Hello everyone, my name is Tyler Johnson and I am one of the current co-presidents of the Modern Human Anatomy Program. I want to say thank you to each and every one of you for taking time out of your busy schedules to celebrate your loved ones with us. This ceremony is to share how special we think your loved ones are and honor the selfless gift they have bestowed to us.

It is easy to associate body donation with the loss of a loved one and the end of a life. In actuality, I think the closest comparison is being at a rock concert, watching the stage go dark as the concert seems to be ending. But just when you think it’s over, the band comes out and plays that final hit song. That smile on your face you get when they come back out is the same smile each of you should have knowing your loved ones gave an encore after their rock concert of a life.

Now, Cu Anschutz might have a star or two in the midst but the real rockstars of our school are the donors. I want to talk about the encores that some of these donors have played in my program.

During our first semester, we take a class called imaging and modeling. This class teaches us how to use our computers to segment and make models of real tissues, bones, and organs from CT scans. The CT scans we use are from the donor bodies we are privileged enough to meet the following semester. Think of that, the body many thought would just be a physical teaching tool, is now a digital tool to allow all students to continue using long after the physical body is gone. Our final project is to create a scientific experiment based on these CT’s for our specialized interests. For the majority of us in the class, this was our first scientific experiment we had the opportunity to design and perform. We can’t say thank you enough to you and the donors for allowing my classmates and I to have this experience.
After the digital experience of exploring bodies we haven’t even physically laid eyes on yet, the second semester begins, and our gross anatomy class is upon us which allows us to finally meet the donors. This dissection experience is what brought most of us to this modern human anatomy program and for good reason. The process of dissection allows us to truly see what the human body is like. A process that can never truly be felt through books or virtual software. The donors teach us more about their bodies than we will ever know about our own. The experience can be thought of as an unspoken agreement between donor and student stating any knowledge gained from the donor, is to be put to use towards positive medical advancements in the future. A future of a person the donor will never know based on knowledge from a donor, who’s name we will never know.

Before I go, I’d like to share a small experience from a recent anatomy lab I was in. A couple of weeks ago my group and I were removing the organs of our donor. We carefully removed the heart from the body, and one at a time, each of us held the beautiful muscle in our hands. We knew we would take time later on to learn the structures, but in this moment, we also knew to take in the experience of holding a real human heart. This heart was not like any cartoon rendition or anatomical drawing because ultimately it was real. It had lived a long life before ever being brought outside the body. As I felt the heart, I noticed a rough texture along the right atrium. Naturally, I was curious. But when I asked Dr. Wagoner why this was, she responded with a question of her own, “how old was this donor?”. Thrown off by this, I told her the donor was over 80 years old. Her exact words were, “it’s because they had a damn good life”. So, thank you, to your loved ones, for donating their bodies to this school and allowing us this experience. I hope each and every one of you is proud of the encore they gave after their damn good lives. Thank you.