Life wasn’t easy for Tillie Kohler Wing. She survived an abusive relationship during a large part of her life and then endured a long stretch of poor health. Through it all she had the love of her son Melvin Wing III, who tried to protect her during her marriage and took care of her during her illnesses.

“She was a wonderful woman,” Wing said. “My dad was just the opposite.”

The intense childhood memories that were imprinted on Melvin led him to recently establish the Tillie Kohler Wing Fund through the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln. The Fund aims to benefit the Sojourn Shelter and Services in Springfield, an organization dedicated to providing shelter and assistance to victims of domestic violence and their children.

“She would be proud of me,” Wing said. “It makes me feel good.”

Wing toured Sojourn to see firsthand the services offered to women and their children who are fleeing abusive relationships.
“Melvin is a very generous person. He has been a saver his whole life. He wants to help people during his life,” said Joe McMenamin, a friend and advisor to Wing. “Melvin thinks about how he can help others and do what he can. This seemed like a good match.”

One program that may benefit from the Fund is Sojourn’s resale shop. Sojourn is working to relocate and refocus the shop. Profits from the shop help support the center’s programming and provides clothing to clients at reduced cost.

Melvin understands the pain a mother can go through to keep a family together and her children safe.

“She would try and protect me from my dad,” said Wing, whose father passed away in 1972.

Melvin served in the Springfield Fire Department for 35 years. He took care of his mom during the last five years of her life as she battled poor health. Her later years included happy memories of visiting Florida and spending time on the beach.