



## Jim Finke

March 9, 1927 - March 27, 2020

Jim Finke, veteran of two wars and a pioneer tech executive, died peacefully in Hampton, New Hampshire on March 27. He was 93.

Born Harry James Finke in Buffalo, New York on March 9, 1927, he was the son of Gilbert and Adele (Lutwack) Finke. He attended public schools in Buffalo and joined the Navy in 1944 at the age of 17. Plagued with poor eyesight, he memorized the eye chart, got caught, and was rejected for service. His strong-willed mother interceded with Secretary of the Navy Forrestal who wisely decided that fighting a two-front war was challenging enough. Jim joined the Navy and was trained as one of the first technicians to service and repair the emerging radar technology. Working on the cutting edge of technology would be a lifelong endeavor. Jim served aboard the U.S.S. Arleigh Burke and the U.S.S. Capellotti before mustering out in 1946.

After the Navy, Jim enrolled at Williams College where he majored in physics, sang in the glee club, and joined the university ski team. After an incident lost to the vagaries of time, the Dean suggested that he might want to take a year off from school and decide if he really wanted to be a Williams graduate. Using the skills he'd developed in the Navy, Jim went to work for Philco in Japan. When the Korean War broke out, Philco sent him to Korea to help remove and destroy sensitive technical equipment. Often just a day ahead of the advancing North Korean troops, Jim and his team worked their way down

the Korean peninsula removing the gear and ensuring that it didn't fall into the hands of the enemy.

While Jim was undertaking this dangerous mission, Jim's mother received his draft notice, ordering him back to active duty in the Navy. It took months to convince the draft board that Jim was already heavily engaged in the war effort.

Following his time with Philco, a more mature and worldly Jim re-enrolled at Williams, and graduated in 1951. To his dismay, the Dean informed him that he'd won a scholarship to Oxford, a scholarship that he hadn't applied for.

While cycling through Europe in the summer of 1947, after his freshman year at Williams, Jim met a recent Barnard College graduate named Jo-Anne Lent. While the story changed depending on who was telling it, Jim maintained that he'd crashed into Jo-Anne on his bicycle in Bordeaux. Thus began an on-again off-again courtship that lasted for six years. In the meantime, Jo-Anne got a Master's in Library Science at Columbia University, joined the United States Information Agency as a Librarian, and was posted to Paris and Grenoble, France. The latter months of their courtship were conducted crossing the English channel.

Jim attended Worcester College at Oxford, and a one-year scholarship somehow became a three-year scholarship. Jim and Jo-Anne were married on December 30, 1953 and led an idyllic life in postwar Britain, living in a 17th century thatched-roof cottage off Iffley Road in Oxford. Jim took an M.A. degree in Economics, and in 1954 he and Jo-Anne returned to the United States where Jim enrolled in Harvard Law School. Son Eric and daughters Kristin, Sigrid and Carlin were born in Boston while Jim and Jo-Anne were living there. Jo-Anne worked at the Widener Library at Harvard to put food on the table for the growing family.

Harvard law degree in hand, in 1959 Jim went to work for Raytheon in Boston as a patent attorney. The pay was good, the work was boring. Eager to get back to his technical roots, and determined to get out of the General Counsel's Office and into the business side of business, in 1964 Jim landed a dream job as a Vice President of Motorola's semiconductor division in Phoenix, Arizona. Jim loved technology and new things, and loved being on the cutting edge of a new industry. His technical background, experience as a patent attorney and natural salesmanship gave him a unique skill set to lead Motorola's dominance of the field.

His time in the Navy, his bike tours through Europe, and his experiences in Japan, Korea and England had given Jim the international bug. When Motorola offered him the opportunity to lead their European division in Geneva, Switzerland, he jumped at the chance. The family quickly adapted to the expatriate lifestyle. They rented an old villa on Lake Geneva and spent vacations skiing in the Alps. Jo-Anne, the former diplomat, spoke excellent French and the children became bilingual. Jim studied French at Bull in the China Shop University, but was occasionally able to get his point across.

From Geneva, Motorola sent Jim and the family to Wiesbaden, Germany in 1971, where Jim led European operations. Again, Jo-Anne learned the language, the children did what children do, and Jim learned six stock German phrases which he would roll out without provocation nor fear of correction.

In 1974, Jim left Motorola to take a job in Liege, Belgium with General Electric Medical. Eric and Kristin were off at schools in the U.S. Sigrid and Carlin attended a Belgian convent school, and have never fully forgiven their parents. Jim loved to recount stories of working for legendary GE Chairman

Jack Welch. In one possibly apocryphal tale, Jim and his team were preparing for a visit from Welch. Knowing that the Chairman had a photographic memory and usually knew more than his VPs about their jobs, Jim and the team prepared for the visit for weeks. When the corporate jet landed at the Liege airport, Jim and the team were lined up with the cars ready to whisk Welch to the office for the customary grilling. The airplane door opened, Welch leaned out and yelled "close the goddam factory", the door closed again, and the plane roared off into the dreary Belgian sky.

Jim survived that and many other Welch encounters, and in 1975 GE sent him to Milwaukee to lead their international medical division. Living in Wisconsin was a great way to re-acclimate the family to the United States, but after just a couple of years Jim left GE and took a job with personal computer pioneer Data General in Paris, running their European operations. Jim was an early adapter and saw the future of personal computing sooner than most.

