

## **Podcast Transcript: “Secrets of the Campus Cadavers”**

**Narrator:** From the University of Utah, “Secrets of the Campus Cadavers.” I’m Paul Gabrielsen.

### **Episode 7 – The Final Word**

**Narrator:** It’s a cool, overcast day, the Friday before Memorial Day at the Salt Lake City Cemetery. The cemetery is on a hill, not far from the University of Utah. The whole Salt Lake Valley stretches below it under a soft canopy of trees.

And because it’s nearly Memorial Day, headstones are decorated. Some have plastic flowers. Some have a can of beer. At a children’s memorial, someone’s left a brand-new toy dump truck.

In the northwest corner of the cemetery, a crowd is gathering around an awning. As I’m walking up to it, two different people ask me who the service is for. I tell them: It’s for those who have donated their bodies to medical research and education at the University of Utah. It’s for their families and friends to say goodbye.

It’s now been more than a year since human remains were first found under the George Thomas Building.

Here’s Charles Shepherd again, the university architect who made the first discovery.

**Shepherd:** But it has given me a really concrete example, when I go to meet with contractors on other projects, and I can always say, “You can find, we can find and we have found, the most amazing things in the most unexpected places.”

**Narrator:** Our investigators gathered their findings into a report that was completed in March 2017. Here’s an excerpt from the summary read by Kate Hovanec:

**Hovanec:** Three primary lines of evidence—extensive historic research, archaeological investigation and osteological analysis of human skeletal remains—were explored during this project to infer the history of this site and determine the context in which the human skeletal remains were initially deposited.

**Narrator:** Bringing those three lines of evidence together told us a range of possible dates: 1905 to 1933. And told us their connection to the university, as cadavers for anatomical dissection. How they got there is still unclear. The clues told us that the people who owned these bones were likely laborers. From the summary by state forensic anthropologist Derinna Kopp:

**Kopp:** This collection is an important and unique snapshot into not only the past methods of study but also the life of the individuals represented by the skeletal remains.

**Narrator:** So, we know the what and the when. We still don’t know the why. And we’ll never know the who.

At the cemetery, the body donor memorial proceeds and more people gather. Some hold each other.

Kerry Peterson is here.

**Peterson:** Your loved ones teach students.

**Narrator:** And so is Dani Golomb.

**Golomb:** I'm not really a public speaker, so this is a big deal for me. I practiced at my mom's wedding last week. Not giving the same speech, but. . . I'm here overcoming my public speaking because anatomy was such a meaningful experience for me.

**Narrator:** The loved ones of the body donors speak as well.

**Congregant 1:** She worked for the state for over 30 years. She made a big impact on everyone.

**Congregant 2:** So, my mom passed away about a month ago and we're having her memorial tomorrow, I see some of my family here.

**Narrator:** One donor wrote a note before her passing that her daughter read to the assembled group.

**Congregant 2:** "Take my bones, every muscle, every fiber and nerve in my body and find a way to make a crippled child walk. Explore every corner of my brain, take my cells if necessary and let them grow so that someday a speechless boy will shout at the crack of a bat and a deaf girl will hear the sound of rain against the windows."

**Narrator:** Many talk about how donation to science is seen as giving meaning to death, a way for people to live on and give one last gift to the world.

After a cadaver's service is complete, the remains are cremated and returned to the family or interred here in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. But where should the George Thomas building remains go? One idea was to cremate them. But another idea was to return them to their original purpose. Teaching.

**Knapp:** This door doesn't creak—Oh! And it's so cold! I keep it really cold because I have a lot of samples. Oh, my gosh, it's freezing!

**Narrator:** The Anthropology Department at the U has a collection of human remains used in teaching, secured in locked cabinets. Here's Leslie Knapp. She's the department chair.

**Knapp:** We have many individuals in these two cases. . .

**Narrator:** They come from different sources and are used in human osteology classes.

**Knapp:** Very popular with our students. And I think if we didn't have caps on those courses, we would have even more students coming through.

**Narrator:** With Knapp's encouragement, the University of Utah decided that the George Thomas building remains, originally used to teach, would now return to that role in the Anthropology collections.

**Knapp:** To do comparative studies, to show students what's the difference between a male and a female bone. To be able to look at differences in size, to understand how the relationship between skull size and limb-bone size relates. And also to understand how in the world the excavations might have uncovered these bones and what are the consequences.

**Narrator:** In 2018, the Anthropology Department—and the George Thomas Building remains—will move to the new Carolyn and Kem Gardner Building. But the department is now housed in the Stewart Building, which is only 150 feet from where the remains were first found.

**Knapp:** We are not very far, in terms of proximity, from where those bones were excavated recently.

**Narrator:** This is how we honor these remains. For a century they lay forgotten in an unmarked grave. We don't know what they did in life, but they gave something in their death—knowledge and practice at the hands of doctors who would go on to touch countless lives. And now those bones, those people, are teachers again.

The body donor memorial comes to a close.

**Music:** “Amazing Grace”

**Narrator:** It's played by a lone bagpiper and it's a moment of reverence for a song that often heralds the end of one life and the continuation of everyone else's.

This is so different from the day, or night, when someone walked away from those cadaver remains under a fresh layer of soil in the gulch. In those days, medical schools collected bodies that were unclaimed, without any other home to welcome them. Now donation is a matter of a family willingly, although sadly, giving up all that is left of their loved one. Bodies are now donated with love and treated with care.

There's another song as part of the service. That's hospital volunteer Glenn Register on guitar.

**Music:** [“Love Remains by Collin Raye”] We are born one fine day, children of God on our way . . .

**Narrator:** Reflecting on a birth on a day of remembering and somber gratitude reminds me how limitless life's possibilities seem at the beginning. And a death seems the opposite of that—the closing of a book. The end of possibilities. But for cadavers, past and present, those possibilities don't end. They teach and touch deeply the people who work with them.

**Music:** I don't know, baby, what I'll do on this Earth without you. We all live and we all die, but the end is not goodbye. . .

**Narrator:** We may not be able to attach names to the remains found under the George Thomas Building. But they are not anonymous. The course of their lives is written on their bones.

**Music:** An eternal, burning flame. . .

**Narrator:** Everybody, every person, every set of bones has a story.

**Music:** We are born one fine day, children of God on our way.

This podcast has been a production of University of Utah Marketing and Communications, produced, written and edited by Paul Gabrielsen and Brooke Adams.

Find the complete series at [unews.utah.edu/cadavers](https://unews.utah.edu/cadavers).

“Love Remains” by Collin Raye, is used by permission.

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Special thanks again to everyone who helped make this project possible. Thank you to the men and women who choose to donate their bodies to science education and research. And thank you for listening.