Introduction

The following is a compilation of original artwork, poetry, song lyrics, and essays created over the past 26 years by University of Minnesota medical, dental, occupational health, mortuary science, and physical therapy students in honor of the Anatomy Bequest Program donors. This booklet is dedicated to those whose generosity extended beyond their lives, to their loved ones who trusted us with the care of their favorite people, and to these fine students who made it their lives’ work to protect the health and improve the wellbeing of our community.

The above image was crafted by the medical students for the 2017 Service of Gratitude. Surveys were sent to families of those who donated to the University of Minnesota and our students who learned from our donors. We asked donor family members to share some of their loved ones characteristics during their lifetime. We asked the students what they imagined their donors were like during their lives. The red words represent how students responded, blue represents how families responded, and purple represents characteristics both groups chose. The resulting image symbolizes the beautiful lives our donors led and the positive impact they’ve had on our students and community.
Day one of anatomy lab, and I thought I was prepared. Prepared to meet my
donor, who would become my First Patient and my First Teacher. I had seen
pictures while going over the material I needed and videos of what was to
come. I had read blogs from medical students about their first experiences,
and I had even read a book about people who had donated their bodies to
science. So, Wednesday morning, when I put on my maroon scrubs, stuffed
a bunch of purple Nitrile gloves in my pocket, went over what was going to
be done that day in my head, and tied up my hair to enter Anatomy lab, I
thought I was ready.

I was not ready.

They say it’s the little things that make you realize who it is in front of you.
The nail polish on the toenails, the delicate tattoo on the neck, the smile lines
still etched on their faces. For me, it was my donor’s hand. As soon as I saw
my First Teacher’s Hand, the wrinkles, the sun spots, the calluses that told a
story, I had to step back and breathe.

This is a human being. This is a human being. This was no longer a plastic
model used in undergraduate classes around the country. This was once
someone’s child, sibling, parent, grandparent, friend, classmate. This is a
human being. I felt so much gratitude.

Looking around the room at the other donors, it was clear to me that
selflessness filled the air. In their wishes after death, these men and women had
wanted to be here. These men and women had willingly donated their bodies to
our school so that we could learn. So that we could be better physicians. So
that we, with their permission, could see for ourselves the wonderful workings
of the human body. So that those of us, myself included, who are kinesthetic
learners and need to touch and do and feel in order to understand, could finally
grasp the concepts we had once struggled with before.

I held the hand that made me pause, overwhelmed with feelings of wonder,
fear, honor, and thankfulness. Thirteen weeks later, and I still feel all of those
things every time I enter the room. Wonder, for the beautiful and intricate
creation that is the human body. Fear, of the complexity of it all and of the
possibility of making mistakes.

Honor, for being among the very few given the opportunity to explore the
human body in such a way. Thankfulness, for my First Patient for letting me
see what the skin hides, and for you, family and friends of all the donors, for
letting them donate their bodies and for trusting us with such a precious gift.

Thank you. I know that I am not unique in these feelings. So I must say: We
held their hands, but they have been the ones to hold ours.

We touched their hearts, but they have been the ones to touch ours. So
thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for letting your loved ones donate
their bodies to the University of Minnesota. The precious gift that your loved
ones made for us to learn will not be forgotten.
So selfless your hands,
Forever teaching, forever giving.
Your hands held me when I was a child
Fed me, clothed me, bathed me.
As I grew, your hands guided me.
Forever teaching, forever giving.
I watched your hands grow busy with work.
Knitting, building, cooking, cleaning.
Serving, teaching, making, playing.
Never were they idle,
always they were moving.
Forever teaching, forever giving.
Then it was time for your hands to set me free.
And I set off into this world, but little did I know,
Your hands were still supporting me.
Forever teaching, forever giving.
Loving hands that helped me grow.
Working hands that served in the community.
Compassionate hands that touched many lives.
Hands that brushed away tears, clenched in pain, rejoiced in happiness.
Hands that told a story.
Now, as your story has ended, your hands continue to give.
Teaching students through the selflessness of your heart,
Learning your story as they create theirs.
The work of your hands carry on your legacy.
Forever teaching, forever giving.

