

# Stiff: the curious lives of human cadavers



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After reading the book *Stiff* I have gained a better understanding of what donating your body to science really means. Through my research and by reading the book, I have decided that a person should most definitely donate his or her body to science. I believe that once a person has died, there is nothing more that the person can do with his or her body. Why not give yourself to science and continue to help people even after you have passed away? I personally would like to die knowing that I could potentially save the lives of millions.

The first option for donating your body to science mentioned in the book is for the practice of cosmetic procedures. In the first chapter of the book, Mary Roach attends a seminar where plastic surgeons perform different cosmetic procedures on cadaver heads. The surgeons are able to practice new procedures on nonliving patients before performing them on live patients. The cosmetic surgeons gain a better knowledge of human anatomy and how to perform specific procedures. Practicing on these patients is much easier, since the patients do not have blood that would block their view of a human's basic anatomy and facial structure. The surgeons can see everything that is going on in the surgery clearly which will help them to better perform these surgeries later on. In addition to cosmetic procedures, I have learned through my research that universities often provide cadavers for medical students to use as a way to advance their knowledge of the human body. In an article I read, it stated that before first-year medical students are allowed to lay their hands on the living, they must first learn the anatomy of the dead. Students are required to take apart their given body and look at each section of a human's internal anatomy. Although it is

possible to learn this information through high-tech simulators and body models, nothing can replace being able to see and touch a real body. This is why donating your body to science is important; so that medical students will have the chance to learn from dead bodies, before operating on live ones.

The third chapter of the book is set at a body farm. A body farm is a research facility where human decomposition can be studied in many different settings. At the body farm, Mary Roach sees a variety of dead bodies that are being used to study human decomposition. Each body is at a different stage of decay. Studying these bodies can help determine the time in which a person has died. In reality, this can help investigators determine “the time of death” of a corpse. Knowing the time of death can help solve crimes and murder investigations, an important component of forensic science. In the book, Roach mentions fly larvae as an important way to determine when a person has died. Forensic scientists can conclude how old the larvae on a cadaver are, and therefore decide how long the person has been dead for. Other methods of determining this can be used, such as looking at the potassium level in a person’s eyelids or studying the stage of their decay. Not only are the donated bodies at different phases of decomposition, they are also put into different scenarios. Every time a person dies, they are not going to be in the same setting. This is why researchers at the body farm have to put cadavers in different situations. The first body Mary Roach sees at the farm is wearing sweatpants, so that examiners can study the effects of decay on bodies that are wearing clothing. During my research, I have learned that some of the other scenarios bodies have been put in include being buried, left outside, and even submerged in water. People die in all

different settings, which is why it is important to know how a body reacts in these different environments. By donating your body to science, forensic scientists can learn the rate at which bodies decay, and therefore solve investigations later on.

The fourth chapter involves the use of cadavers as crash test dummies.

When a person donates his or her body to science, it is possible that he or she will be sent to a research facility where researchers study the effects of impact on the body. When car companies make new car models, it is necessary for them to test if a car provides safety to a human in the event of a crash. However, researchers cannot use nonhuman crash test dummies for these studies. Crash test dummies can tell you how much force a crash has unleashed on a body, but not how this force affects the body. Scientists need to know how much force a real body part can handle. For these test, researchers need subjects that will provide accurate results without causing harm or pain to them. In the past, dedicated researchers have donated themselves as dummies. However, this is neither safe and causes pain to the living researchers. Cadavers are better candidates, since they are not only human, but they also feel no pain and cannot sustain injury. During this section of the book, Mary Roach visits a facility where a simulated car accident is taking place on cadaver UM 006. The results from the car accident will help the car company know if the particular model will keep a person safe if a crash were to occur. Then, they can adjust the car to provide better safety. So someday, when a live human survives an accident, he or she has UM 006 to thank.

