

'Dem Bones

It was getting late when the phone rang. It was the police dispatcher saying that she had received a call from an officer who claims to have come across a body lying on one of our trays just behind our building.

I assured her that there was nothing to worry about... we were well aware of said body and that we were decomposing a "John Doe", the bones of which were to be used at a local university to further their medical studies.

She asked me if this was normal procedure for us. I explained to her that we didn't do so with every "John Doe" but that, when a university requested some help with their studies, we were usually open to helping them out. She let it go at that, but still seemed a bit unsure of what to think.

A bit later, two officers came to the front door. I let them in and found out that they, too had come to inquire about the man on the tray behind our building. I explained to them the same story that I had earlier to the police dispatcher. They asked the same questions and then told me that the worried party was really a new security guard for the hospital who had found the body during one of his first rounds. I laughed and told them that we always know when there is a new security guard 'cause we also have to re-explain our body in the back. We all got a good laugh and the officers went about their business and I, mine.

Well to some this would be a humorous story... to others, a terrible story. There are, I'm sure many people who would say that this is a terrible way to treat an unidentified person... just leave him out for nature to break him down to bones. I agree. As I have stated many times before, people should not die with no one to say farewell or even to give us a name. People should never die and be left unclaimed.

But the sad truth is that as long as I've been here, there has always been at least two or three of these unclaimed, unnamed people in the back, who will only wait for the appropriate time to pass before we ship them off to a nearby hospital to be quietly cremated, their death forever to go unknown.

On the other hand, if a university can use the bones to help teach young, future doctors

understand more about the human body, why would that be so wrong? We go out of our way to cover them and put them in a location that would not be obvious or disrespectful to anyone. After all, we are the only family this guy has. We are the only people who know that he has passed away. We are the only people who care enough to want to do something for him. So do we just hold onto him until it's time to go throw him in the local furnace, or do we give him to science so that the world he left behind can continue to progress? He is fenced in and locked up so as not to disrupt anyone or anything (except new security guards).

It's a moral issue that would generate a lot of opinions, I'm sure. But I'm also confident that Mr. John Doe would be satisfied, all things considered, with the choices we made on his behalf.

As a religious man, I can't help but think that God is much more concerned that these people die without anyone available to claim them or say goodbye, than He is in how we are preparing their bodies for the scientific community.