Forever Teaching, Forever Giving

by Diane Reader, Physical Therapy Student

Original Drawing by Kyley Crotty, Dental Student
Formalin reeks of mortality
Its seeps through my pores
Ferments my soul
As I, drunken with this medical gaze
Examine this body
These youthful hands of mine
Having not yet been doctored by demise

Ode to the Bodies of Anatomy Class
by Tchao Thao, Medical Student

Formalin reeks of mortality
Its seeps through my pores
Ferments my soul
As I, drunken with this medical gaze
Examine this body
These youthful hands of mine
Having not yet been doctored by demise

Having not yet embraced the hands of death
Must now weave through seams of flesh
And I stand before this body
Shaken and stirred for answers
Questioning my future worth as a physician
Until finally it came to me
It came at that moment of reflection
It came as I reflected the eyelids back
And found myself in his reflection
I in his eye
It came as poetry
It became poetry
It became poetry in stillness
It became poetry in bodily incarnations
It became poetry in pronated poses
Rather than pronoun and proses
His body became poetry
And now I stand before his body
No longer afraid
For his body inspires fruitful breaths inside me
Nourishing the fevers of forgotten wings
As they sprout from my back
Drape over my body
And paint my being
With white coats
And in rhythmic motion
I can now weave along networks of flesh
Finding fascial layers
As if conducting songs
And unraveling psalms
From my palms
And in rhythmic motion
I unravel newfound heavens
Summon skies, encircle planets and now,
I no longer cloud my mind with doubts, I brainstorm
I condense healing, beauty, and life
Into poetic medicine
I diagnose the sick with smiles
I overcast suffering
By showering metaphors
And flooding hospital floors
Three feet deep in his poetry
And I, a first year medical student
Am no longer blinded by the lightness of being
For I saw a glimpse of the naked truth
This body before me

Original Drawing
by Amanda Collins,
Mortuary Science Student
What can you tell me
What can I tell you?
Two Strangers—Never spoken
But by touch, and the occasional textbook-fuddled examination

What can you show me
What can I show you?

Two lives—Never intersected

Until now—One toddling along new roads bright with wonder,
gliding along silvery trials shrouded in mist

What may we share together, in our awkwardly beautiful partnership?

I can tell you what is behind your belly button
You can tell me what hue looks best on your nails
I can show you the secrets you carried,
known only to your creator and your surgeon
you can show me the result of 40, 60, 80 years of lifting, carrying,
pulling, and pushing innumerable burdens, cares, and joys

Together we share an enormous gift

Alone you have revealed to me the power
And love of knowledge bequeathed
The Gift We Share

by Vicki Brown, Medical Student

I closed my eyes one day
Thinking about the lives we live
All of the people I have met
All of the special things they give
I thought about our teachers
And the message that they sent
Things they must have thought about,
All that their lives meant

All throughout our lives
As your friends and family
And then as our amazing teachers
They gave so much so freely
Through our teachers kind actions
I thought about them each day
I tried to decide, if I were them
Some of the things I would say

“I am here for you don’t worry
I’ll leave you with a gift so dear
I want to make a difference
Use it well and keep it near”

My friends and family can feel my gift,
It’s forever in their hearts
My love, my smile, my wit
Can be cherished even though we’re apart
My students can use my gift
What I taught is forever in their minds
I want to help them be better doctors
Will every patient they greet, every problem they find

As a student I appreciate
All of the gifts I got, I’m lucky
My life was touched my wonderful people
People who thought how they’d like the future to be

Family, friends, students
What a wonderful gift we share
Every now and then we’ll close our eyes and remember
That, even as time passes, our gift is always there.

“Life is a flower for which no one can keep the secret...”

