

Transcript for Interview - Kate Fitzsimmons

Courteney: I had the opportunity to speak to somebody with a very unique and personal connection to the Body Donation program.

Kate: My name is Kate Fitzsimmons, I am a second year Medical student at UBC, and both of my paternal grandparents were body donors.

Courteney: Thank you so much for speaking with us today. You have a very personal connection to the Body Donation Program. You mentioned your grandparent were both donors. Were you aware of their decision to become donors?

Kate: Not initially. So my grandfather, who I called Pop, passed away in 2015, and I was in my midteens at the time, so that wasn't something I was speaking about with my parents. But when he donated his body, it was disclosed to me that my grandmother had the same plan. So that was the point when I learned about her future.

Courteney: And what do you think it was that made your grandparents make that decision to become donors?

Kate: For my grandfather specifically, I have been reflecting on this. He had a very interesting experience with the education system. He dropped out between I think 8th and 10th grade, somewhere in there. And actually obtained his GED at 60. I think education was on his mind in his later years, to some extent. And he was well-known within my family for being someone who cared a lot for others. He used to go to a specific care home every evening in retirement and feed the same person dinner and forged a really deep connection with them. So I think there is an intrinsic caring about other people and appreciation for education in his older years that might have informed him. For my grandmother, I can't really speak to it, because again, it feels funny still in this day and age sometimes talking about death with someone who is still living, so I never had the opportunity to inquire. But, she was also a very loving person. I can only assume it was motivated by intentions just like my Pop's.

Courteney: And at the Memorial Service, you actually spoke about your grandparents becoming donors and what impact that would have on students, who would be learning from them. Do you mind sharing some of those thoughts with us?

Kate: Yes, something that was extremely interesting to me as someone who had an intersection between being a family member of a donor and being a medical student was that you learn so much about how a donor and future patient's body would be important to them in life. So, I think I specifically mentioned my grandmother, who loved to knit, would have used her ulnar nerve to control the intrinsic muscles of her hand when she would make myself and my cousin sweaters. So it strikes me as someone who is learning about the ulnar nerve from her wasn't just learning about a nerve that would fire, but something that was extremely important to both her and everyone who loved her. And the same would go to my Pop, who played a lot of golf with my

dad and my uncle and the significance of something as simple as his deltoid, which I think can be just sort of like another muscle in the body, but when you learned it from a donor, it becomes so much more than that.

Courteney: You yourself are now a medical student, learning from donated bodies. Has this changed your views on Body Donation?

Kate: I think it has made me realize how impactful it was. I had the privilege of being at one of these services that UBC threw for donors before I actually applied to medical school, so I heard the students say how important it was to them. But it was really driven home when I started learning. It was really amazing to me that the last people to spend time with my grandparents would have been my now called colleagues. And knowing who they are and what they are like, there are very few people that I would trust or want to be the last people to see my grandparents. So that was very important to me. And I think also just the degree to which learning is enhanced when you learn from a real person was pretty mind blowing as well.

Courteney: If you could sum up the Body Donation Program in one word, what would that word be?

Kate: I had to think about this one for a bit, but I settled on the word profound. To me it kind of encompasses everything I have just said: the depth of experiences as a student, the meaningfulness as a family member, to me it is all summed up in that word.

Courteney: Thank you Kate so much for sharing your story and those of your grandparents, you've really got this really personal and unique connection to the Body Donation Program and we are so grateful for you to share this with us. So thank you so much, and good luck with your studies.

Kate: Thank you for having me.