**Deeded Body Memorial Service**

**September 22, 2023**

**Introduction and Welcome** (Darren Hoffmann)

Good afternoon and welcome to everyone. My name is Darren Hoffmann, and I have the privilege to serve as Vice Chair for education of the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology. On behalf of the Carver College of Medicine, the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology, and the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, we deeply appreciate your attendance as family members, friends, students, and faculty.

On June 12, 1968, the first University of Iowa Deeded Body Memorial Service took place here at Oakland Cemetery under the direction of Rev. Jack Zerwas. That service initiated the heart-felt traditions you will experience today in our 56th annual memorial service honoring your loved ones. This service reflects our gratitude and respect for all the participants in our Deeded Body Program and our deep appreciation for the compassion and support of their family and friends. This service is dedicated to those who, in death, have served the living. Each of these donors, by their final compassionate gift, has participated in a great humanitarian and educational endeavor. We honor their memory and acknowledge their generosity today. By their act, hundreds of students in the disciplines of Medicine, Dentistry, Physician Assistants, Physical Therapy, Nursing, Sports Medicine, Paramedics, and our graduate students in Anatomy have been able to learn the intricate details of the human body through the study of these donors. As you listen to the health professional students today, I hope you will appreciate how your loved one's generosity will benefit humankind. This benefit stems not only through the quality healthcare they will provide to their patients, but also the quality of education they will provide to the students who will eventually succeed them. Your family is part of medical history, forever.

In addition to the education of our health science and graduate students, many physicians have benefited tremendously as well, through focused educational programs that serve to enhance the practice of medicine. And finally, important research and insight into the causes of many different diseases has been enabled through the generous donation that could not have been achieved in any other way. A countless number of patients in the future will benefit from these studies. Therefore, my colleagues and I, in teaching and in research, offer to you our heartfelt appreciation for your loved one's gift.

I also wish to commend the outstanding efforts and wonderful stewardship of the Deeded Body Program Staff, and I would invite you all to stand and be recognized. These include our director Brian Chapman, Daniel Buckingham, Ryan Glesener, Jon Scranton, Valeria Cota, Benjamin Kelvington, and Danni Talbot. Over many years these individuals have faithfully administered and maintained an extremely successful Deeded Body Program that serves as a model for all other medical schools throughout the country. As a longtime educator in the department, it has been a privilege for me to work with these individuals and observe the impact their efforts have on the education of health science professionals. I can say with firsthand knowledge, that your loved ones became members of this Staff’s extended family while under their care.

I would also like to acknowledge the medical student coordinators, Devan Heinrichs, Stephanie Meza, and Linda Peng. Your efforts and contributions to the today’s service are also greatly appreciated.

I suspect that it has been a long and difficult time for many of you to endure the grief you have felt in the weeks and months since your loved one passed away. As you have waited for this service to assist in bringing closure to your grief, it is our hope that as you listen to our guest speakers today, you will not only find comfort and be uplifted from what they say, but that you will also be able to leave here today with a sense of fulfillment and pride for what these donors have done for humankind.

To provide some context for the meaning of the gift of body donation, I would like to share the perspective of a student learning anatomy for the first time, and the perspective of a teacher, who has taught anatomy many times. The student’s name is Amy Marie Milligan, and I think that she says, in a very touching way, exactly what it meant to learn from a donor. Amy entitled her poem “Anatomy Teacher.”

*When I touched your hands, I touched the hands that had felt the chill of ninety-four winters, fingers that had stretched in the sunlight of as many springs.*

*When I touched your feet, I touched the feet that had walked the paths of nine decades, toes curling and uncurling through the uncertainty of five wars.*

*When I touched your arms, I touched the arms that braced you from and embraced the world, a world I know only through historians and faded photographs.*

*When I stared into the shell of your eyes, I saw the screen upon which a million irreplaceable scenes had been played, visions of a world rapidly changing at once both like and unlike my own.*

*When I held your heart in my hands, in a moment filled with awe and grace, I held a heart whose mysteries I will never know, a heart that gave me the gift of itself.*

*When you invited me to know you, to be a guest in the house that your spirit left, you forever altered my life.*

*My feet, with the knowledge of yours, will walk into the future carrying you with me.*

*My hands, as they reach to comfort and heal, will do so never forgetting the delicacy of yours.*

*My eyes, as they sweep across the landscapes of my future, will find in it reflections of the world I saw in yours.*

*My heart, in the rhythm of its beating, will carry with it the stillness and wonder of your heart, lying silently in my hands.*

Our thanks to Amy for allowing us to share this poem and her talent with you today.

