

2009

### An Act of Kindness

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#### Recommended Citation

Cherrick, D. (2009). An Act of Kindness. *Quill & Scope*, 2 (1). Retrieved from

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## An Act of Kindness

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In Judaism it is traditionally felt that caring for those that are deceased, and performing the rituals necessary prior to burial, is one of the highest levels of *chesed shel emet*, a pure act of kindness. It was understood that extending a kindness to someone who cannot reciprocate or even say, thank you, represents the highest level of doing good. In a similar way I have been the recipient of an equally generous gesture. While I cannot thank this special person, at least I can thank her family.

Through my experience in the anatomy lab I have been the recipient of an equal, if not greater, act of unselfish giving: the gift given to our class by your loved ones. Today I am going to talk about the woman that I and the other members of my lab group had the privilege of “knowing.”

The woman that I worked with was the reason for some of my first friendships in medical school. On the first day of classes my classmates and I traveled up to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor with that nervous excitement typical of any new class. We donned our scrubs, put on our blue gloves, and grabbed our anatomy atlases; everyone was ready to go. But, there was one thing missing: we, the members of the class of 2011, were not colleagues. We were not yet the cohesive group that we are now. When my lab group met at table 10 and introduced ourselves, we only had in common our new, silent teacher. The next several months presented numerous challenges both inside and outside of the lab; but when there we were always learning together, reassured by her presence that we would master this knowledge.

The friends that I gained were really secondary to the transformation that I experienced when I went into that lab. Every time I entered the lab even if I was tired or when I was less prepared and focused than I should have been, I felt humbled and in awe. It was not until I started writing this that I really tried to figure out why I had such a visceral response to the room on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. However, I now realize that it was the learning. A learning that is indescribable, to see the inner workings of the human body; no wonder it was surreal. I think that this gift, the gift of learning in this intimate setting, was so tremendous it was too much for me to grapple with at the time. In many ways it is still difficult for me to verbalize.

Throughout my first year I have gone to offices and thanked professors for a good class or series of lectures. Now, as this year comes to a close, I find it the ultimate irony that the one woman who has arguably given me the most tangible knowledge about the human body is not physically here to be thanked. This woman was not obligated to donate her body, she was not hoping to get anything in return, and she gave of herself in a spirit of honest and selfless generosity, a generosity that I hope will inspire the way I practice medicine.

I cannot thank your loved ones enough for the lessons that they have provided my classmates and me. May their memory be a blessing.