

Anatomy Lab

Brian R. Smith^{1*}, MS

<https://doi.org/10.55504/2578-9333.1165>

Website: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/jwellness/>

Affiliations: ¹Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, USA

Recommended Citation: Smith, Brian R. (2023) "Anatomy Lab,"

Journal of Wellness: Vol. 4 : Iss. 2, Article 7.

Received Date: Aug 13, 2022

Accepted Date: Aug 29, 2022

Publication Date: Mar 7, 2023



One minute of silence for your body,
for the gratitude we feel
that through your gift we learn.

Will you forgive our inexperience?
Please pardon our shaking hands as they are
buffeted by the pounding pulse of panicking hearts that
are shocked to see their siblings so exposed.

Inhaling sawdust,
we were taught in woodshop to "Measure twice, cut once."
We rolled our eyes then,
because we always got second chances.
Choking on formaldehyde,
we measure you ten times, pause, then measure
twenty more.
It feels like the least we can offer you.

Some quiet laughs waltz past your body
for a joke you did not hear.
Some gentle tears roll down your cheeks,
dropped from my eyes, which you have never met.

You are unnerving me as I am unnerving you.

Thirty seconds of silence for her body,
that without a blink has shared her innermost secrets.

"Should we move its arms?
Her arms, I mean."

All of a sudden I notice
she and I are holding hands
as if she heard my words catch in my throat
and wants to reassure me.
We part, but for one sacred second
we leave behind the fluorescents and the fumes and
adorn the glimmering roof of the Sistine instead,
index fingers touching, mimicking Michelangelo's
"The Creation of Adam."

We are told only her cause of death, but
that does not define her. That is not why she is here.
She is -
I mean, she was -
part of a "willed body program."
I admire the strength of her will.
She launched her last stone out along the water
and though she has turned away,
eyes fixed on another shore,
her stone skips on for now.

Ten seconds of silence for a body,
and even then I worry if I am asking for too much.

I wish I had known that anatomy lab would rob me
of second person, pronouns, and present tense.
I wish someone would have warned me,
before we disassembled this body,
that anatomy lab and depersonalization are the same,
that they go hand in hand,
instead of assuming I had the stomach and the heart
to seek and dissect someone else's.

At the end of the day
we use watering cans
to keep the bodies from drying out.
We only get one, after all.
How strange a sight.
I wonder what will grow.

Three seconds of silence is
my new ritual of remembrance:

One for your body,
one for mine, and
one to remember why we are both here.

I am honored, but
must press onward, so
I look inward.

*Correspondence To: Brian R. Smith
Email: Bsmith19@stanford.edu

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Acknowledgements: I would like to thank body donors and their families for their priceless gift to medical education.

Funding Source: The author(s) received no specific funding for this work.

Conflict of Interest: The author(s) have no conflict of interest to declare for this work.