-FRIEDRICH BURCHARDT
Coming down the stairs this morning
by Rachael Harlos, Medical Student

Coming down the stairs this morning
there you were
pink and orange and yellow
I knew you were there
before I saw you-
your light-
coming through the window
so lush on the steps
Welcome it in.
That is what you would say.
Fill in the story.
Was it all loss?
Kali is the Hindu goddess of destruction.
She destroys to make space. An opening, a hiatus, a leeway, a margin.
We twist our bodies occupying angles that
challenge and stretch-that feel good and uncomfortable.
And we when we come out of the twist
there is a space, an opening, a place to be filled.
You have died.
This body we became so familiar with-the lines of your smile, the way you held your shoulders when you stood in a crowd, the way your laugh jumped out of you-this body that held you
we can no longer reach out for, hold, touch, ask it to comfort us with the familiarity of you, the smell of you, the contours of your hands.
You have died.
I want to acknowledge that you were alive. You were here-in this world-loving and crying and laughing and shouting. You breathed, you ate, you sang, you whistled, you told bad jokes, you slammed doors, you wrote poetry, you built houses, you loved, you hurt, you lived.
In this twisting work of dying
we are faced with our limitations-our ultimate limitation-that to live is to die.
But is it all loss?
We come out of the twist of dying-the living and the dead-and there
there
is a space
an opening
still
blue
quiet
It reverberates with the hum of your life-the chord you played-how you found a way to be in this world so that you could be you. And we, the living, the ones who remain for a bit more, carry your hum with us and it becomes our love, our laughter, our bad joke, our poetry, our carpentry, our pain, our joy.
Grant’s Dissector instructs a rigidity in the teaching of Anatomy. Know the muscle, recite origin, insertion, innervation. Describe Action. The body becomes the parts list, the student the master of recitation, route memorization and fact regurgitation.

Here is another parts list.

Muscle: Supraspinatus, Origin: Fossa of scapula. Action: lifted four children and sixteen grandchildren countless times, spinning them in the air, placing them on shoulders to see the world, helping them reach higher, stretch farther, grow taller.

Ligament: Anterior Cruciate Ligament. Insertion: lateral condyle of femur. Action: barely held together a knee bruised and battered by high school hockey, collegiate soccer and explorations through backyards, on bicycles and by backpack. Torn by a game of thanksgiving football because saying no was never an option.

Joint: Temporal Mandibular. Location: between squamous portion of temporal bone and condyle. Action: held his jaw shut when she smashed the Subaru, when they lost the offer on the house, when they told him they “no longer had a place for him at the company.” Opened his jaw: every Sunday night football game, every soccer game in the fan section, and every piano recital, even when cheering wasn’t allowed.

Gland: Lacrimal. Innervation: parasympathetic from CN VII. Action: only the memorable moments. Walking his daughter down the aisle. Carrying his wife’s casket down that same aisle. Running to the hospital when they thought the baby was breach. Saying hello to life, and saying goodbye to it.

Muscle: Iris Dilator. Innervation: sympathetic from superior cervical ganglion. Action: never knew what true clarity was until these muscles brought her into focus. Every inch of her glowing and focused in front of him, for 55 years.

Organ: Lung. Location: pleural cavity. Action: breaths... deep ones of solitude, alone in the mountains. Ragged ones after a fight ...or sex... or fear... Short ones: towards the end.

Bone: Malleus. Location: inner ear. Action: listened. To worries, to stories around the fireplace and laughter at the dinner table, to patients, to son-in-law’s, to friends who quit jobs and friends who started families. To MPR every morning and A Prairie Home Companion every Sunday. To her voice, every day, with “good morning”, “I love you” and “goodnight.”

Organ: Heart. Location: pericardial space. Action: beat for 82 years, 30,000 days, for four children, sixteen grandchildren, and—always—for her.

