



## What One Life Can Do: A Profile of Donor Grace Kavjian

Grace Kavjian may not be your typical College of Medicine donor, but her vision, altruism, and humility place her in a truly elite stratum of the Drexel community. Mrs. Kavjian is not an alumna of the school, though many family members, including her late husband, Edward M. Kavjian, M.D., H.U. '39 and a staff member at Woman's Medical College, are affiliated with the institution. Rather than by diploma, Grace Kavjian is joined to the College of Medicine by a profound sense of commitment to future generations, which is in turn influenced by a strong acknowledgement of her own family's past.

Edward Kavjian, a urologist, graduated from Hahnemann Medical College in 1939. He completed his residency at Woman's Medical College (WMC). He was on staff at WMC for the next 29 years. Grace Kavjian notes, "How fortunate he was to be surrounded by so many capable physicians there who taught him so much." Four of the Kavjians' five children were born at WMC. The fifth was born at Haverford Community Hospital, of which Dr. Kavjian was a founding physician.



To say Dr. Kavjian cared about his community – both local and global – would be an understatement. In addition to his position at WMC, he worked at Delaware County Hospital and Haverford State Hospital. He helped found Haverford Community Hospital and was a leader in his church, school district, and local Rotary. A member of the A.J. Drexel Society, Dr. Kavjian was president of the Armenian Missionary Association of America, Commander of the Knights of Vartan for several terms, and a trustee of Haigazian University in Lebanon. In 2003, Mrs. Kavjian established a scholarship in his name to assist students with medical school expenses. To date, nine scholarships have been awarded. After a long, fruitful life, Dr. Kavjian passed away in 2007 at the age of 92.

Grace Kavjian's relationship with the College of Medicine could have ended there. Her husband, the alum and staff member, had passed away, and she had created a meaningful tribute in his honor. Many would say, enough. Yet Mrs. Kavjian's connection to the College *doesn't* end there. Interestingly, this is where her story becomes its most compelling.

Mrs. Kavjian donates in her husband's name to the College of Medicine because she's invested in the future, and this translates into being invested in education. "I wish that there were more scholarships available to young people who graduate high school and desire to continue further education," she says. "Getting an education in medicine, if that's your desire and ability, is very expensive. I just felt that the young people who are inclined to go in that direction could use some help. We certainly need doctors and I just think it's important they get help."

She continues, "Those who are able to give *should* give. It's so important we have our citizens well-educated and well-trained. We certainly are going to have a doctor shortage one of these days. It's important we're made aware of that and do whatever we can to help those who are interested in medicine get the financial help they need to pursue their career."

It might seem strange for Mrs. Kavjian, at 87, to be so concerned about educating future generations of physicians. This concern is not merely philosophical talk. She has consistently and generously given to the College of Medicine, backing up her vision with action, for the past nine years. Mrs. Kavjian explains that this selflessness is "a matter of training" from her childhood. She says, "You learn so much without even realizing it, just observing what goes on in your home. Then you continue it when you have a home of your own."

Growing up during the Depression, one of six children, Mrs. Kavjian didn't realize her family was considered poor. The family was a happy one, and her parents shared whatever they had. She recalls, "My parents were always concerned with giving back, no matter how little they had.... We *always* shared whatever we had, and I give my parents credit for raising us that way."

As Mrs. Kavjian elaborates on her parents' influence she says, "If a million people would give a little bit, all put together, it adds up to a considerable sum. I just don't ever want to put down the value of what just one life can do." Her father was born in Turkey, of Armenian descent. He came to America in 1902 to study dentistry. Once he saw how wonderful America was, he didn't want to return, despite a promise to his mother to do so. Instead, he worked five years, finally saving enough money to bring 11 family members over. "Now this one life changed the lives of those people," states Mrs. Kavjian.

Her Armenian mother was one of those 11. When she came to America, she also wrote to her family and encouraged them to make the voyage. "All her relatives started coming to America well before [the Armenian] massacres.... So you can't ever minimize what one life can do," Mrs. Kavjian explains. It is estimated that 1.5 million Armenians were victims of genocide between 1915 and 1923. "I just think that we all have a place on this earth and we can all do some good, even if it doesn't go any farther than your next-door neighbor or a needy person in your church."

This cognizance of her family's history prompts Mrs. Kavjian's selfless generosity and continued giving. She has seen firsthand how one life can make an incredible difference. She says of her philosophy, "It's important to factor giving into your life. It doesn't have to be a huge sum. It doesn't have to be, you pick up the paper and see there's a million-dollar giver and you say, 'Oh, gosh, I could never do that much.' You can give *something*. You should give what you can. It's amazing. You *will* feel good about giving when you see your dollars at work." How fortunate for the College of Medicine that she has chosen its mission as worthy of her vision.