In chapter six, Mary Roach discusses cadavers who are used to understand how bullets and bombs work, and how they affect the human body. Quite often, the bodies of people who choose to donate themselves to science are sent to facilities where the main goal of research is to figure out how to better protect those who are often exposed to danger. As with most tests, researchers need subjects who give results that are realistic and accurate, and that do not feel pain. Cadavers fill these needs when it comes to testing items such as bulletproof vests, army-strength footwear, and other protective wear. To ensure that our soldiers and police officers are safe, it is essential to guarantee that their equipment is safe and will withstand whatever circumstances they may endure. To do so, experiments are conducted to test these different items. Through these tests, researchers can tell if bulletproof vests will withstand the force of a shot, if boots will withstand the effects of a roadside bomb, and if miscellaneous protective wear can handle under pressure. All of these tests are important in protecting those who give their life to protect us.

In chapter seven, Mary Roach discusses a controversial experiment that many people choose to donate themselves to. These trials have become known as the crucifixion experiments. Throughout history, a number of scientists have been engrossed by the idea of recreating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Through trial and error, these scientists have each created their own theory about how Jesus was positioned on the cross and each event that took place during this time. Not only do some people choose to have their cadavers donated to this experimental process, but some actually volunteer themselves while they are still living. Although most people don't choose to

take this path when donating their body, it is always another option that could be considered.

Throughout the book, Mary Roach touches a couple of times on the subject of organ donation. I believe that organ donation is one of the most beneficial and practical means of donating yourself to science. In all other cases of donating yourself to science, your body is not used to provide direct help to others. In these cases, your body is used for studies and research that could one day hopefully help someone else. When you choose to donate your organs, you are directly giving yourself to someone else. The second you are considered dead (whether your heart has stopped beating or you have been considered brain dead) your organs are give to another person who is in need. In a sense, you are able to live on through another person, or at least a piece of you is. According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, every eleven minutes a person is added to the waiting list to receive an organ. Seventy-five people receive an organ transplant each day. However, twenty people die every day waiting for an organ, because of the shortage of donated organs. When one person alone decides to become an organ donor, he or she could possibly save up to eight lives. So if you don't want to join the body farm, be used as a surgical patient, or become a human crash test dummy, I believe that deciding to become an organ donor is the easiest way to save lives.

The book Stiff gave me a much better understanding of what it means to “ donate your body to science.” Making the choice to give yourself to scientific research could help an endless amount of people. After all, what are you planning to do with your body when you die? Why not give yourself to <https://assignbuster.com/stiff-the-curious-lives-of-human-cadavers-essay-samples/>

something rewarding and beneficial? If you don't want your dead body to be shot for scientific study or to receive a facelift once you have passed away, choose to become an organ donor. You could save up to eight lives, and die knowing you're going to continue to help others. One day, I will certainly choose to donate my body to science, and potentially make life better for those who are still on earth.

## **Personal Review**

I have always enjoyed reading, and throughout the years I have read all kinds of different stories. However, I have never a book quite like Stiff. In Stiff, Mary Roach talked about a topic that most people would find repulsive and somewhat hard to even think about. Cadavers aren't a usual subject when it comes to writing books. Yet, I absolutely loved it. Roach found a way to write about death in a humorous way without ever being disrespectful. Who knew reading about dead bodies could be so funny? The book was filled with interesting facts and never had a dull moment. Most of the time, I had trouble putting the book down. I could also see all the hard work and research Mary Roach put into it. She knew what she was talking about inside and out. She traveled to different countries, researched a countless number of events in history, and interviewed numerous people who were somehow related to the topic. She also mentioned every little detail about what was going on, which made it that much better. Roach never sugar coated anything. She always told everything like it was. Yet she always respected the cadavers and treated them like they were still alive.

After reading this book, I feel much better informed about what it means to donate your body to science. I never understood all the possibilities of what <https://assignbuster.com/stiff-the-curious-lives-of-human-cadavers-essay-samples/>

could happen to you if you made the choice to donate your cadaver. Mary Roach wrote everything on a level that I could understand without getting confused. I now feel much better prepared about deciding whether to donate my body or not. I have decided that I definitely would like to donate my body to science and make my contribution to society. I would like to be able to help others even after I have passed away. Without this book, I don't think I ever really would have considered donating my body as an option. I didn't understand what it meant or what would happen. Mary Roach convinced me to donate my body to science, and I believe others would feel the same.