



Dr. Harold L. Finch

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Dr. Harold L. Finch was born March 18, 1933, in Kansas City, Kansas. In 1955, at age 22, he married his sweetheart Peggy Thompson. The couple was married 67 years. Harold always said that his greatest achievement was winning the heart of Peggy. They enjoyed a happy life together and produced a family that includes 3 children, 7 grandchildren, and 3 great grandchildren – all of whom live in the Kansas City area.

Dr. Finch graduated from Wyandotte High School (Kansas City, Kansas) in 1951. His post-secondary education included a B.A. in Mechanical Engineering (University of Kansas, 1956), an M.A. in Thermodynamic Science (Ohio State University, 1961) and an Ed.D. (University of Kansas, 1971).

Dr. Finch passed away January 8, 2023, at the age of 89 and is buried at Mount Moriah Cemetery in Kansas City, Missouri. [To read his obituary click here.](#)

Highlights of Finch's diverse and uniquely successful life:

Dr. Harold L. Finch was born in the heart of the Great Depression. As a young boy he often thought of himself as poor, but his wise mother would say to him, "Harold, you are not poor, you are rich! You have God who loves you and you have a good mind. Your future is bright." Her wisdom proved to be prophetic as well as inspirational. Now looking back over his

multi-faceted professional career there is little doubt that God gifted Dr. Finch with rich experiences that would be invaluable in his research and quest for a better understanding of the fundamental elements and essence of success.

During the Cold War, Finch played multiple key roles that helped make Neil Armstrong's epic "one small step" a possibility. First, he was an Air Force intelligence operative who participated in [multiple covert operations](#) that others later said changed the course of the Space Race to favor the United States.

Later, as a civilian, Finch obtained an engineering job with Kansas City's Midwest Research Institute (MRI now MRIGlobal). His innovative space proposals gained him and his employer great notoriety. They were MRI's first aerospace contracts.

In 1962, NASA named him their Apollo Project Director for thermal controls when he was only 29. What Finch invented was the first-of-its-kind computerized system that ultimately [stopped satellites from failing because of temperature-related problems](#), a common occurrence in the beginning years of the Space Age.

Finch's next invention was his greatest. Dubbed "the barbecue roll," his system succeeded at moderating the harsh space temperatures that crewed lunar spacecrafts would encounter. In translunar space, astronauts and their sensitive instruments will have to endure cooking temperatures hundreds of degrees above 0 F on their sun side at the same time as their craft's shaded side is encountering temperatures hundreds of degrees below 0 F. To moderate such radical extremes, Finch's challenging computerized system kept track of nearly 1,000 Apollo surface features and caused the spacecraft to slowly spin (like a chicken on a spit) as it coasted toward the moon. [See the animation](#). A manual version of the barbecue roll was later destined to become the necessary first step NASA would order to help rescue the disabled Apollo 13. The barbecue roll was also used by the space shuttle fleet and is still used today in the planning of space missions to the moon and Mars. There were 400,000 engineers and space scientists working on Project Apollo, but it took the brilliant mind of only one, Harold L. Finch, to figure out how to keep the astronauts and their sensitive instruments from either freezing or frying. It is worthy of note that Finch was the only NASA Apollo Project Director from that era (and likely ever) to have possessed the title of "Mr." All other directors as well as every team member that he personally led had one or more PhD's and/or DSc's.

Leaving his career in science at its peak, Finch made an unlikely move to become a trailblazer in the field of education. He brought his [scientific planning methods](#) to bear when he helped create a new educational paradigm – that of the comprehensive community college (and the creation of the Midwest's first vo-tech certification courses). He was the

first vo-tech director and Dean of Applied Arts for Kansas City's Metropolitan Junior College (MCC, now the Metropolitan Community College system).

His greatest achievement in education was helping to found Johnson County Community College (as the Charter Dean of Development) and of meeting the mandate of being open for classes in an unprecedented record time – one year! In that short period, Finch oversaw the planning and hosting of community surveys, the hiring of the first staff, the creation of the first curriculum (including complicated vo-tech programs), the obtaining of provisional accreditation, using his demographic skills to identify what would be projected to be the school's ideal permanent site decades into the future, and of providing the architectural specifications for the said as-yet non-existent campus. He succeeded on all counts. In turn, Finch became the institution's first Dean of Instruction, first Vice President, first Executive Vice President, and also served as Acting President for ten months. He next left the college to try his hand at entrepreneurship. Today, JCCC is ranked as one of the [nation's top community colleges](#).

After rising to the position of JCCC ACTING PRESIDENT, Finch left education and became an entrepreneur. He co-founded businesses that three times achieved *INC 500* status. The most notable was a business-training company called Padgett-Thompson (uniquely named in honor of the partners' wives' maiden names). Finch once again brought his scientific background into play and revolutionized the way marketing was done within the industry. He used tightly focused analytics (before such things were commonly known about) to attract an unprecedented number of clients. The company's growth was so phenomenal that within a short time the corporation was training more than half a million people every year. Its customers included all Forbes 500 corporations. Three different times did businesses Finch founded earn the distinction of being an Inc 500 corporation.

Achieving financial independence, Finch next created the Wellspring Mission Volunteer Foundation and sponsored more than 1,200 non-clergy church people to go overseas to experience international missions for themselves. The goal was to motivate and inspire the average church goer to put more feet to their faith. Finch said, "The only things that really matter are those of an eternal nature. Those are the things that give joy, peace, satisfaction, and a deep sense of purpose. Life is not about the things we collect. It's about the things we give away." Meanwhile, Finch himself traveled the world presenting more than 750 pro bono success seminars that routinely filled large auditoriums and soccer stadiums on five continents.

At age 80, Finch switched careers again and became the executive producer of a theater-released motion picture, *Unlimited*, that was loosely based upon his life. *Unlimited* can be viewed on [most streaming platforms](#), including Roku, YouTube, and Amazon Prime.

Public Service

Throughout his professional life, Finch believed in giving back. He served as a special advisor for an educational program called Science Pioneers (which morphed into Kansas City's Science City attraction). He served on the Board of Trustees for Shawnee Mission Hospital, the Aviation Resource Board in Washington DC, the Kansas City Museum, Trinity Engineering, Southwest Baptist University, the Southern Baptist Convention, Summit Christian Academy (SCA), and Midwest Research Institute. Finch was a deacon or deacon chairman of every church he ever belonged to. He served on the Kansas Master Planning Commission, was an elected member of the 110 school board (now part of Shawnee Mission District), and his Wellspring Foundation provided the means for thousands of church members across Kansas and Nebraska to travel overseas to experience personal missionary encounters for themselves. inspired countless people to pursue their dreams.

Honors

Finch belonged to 3 engineering fraternities, an honorary Air Force ROTC fraternity, THE AMERICAN ROCKET SOCIETY SIGMA XI, and the Research Society of America. He was the first Man of the Year for the emerging city of Overland Park, Kansas. He was the youngest Principal Engineer in the history of Midwest Research Institute. He received the Distinguished Engineering Service Award (a Kansas University Engineering Hall of Fame honor), was awarded an honorary doctorate in business from Southwest Baptist University (SBU), has a place in the Missouri Entrepreneurs Hall of Fame (Bolivar, MO), and has rooms and halls named in his honor at two educational institutions (SBU and SCA).