

Letters of Appreciation

Letter from a student:

To the donors who have taught me the wonders of humanity, Thank you.

You gave your sacred temple as a gift to strangers to behold, do you know the impact you have left?

I have held your heart in my hand, but I do not know for whom it once beat for. I have held your brain, but I do not know the memories within the folds. I have seen every bone, muscle, organ, nerve, artery, and vein that makes you, you; and as you taught me every name of every part of you, your own name was a mystery. I often wondered about your families, your history, the love you gave, and though these thoughts flooded my mind I realized your donation itself encompasses the life you lived. You have allowed me the privilege of knowing the home you inhabited in your time on Earth, to understand humanity on a level that very few are honored to see. Even in your death you have shown me one of lives most valuable lessons, to give selflessly to others in hopes that the world will change. The gift you have bestowed upon me enables me to make change in your honor, so that one day when my patients call upon me I can use the knowledge granted by you to understand their needs. You have shown me that although we are all unique, even at time anatomically, we have a shared human experience and are built all the same. You have not only shown me the wonders of what makes us all uniquely human anatomically but how compassion and love continue on far beyond when death calls for us. I do not know how I could ever repay such an immense gift, but I thank you for all you have done for me and hope that I can carry on the lessons of the beautiful life you lived.

Letter from an Anatomy student:

I wish thank you was enough; enough to thank you for your gift, for your desire to help the next generation of health care professionals, and your willingness to be our first patient on that journey. I wish thank you was enough to express how incredibly selfless your gift is to the future of medicine and to me.

You do not know me; you have no idea where I come from or what my interests are. But without knowing anything about me, you gave me the perfect gift; the ability to learn who you were.

I wish I could express the significance of what your donation means to me. Without knowing anything about who you are, I am able to learn your heart. Without knowing anything about your thoughts, I am able to learn your brain. And even though I know nothing about you, you have let me see everything. To learn about the hands that held your first child. To learn about the feet that helped you take your first steps. To learn about the legs that let you run. To learn about the body that carried you through this life.

The gift of your life is one we honor. We respect. We revere. Your life is important to us. Who you are matters. For many of us, you are our most important patient. Because you have given us the opportunity to learn everything about you so that we can go on to treat others; so that we

understand the intricacies of the human body. Knowing the inner workings of the body, having an ability to trace the path of nerves or vessels from the brain and heart to the feet, only enables the expansion of our learning. And without your selfless gift, none of it would be possible.

I wish thank you was enough. Enough to thank you for your gift. Enough to express how impactful your decision is. Enough to tell you how important you are to me. Your memory will continue on far beyond this point; I carry a piece of who you are with me. When I start to interact with patients, I will think of you, my first patient. When I have a particularly difficult case, I will think of you, and the stories your body told. I will cherish you because you have given me the ultimate gift.

I wish thank you was enough. And even though it is nowhere enough; thank you. Thank you for allowing me the honor of getting to know you.

Thank you.

From a grateful medical student:

It is an act of faith to put your wellbeing in the hands of a relative stranger. It is an act carried out often in the world of medicine. Patients put their trust, faith, and confidence in doctors with the expectation that they will be treated carefully, kindly, and perhaps most important of all, deftly. The care and kindness of my classmates and teachers I have seen firsthand. These are central skills that have been developed all their lives and are core to how they approach their work. However, the functional ability to practice medicine is developed here now, as medical students. This development is made possible only by the generosity of you or your loved one.

The most skilled doctors, with years of experience and practice under their belts, at one point stood as I have – a novice in need of a teacher. It is the act of faith of the donor, and the gift of their life and body, that enables our journey from the novice medical student to that deft, skilled physician. The donor becomes a teacher whose lessons will remain with us for our whole lives. It is challenging for me to put into words the meaning of donating your body - it is one of the most selfless and valuable acts I can consider. In doing so you are giving the next generation of medical professionals the ability to develop the skills that may help your children, grandchildren, neighbors, friends, and complete strangers alike. I wish each donor had the good fortune of meeting the beneficiaries of their gift - smart, driven students who are so kind and compassionate. I cannot think of a group of people for whom such a profound gift would be more meaningful.

*I will take the liberty to say for all of us the only words I know **certainly** ought to be said: thank you.*