

**The University of Scranton
Panuska College of Professional Studies**

Celebration of Remembrance Ceremony

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Student Reflection

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St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, dictated to his companions the following: “It should constantly be our care to see God’s presence in everything ...” My experience in the gross anatomy lab this past semester has reinforced the truth of this statement. The contradictory fragility and strength of the human body, the complex story behind each anonymous benefactor, and the closeness to death has helped me better understand and appreciate the beauties of life and the blessings which God has bestowed upon us.

Initially, I struggled to wholly embrace this experience. I could not figure out how to reconcile my feelings of excitement and apprehensiveness. However, with time and further reflection, I began to identify the complexity behind the thoughts and feelings I had. For the majority of humankind, death is difficult. Death seems unnatural. Yet, with introspection, one can recognize death is precisely the definition of natural. Death is the imminent conclusion to life; ergo, there is nothing about it that should appear abnormal.

My time in the gross anatomy lab helped me grow in ways I did not expect. Not only has my knowledge of the human body increased, my perspective on death has changed greatly. I now have an immeasurable amount of empathy and respect for those who chose to donate their bodies to science, to students they never encountered during their lifetime, in the hopes of furthering their education.

St. Ignatius of Loyola once said, “Teach us to give and to not count the cost.” The benevolent men and women who willingly gave their physical bodies to science truly exemplify Ignatius’ hope for humanity. They thought not of themselves but of others, and as a result, myself and my peers were gifted with the opportunity to advance our learning and apply our clinical knowledge beyond the traditional classroom. Their lives will not be forgotten; instead, the memory of them is instilled in us. Each benefactor’s passing is honored, for it has played a vital role in our personal growth, in our education, and in our future careers.

It all became real for me as we got inside the body. I ran my fingers across muscle fibers that helped Bert walk all paths of life. I held his fingers so delicately that used to hold the ones he loved. I saw his lungs, the organs that kept him alive day in and day out. I held Bert's heart, a human heart; a heart that once raced with excitement, with fear, with love and with passion. These cadavers dedicated their life to have a lasting impact on this world even when their hearts were no longer beating. In that moment, I witnessed eight human beings carry out the greatest act of heroism.

These bodies will forever be our teachers; the ones who were with us through our first step to becoming the amazing physical therapists we aspire to be. We will never forget the beneficent actions, the patience and the lessons that each of these individuals taught us.

Months after cadaver lab, I still get a sense of gratitude when students say the names we gave them. I will never know my cadaver's real name, but I know the impact he had on me will forever hold a special place in my heart. Thank you for having the courage to teach, as the best lessons are taught through actions. I'm apprehensive to describe how grateful I am, as your impact goes beyond words.