DONOR SPOTLIGHT:
FRED RAPPAPORT - A LEGACY OF LOVE & SERVICE

The five Rappaport siblings (Cheri, Jon, Rob, Jessica, and Julie) recently came together to share memories, stories, and information about their parents in order to create a Legacy Document to supplement the purely legal document signed in 1979 by their mother Betty, establishing an endowment fund in memory of her beloved husband, Fred, with an initial donation of $200.

Fred was a tall man, 6' 2," with a big heart, who was known for his warm personality, his ingenuity, his devotion to his family, and his sense of joy and fun. Born in 1918 to a large family, he grew up on the North Side, with good values and deep pride in his Jewish heritage. He graduated from North High and attended the University of Minnesota.

Following graduation, Fred spent nearly five years in the Pacific Theater during WWII, as a member of the Amphibious Engineers unit of the Army. For two of those years, he was in charge of a supply boat that traveled between the South Pacific Islands. For his service, he earned the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, four Bronze Stars, and the Philippines Liberation Ribbon. Along with his wartime heroism, stories about his acts of kindness during the war are family treasures. Believing that wars are between leaders of countries not the people who live in those countries, he was kind to those he met while in Asia, and even established a school in a small community where he was stationed. After he was discharged, he returned to Minneapolis ready to find the woman of his dreams and begin his career and the next stage of his life.

Betty Kozberg was an elegant and cultured young woman, with the talent and aspirations of being a concert pianist. She and Fred had seen each other once, when she was on a date with another suitor. Smitten and intrigued as they passed each other, they both turned back at the same time, creating an indelible impression. Another time, Betty was on a date at a bar and heard raucous laughter. When she searched for the source, she discovered that the noise was emanating from a large table with the four married Rappaport brothers and their wives, as well as Fred, who was there stag. The first time they truly met, however, Fred so exuberantly shook Betty's hand that she was almost unable to perform in a piano concert the next night. They began to date, and soon they were planning their future.

Fred and Betty nervously anticipated the first meeting of their parents. With preconceived notions about Jews whose families immigrated from different parts of Europe, it was not assured that Fred's Romanian parents and Betty's Lithuanian parents would be as enthusiastic about the match as they were. The ice was broken, though, when Betty played the piano for all assembled, as Fred sat nervously holding Betty's little sister, Etta's hand. They were married in 1947 and moved into their beautiful family home on Basswood Road in 1954, eventually raising their five children there.

Jewish values were on full display through Fred and Betty's charitable and leadership endeavors, and during their large family gatherings for Jewish holidays. At the age of 41, Fred served as one of the youngest Campaign Chairs to date, of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation. He was also on the boards of Adath Jeshurun, Bnai Brith, Mount Sinai Hospital, and Brandeis University. Betty served on the boards of the Council of Jewish Women, Hadassah, was the Women's Division chairperson of the Federation's campaign, chair of the Social Justice Committee at Adath Jeshurun, and a local leader in the Bonds for Israel campaign.

The kids participate in activities at the JCC and Cheri was a member of the first Bat Mitzvah class at Adath Jeshurun Congregation in 1961. At that time, she noted, religious school education required attendance 6 days a week. Her siblings followed her at Talmud Torah and programs at Adath Jeshurun. They also attended the JCC's Camp Tikvah and later Herzl, Camp Interlachen (through the Milwaukee JCC). Rob was particularly impacted by his camp experiences. In adulthood he realized how fortunate he was that his parents could send him to camp, where he acquired important life skills and developed meaningful

friendships. This inspired his own interest in ensuring that children whose families cannot afford to send their kids to camp, be provided with scholarships.

Fred had joined the family business, Napco, with his brother, when he returned from the war, but by 1959, his independent and creative spirit, and desire to be his own boss, inspired him to venture out on his own. Partnering with a friend, Steve Fliegelman, together they bought their first business, St. Paul Corrugated, which made steel culverts that were used in drainage systems. As these products were mostly just needed during the summer months, they investigated how their equipment might be used in other ways in the off-seasons. This effort unleashed many new ideas and inventions geared for the baby boom generation of kids.

The first innovation was the creation of a steel saucer with handles, which improved upon the regular and much slower sleds of the day. He also developed a sled that used skis instead of blades, making those faster, as well. The children were excited to be his "Guinea pigs," testing his prototypes, in an effort to perfect them before they went to market. The Rappaport offspring enjoyed having a role in the development of these innovations and felt special that they were the first to play with toys that eventually would be favorites of the kids of their generation.

The company was now named Tal-Cap Inc., and a new division branched out into creating updated swing sets and "kiddy gyms." Once neighborhood kids played on the equipment in the Rappaports' backyard, they too had to have one, which was the start of a trend that spread throughout the country. Fred next bought a company called Sifo, which created wooden puzzles for young children. During these years, any home that had puzzles, certainly had one or more Sifo puzzles. Banner Plastics, which manufactured plastic toys that enabled kids to play house using their miniature tea sets and kitchen items, became part of the company that had become focused on children's enjoyment.

Those were happy and exciting years for the Rappaport family. As new toys were created, the children were sometimes used in publicity materials, including appearing in catalogues. Fred produced a toy box on wheels called, "Toyola," and created the first kid-size electric car, which was such an exciting invention, that a red convertible corvette version of it was on display at the 1964 World's Fair in New York.

The company was highly successful from its inception until Fred got sick in 1965. Without Fred at the helm, the company began to decline.

Losing Fred, only 48 at the time, when Betty was just 41, was an understandably traumatic time for the Rappaport family. The five children, the youngest of whom was only three years old, were now without their beloved and much revered dad. Betty had lost the love of her life and now would have to manage the household and raising five children on her own. As a woman of that era, Betty had relied on Fred to take care of all of the "traditional male roles," and as was the norm, he was the sole "breadwinner." Beyond those already tragic and life-changing circumstances, as the family readied to attend Fred's funeral, a man arrived at their house with bankruptcy papers. The family's financial situation changed dramatically after Fred's death.

It is because of the challenges of those difficult years, during his two year illness and after Fred's death, that the children feel they were drawn to wanting to help and having compassion for others, and why they have been compelled to enact the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam, working to repair the world.

In reflecting on why the Fred Rappaport Endowment Fund was designated to support scholarships for children to attend Jewish camp at the JCC, Jon recalled when Al Tychman came to their home to visit Betty, several years after Fred had passed away. Al, who had taken Rob under his wing after Fred had died, presented the idea of supporting the JCC's efforts to expand opportunities for community engagement through the establishment of a memorial endowment fund, which would have a perpetual impact on future generations. With so much of Fred's business success and personal enjoyment being related to children, and because Fred and Betty's five children had been able to benefit from Jewish camp experiences when they were young, the endowment fund's support of camp scholarships is a fitting legacy for Fred. Since its creation in 1979, the annual distribution from the fund enabled dozens of children to benefit from the life-enriching experiences that happen at the JCC day camps.