In our dissection, let us not forget the forest for the trees.
Light in Mourning
by Aaron Henderson, Dental School Class of 2018

Death. Death is the substance necessary for life. The view may seem pessimistic, but I challenge you to view it as a positive set of circumstances: the death of stars provides the elements necessary for life (yes, to invoke the late Carl Sagan, all we know is the stuff of stars); the death of plants and animals provides the sustenance and energy for homeostasis, the maintenance of both micro and macroscopic biochemistry; the death of relationships supplies oxygen, stoking the future fires for which new love has provided the spark; the death of ideas makes way for new points of view, seeing the light of the universe through the lenses that others have worn. I’m not trying to convince you that death is desirable – I’ve in fact found it to be the most difficult of the foundational elements of the human condition with which to deal, but it enables.

A unique aspect of life is how readily it is defined by its opposite. Instantly the concept of living is provided with profound meaning when death arrives – not unlike when light is immediately understood when it’s blotted out by darkness. When directly asked “what is light?” one may be at a loss for words, just as life lacks precise definition. We mourn this loss of life. I’m recently and intimately familiar with this concept – with the passing of my grandmother in late September, I ruminated on the loss of family – the immediate absence, the prospect of future loss. Watching my father bid his mother farewell was a powerfully visceral reminder of the mortality of my parents, my sisters, my family, and my friends.

Upon reflection, I realized the situation was a catalyst for growth. As a non-religious man, I questioned the circumstance which surrounded the somber ceremony, but soon discovered an understanding that the people who gathered for her funeral came together to remember, to share stories of how she influenced their lives, how she had played such an integral role in their endeavors. This ceremony of loss was the foundation for a collective of shared memories to be born, an intangible representation of the exponential influence one individual can have on a community. She spoke to us all without language as we know it. Before I became a student of dentistry, I was an anatomist. The set of circumstances which brought me to such a place were unique, and the experiences I had as a member of the anatomical society were surreal and formative, to say the least. I was part of a group which utilizes death to facilitate the growth of countless people.

Teaching one student – opening the eyes of just one student to the prospect of comprehending his or herself, their peers, their patients, can in ways both miniscule and great spread knowledge like seeds on the wind. As a lecturer, I was able to play the role of the wind, distributing those ideas to fertile soils. However, as a teacher in the laboratory, I came to realize that it was not I who did the teaching; I acted merely as an interpreter for those who could no longer speak for themselves. In death, I was able to both deliver as well as experience first-hand immense emotional and academic growth.

It’s because of those who have chosen to donate that we are enabled to further our understanding of all aspects of medical knowledge; that we are enlightened by the natural masterwork of each individual, collectively showing us a physical manifestation (a set of phenotypes, if you will) that we average out and call, “human.” In death, we have opportunity to sort out the detail contained within people, hopefully acquiring a deeper - yet curiously incomplete - recognition of that which makes us uniform, that which makes us unique, and an appreciation for the blurry bits in between.

Original Drawing by Amanda Collins, Mortuary Science Student

Anatomy Bequest Program
I wake up in the morning and look in the mirror
And no longer ever do I see only myself
Rather you, you are there too, by my side
Now a reflection of what’s inside.
This hand you see, it’s no longer just a part of me. But also a part of you.
Every day I look at it, and I see my fingers, but yours yours are the muscles, the tendons, the nerves
When I stare in that mirror, I can only imagine my heart. But I see yours.
The gift you gave me at the start is a memory. A memory of you.
A teaching, given to so few.
It’s strange how we met, you and I.
For in order for us to meet, you had to die. But in your death, you gave so much. Not only to me, but so many others you’ll touch.

You taught me first, this is true.
But it is within me now that I carry you. And through your memory I shall take you so far.
To wards and rooms, and patients, many.
I shall teach them of their hearts, their bones
Their muscles, tendons, and nerves.
But as I do, I will see you.
As it is your heart your bones your nerves I’ll remember, as I teach and we see patients together.
And one day we’ll teach so many patients, I will teach other young doctors.

