



## **A GIFT THAT KEEPS GIVING**

I recently took my parents to the Humanity Gifts Registry Celebration of Remembrance at the University of Pennsylvania to honor my father's twin brother. My uncle had been a family doctor and then a psychiatrist. When he died in July, he had made the commitment to donate his body to the Humanity Gifts Registry for medical education and research.

The ceremony included eulogies and performances by medical students from four participating schools: University of Pennsylvania, Drexel, Temple and Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. The students also read the names of the 2015 donors, contributing to the tone of honor, respect and celebration.

One student spoke about how her father had a serious illness through her childhood, so she spent time in many medical facilities. She knows how important research and new developments are to people managing chronic illness. Her father advised her to "Just say thank you."

Another noted the students' gratitude and respect for the donors, who brought these first year students "Joys of discovery, knowledge and inspiration...This has been a priceless gift, welcoming us into a place of mystery and terror and beauty, our first reminder as doctors-to-be that death is a companion throughout life and that those who pass from this life remain with us."

The students noted that while they didn't know the person as we had - as the families and friends of the donors, we knew their stories, their dreams, their lives - they did feel a connection to the donor as a person with a life. One student said of her donor, "As I find clues, I discover and wonder more about her. I want her to know that I notice, that I appreciate, that I understand. She has taught me everything I know about medicine, from the inside out."

I learned that each donor provides direct education to at least a half-dozen students, each of whom will go on to treat an average of 2000 patients a year for a career of more than 30 years. That's a big impact on the future.

It was a pretty amazing day for our family. I think it helped my father get some closure on his loss. My cousins did not want a family memorial, so this was it. It seemed a fitting final act

of kindness for my uncle, a paying-forward of what someone had surely done for him 65 years ago.

One can make this gift at any age, in any physical condition. Once you register, you receive a card to carry with you. This is not the same as being an organ and tissue donor, which is the notation on your driver's license. I recently learned that organ donors are primarily young people but that tissue can be donated at any age.

If you want to know more about giving your body to science, New Jersey residents can contact the UMDNJ-RWJMS Anatomical Association at 1-800-GIFT-211; Pennsylvania residents can contact the Humanity Gifts Registry at 215-922- 4440, or online at <http://hgrpa.com/>. Other states also have similar registries.

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