practitioners, teachers, researchers, and people for having had this experience. Thank you again with all our hearts to the donors, and to you, their families. Last year, one of the student speakers beautifully told the crowd what she would have said to her donor if she could have. I would like to do the same. I would have said to him ‘Never think for a moment that this was a small action. This was a great action. What you did mattered. It mattered to me,
to my fellow students, to the compassionate practice of medicine, to research, and to the future.'