Students, like me.
I will teach what I remember.
I remember you, your heart. Your gift.
And they; They will teach others
And they will teach patients,
And our patients will teach their families
And our students, one day, will teach other students.
And so you see, And Dear Families Here I say this. This, I say so sincere

Your one gift will help Countless others.
Your gift is well beyond me.
Your gift is to the entire community.
That is my entrusted reward, my privilege.
To carry you on.
That is my responsibility

Know this, dear You,
Ever shall I remember
That August to December
You shall remain ever, in my memory
In the mirror,
You shall remain beside me

So, now and forever and for generations to be you shall always be Within others and me Living.
Just Like Me

Lyrics by Mike Kroll, Medical Student

Early August and I walked into the room
And I thought this day has come a little too soon
Lying there she offered us more than I could ever conceive
didn’t know what alive meant,
What death meant, or what she meant to me

But just like me
She tried to make someone happy
She gave as much as she could
And if I could you know what I would
Give everything I have

She could have been smart, she could have been dumb, she could have been
Someone special to someone.
Her favorite thing could have been to look at kids and smile at the little ones
I wonder if she cried before she died or if she smiled yet another time
And if she had a son, daughter, or a lover who would be kind

But just like me she could have been a little lonely
But nevertheless she gave the most sincere gift yet
And I don’t know how to handle it
And I don’t know what to do with it
And I don’t know how to treat it
But I do know I appreciate it

She reminds me
There is more than one place
for the heart

Donor Anatomy-Learning Humanity

by James R. Carey, PhD, PT

Such brilliant architecture
Arches for protection
Feather-ribbed muscles for power
Tendons tethered sharply to bone
Slippery sheaths to reduce friction
Pearly ligaments collaborating collaterally
Fulcrums, levers, pulleys, and tunnels
All compactly contained behind veil now pale
Biologic beauty—yes, but where is the humanness
Look deeper they silently beckon to me
Past your science
Past our machinery
Seize our stories
Uphold our soul
I hear you and struggle at first
An impossible task, now, in your stillness
But perhaps not
I retreat from scientific training
And with mind wide open
I approach, I imagine and I see
Sturdy hips, hollow hips, metallic hips
That balanced you, advanced you
So many movements, so many miles, ever uphill
Nearly a century of stability, mobility
No wonder your weariness
Knees with thick cartilage, shallow cartilage, no cartilage
That bore the weight
Of playmates tussling in the backyard
Of crippled comrades carried from fury in ’43
Of postures bent and reverent, in supplication
No wonder your joint mice
Thick fingers, calloused fingers, crooked fingers
That tackled the shovel
And the fruit of the earth, despite the pain
Delicate fingers, caring fingers, color-tipped fingers
That tickled thimbles and threads
and backs and heads, of sleepy grandchildren
Brains once heaving with rolling hills of magical cells
That orchestrated fanciful dance, diction and dreams
And countless other thoughts unique to you
Now with narrowed hills and widened valleys

As genetic forces and merciless decades
Eroded your memories, appetite and pace
Still, in stillness you retain your grace
Abdominal walls with staples and stitches
Remind us of our many vulnerabilities
But most poignant are structures repaired
After the many lives you lovingly beared
And of course, your hearts
Some healthy, some enlarged, some mended
To extend the journey
Of repetitive pumping
Of unceasing pleasing, of others
And now, with all that done
You yield one last gift of selfless virtue
Your body to us
In awe, we learn anatomy
Higher, we learn humanity
For the young student’s unsure heart and anxious hand
Your loved ones were there, eager to impart lessons unplanned
We first arrived, not knowing what to say
Yet, we were somehow sure that said it all-in a way
Through our days of attentive and muted angst
Your loved one’s spirit quietly conveyed
“I am here for you, young doctor;
I am here for you today”
As the nights passed
The mornings each day
Through their gift
A most sincere and gracious display
Our first teachers
Who, with us, reside always
Warmly calmed our hearts, and steadied our hands, again to say
“I am here for you, young doctor; I am here for you today”

In the soul of every stranger, there gleams a golden light
Common to all lives between the dawning and the night
As the thread of every person, weaves into life’s tapestry,
The cloth shines with the love of lives gone and lives to be.
At the finish of our labor we see the woven whole.
All life’s strands are bound together with the gifts of
Each soul.
Learning
by Matthew Schroeder, Physical Therapy Student

Dear Donor: Though you cannot receive it now, I write to you this letter.
The gift you gave: incredible; of which I am a debtor!
First of all, may I begin, with utmost appreciation?
For what better way to learn: structure, function and relation?