For the perspective on an anatomy teacher, I’d like to speak from my own heart, and share with you what the gift of body donation means to me. I have been a member of the faculty in Anatomy and Cell Biology since 2006, and before that, I completed my PhD training in this department. Which means, I have been teaching in our anatomy laboratory for just over 20 years. And I can tell you that I still love it as much today as I did way back then.

My first experiences in the anatomy lab were much like the experiences you’ll hear about from our health professional students. Amazement. Humility. Curiosity. Pure intellectual energy. Gratitude. But my path took me in a different direction. My experiences teaching in the anatomy lab felt perfectly suited to me, and I harmonized with the subject of anatomy in a very special way. I never wanted to leave.

Throughout all of these years, donors like your loved ones have been my most valuable teaching partners. It is such a gift to be able to talk about the stories of the human body in a great lecture, and then walk downstairs and experience it together. We use our eyes and our hands to explore these stories directly. And we work hard to develop a scientific language together. The students have time to laugh at their mistakes in the moment, and I have time to reassure them that it’s normal to misspell anatomical words or to not see the difference between two closely related structures at first glance. If ever a student is struggling with understanding the essential facts of an anatomical concept, the answer is invariably – let’s take a look at the donor.

As a scholar in the field of anatomy education, I’ve had the opportunity to develop a lot of really cool anatomy technology, including virtual models of anatomy that students can use at home. This work has often led people to ask me “does anatomy education really require the use of a body donor anymore?” The answer to that question is complicated because the practice of learning anatomy from a body donor is not universal, and it has not always been a norm in medical education. But here’s what I know about learning anatomy from a donor, and how it is different from learning anatomy in other ways, such as virtual models, physical models, textbook images, or dissections of other species. First and foremost, learning from a body donor changes the soul of a student. It makes a safe space internally for the concept of death. It shows students the amazing paradox that everyone is unique, yet we are all the same. Second, it is fundamentally easier to learn human anatomy from the actual human body than to transfer understanding from another medium. Virtual and physical models are great, and they allow students to immerse themselves in anatomy more often – because no one can or should spend ALL of their time in the anatomy lab. But there are inevitable mental gymnastics that a student must do to connect those dots, and working with a donor body bypasses all of that labor. Third, the work is fun, and students get to work in teams to do it. I have literally had students meet each other for the first time in the anatomy lab, and get married a couple years later. And more frequently, I see students learn skills of negotiation and trust by sharing work.

A final aspect of learning anatomy from a body donor is one that I have felt profoundly myself so I am speaking from my own experience here, but I suspect many of our students would agree. Encountering the body in so many variations and discovering that each of these bodies is a work of art, and a machine unlike anything on earth, inevitably leads to the realization that my body is also a work of art, and worthy of respect and love. We discover ourselves through the study of anatomy, and we become more whole as human beings. That probably wasn’t the goal of your loved ones in donating their bodies, but I want you to know that it happened. It happens over and over again, every year with every group of students. I wish everyone could have this experience of self-discovery, but I love that the precious opportunity to explore and learn from another person’s body is held sacred for this very special group of professionals, and of course, we educators who get to be their tour guides.

At this time, I am so pleased to share the microphone with representatives from several of the Health Science classes who have benefited from your loved ones’ gifts. They will now share, on behalf of their fellow students and colleagues, their gratitude for the opportunity to learn, which was made possible by your loved ones’ generosity. Thank you very much.