Far more than physical, many other things as well you teach,
Your influence, now vastly extends, beyond your own life’s reach!
Your gift has touched the lives of many whom you will never know,
and these lives will then go onward: helping others learn and grow!

So to us, the hopeful caregivers for your children’s future,
you teach us the base of healing: like how to mend and suture!
As life begets life, with gifts given, from father and mother,
so life’s torch is passed, from one generation to another.

I hope this, our leg of life’s relay, after the stretch you ran,
keeps up the pace of advancement, your time set, when we began.
What stories you could share, of your journey’s finish, from the start!
And even more knowledge and wisdom, to us, you could impart.

But, the race does not always align to our hearts own beating.
And yet again you teach me: that this life we have, is fleeting!
Though, perhaps your length of time with us had seemed so far from fair,
yet in all the ways you gifted us, you had one more to share!

Now my eyes have seen the inner workings, and it’s beauty shown,
and can understand our body’s form, in ways I’ve never known!
You have taught me that our bodies are beautifully diverse,
take for instance: how our sensation, can travel and disperse.

The mind-numbing network of complex circuitry, just to feel,
all the needed parts to react and move toward what is real.
Or the variety even found in how we circulate,
and the extraordinary exchange for air to percolate!

Or the magnificent arrangement of muscle, joint and bone,
and the seamless nature of our tissues, together sewn.
Still, I often muse and wonder, who it is you might have been,
many things that I call history, your very eyes have seen!

And which of these things did you most enjoy, and still feel fonder?
And of those who knew, and think of you, what things they might ponder?
Now the only barrier between us, being merely time;
for once you also had strengths and passions similar to mine!

And now the thought occurs to me that a principle reigns true:
a theme that holds all together with a sort of cosmic glue.
The thread: that in every twist in life’s journey, and every turn;
in all of our desires, and goals of life, for which we yearn,
and especially true in the passions for which we burn;
Life’s more Meaningful, if we live in such a way, as to learn!

So thank you once more, for graciously, teaching me so dearly,
With my deepest appreciation, I remain sincerely
-A Grateful Learner

Original Drawing by Anonymous Student
Minnesota Plates

Lyrics by Justin Seningen, Medical Student

My suburban was all gassed up
Steam rising from my coffee cup
The windshield was all covered with frost
Living here you gotta pay the cost
The cabin needed some work done
I was driving into the rising sun
But just across the Wisconsin line
State trooper handed me a speeding fine
(I said) Give me the Minnesota plates
Hot coffee and ten thousand lakes
Mister I’ll have you understand
I’ve been through this land
No matter where I roam
That’s the place I will call my home
We’ll smile and we’ll look you in the eye
But we’ve never learned to say goodbye
Just be careful up on the iron range
Cause folks up there; we’re a little strange
Give me my Minnesota Plates
Bob Dylan and ten thousand lakes
Mister I’ll have you understand
I’ve been through this land
And this boy is home-grown
That’s the place I will call my home
Officer I wish I could stay
And thanks for not making me pay
The interstate is calling my name
But please tell me the score in the game
Give me my Minnesota Plates
Bob Dylan and ten thousand lakes
Mister I’ll have you understand
I’ve been through this land
No matter where I roam
This is the place I call home
Goodbye

Lyrics by Michael Donohue, Medical Student

There comes a time in all our lives
When we must all say goodbye
It’s so hard to prepare for
Your very soul seems to cry
So much to say in so little time, you never thought they’d
leave your side…
Goodbye

It’s so easy to take for granted,
The time you spend with those you love.
But these are the moment you’ll remember,
The memories that you’ll recall.

Cause when the end is come and gone, it’s the memories that
keep you strong…
Goodbye

Don’t let your faith pass you by,
You’ll be together again in time.
And with hope and care, they’ll always live on with the love
you share.
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