While living in Paris, Jo-Anne and Jim decided they needed a home base for their peripatetic family. Jo-Anne finally decided to buy a house near the beach in North Hampton, New Hampshire. When Jim left Data General in 1980, they relocated there and Jim set up shop as a consultant, specializing in taking companies in the burgeoning high-tech sector international. This led to a number of consultancies for leading companies, and in 1981 Jim was chosen to be president of Commodore, which was coming out with their revolutionary Commodore 64 personal computer. Jim took the company public on the New York Stock Exchange.

After leaving Commodore, Jim went back to consulting and did work for companies like Peter Norton and spent some time working for Sheldon Adelson at COMDEX.

Meanwhile, the children grew up and had families of their own, and Jim and

Jo-Anne enjoyed hosting them all at their house near the beach. Jo-Anne passed away in 1996 and Jim settled down to a comfortable retirement in New Hampshire.

In 2004 Jim met Rya Zobel, a federal judge from Boston, and in 2009 he sold the house in North Hampton and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts to be closer to her. They enjoyed friends, music, travel, fine food, especially when Rya cooked it, and each other's company.

Jim was a lifelong learner. He loved books, and enjoyed reading about them as much as reading them. He loved words, and had an enormous Oxford English Dictionary on a pedestal in the living room - the better to pepper his children and grandchildren with a word of the day, and to look up each and every new word and its etymology. He loved cheese and beer, good food of every provenance, spoke to strangers waiting in lines to the horror of his grandchildren, and was irrepressible to the end. He had a high tolerance for eccentricity but no tolerance for mediocrity. In his later years he referred to himself as a bull-she-tear, with phony French accent. And he was. As he told his daughter, I take a black and white picture and put it into technicolor. There was no subject beyond his purview, no idea not worth investigating, no scheme not worth pursuing. In the final stage of his life, he was upbeat and happy. As Malcolm said about the Thane of Cawdor, nothing in his life became him like the leaving it. He loved his family and he loved life and his like will not be seen again.

He is survived by his partner Rya Zobel ; by son Eric (Junko); daughter Kristin Nealon (Jim); daughter Sigrid; and daughter Carlin (Brian); and by nine grandchildren Rory; Katherine; Maureen; Liam; Toscana; Aidan; William; Halle and Mireia.

# Tribute Wall



“ *Jim Finke*

September 18, 2022 at 12:49 AM



“ *Between 1997-1999, Jim organized concerts in Phoenix Arizona as part of the International Foundation for Culture and Civilization. He hired me as his artistic director in charge of gathering musicians to perform for retired population in venues such as the Phoenix Art Museum. It was a fantastic idea, sponsored by a wealthy German friend providing great classical music and lunches for the less privileged. Jim was a wonderful man who loved music and people. I have great memories of him. Last I saw him was around 2003/4. My condolences to his family. Baruch Meir, pianist (faculty ASU).*

**Baruch Meir** - April 25, 2021 at 02:20 AM

BG

“ *1 file added to the album Memories Album*



**Brian Gilmore** - April 19, 2020 at 10:52 PM

LA

*I did not know my cousin 'Jimmy' very well, I can assure you , that was my loss*

*Linda Lutwack Ablin*

**Linda Ablin** - August 12, 2020 at 06:00 PM



*Jim was an impressive personality warm friendly and erudite! He has had a great impact in the life of our family when he hired my dad to come and work for Motorola in Wiesbaden in the early 70's We moved from the Netherlands to Germany.*

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**Kees Zachariasse** - June 01, 2024 at 05:03 PM

JS

“ *Dear Family,  
Please accept my condolences and my deepest sympathy.  
I am so sorry for your loss. My heart goes out to you and your family in your time of sorrow.  
Jim was a special person, very thoughtful and knowledgeable, for him to give up on his books was very difficult.... Talking to him was a great joy, we had many shared opinions, which we were exchanging during short time of visit.  
He'll be missed.  
Jahansouz Shokri MD. FACP.*

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**Jahansouz Shokri** - April 06, 2020 at 10:45 AM

DM

“ *Jim and I were fellow students at Harvard Law School and worked together as clerks in the patent law firm, Porter Chittick and Russel in Boston.  
My condolences to the family and especially to Eric, who was in a play group with the two children (Philip and Julia) of me and my wife, Jill.  
David W. Maher*

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**David Maher** - April 05, 2020 at 12:39 PM

MF

“ I didn't know Jim, but our families were connected in a rather interesting fashion....my dearly departed brother, David, was the (adopted) father to Halle and Mireira. He LOVED them so much....and they loved him. Knowing David's propensity to intimacy and "family" he possibly knew Jim. I'm so sorry Sigrid.....My mother was gone last July, as you know.....at the age of 93. From my heart to yours.

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**Mary Farrell** - April 01, 2020 at 10:29 PM

BC

“ An endearing story Jim told:  
When he was a youngster, maybe about eight years old, Jim had discovered the joy of classical music. So he went to the local librarian and asked."Do you have any arias?"

*Betsy Collins*

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**Betsy Collins** - April 01, 2020 at 03:26 PM

KN

*Betsy, I thought I had heard all Dad's stories but that is a new one for me! Thank-you,  
Kristin*

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**Kristin Nealon** - April 02, 2020 at 10:25 AM

PB

“ *In reading Jimmy’s obituary, I could not help remembering our times in Europe. I was working at some menial job in Brussels, barely making ends meet, and cousin Jimmy would come to my rescue calling to take me out to a great restaurant. At family reunions, his stories would keep my husband and me continually intrigued and entertained. His searing intelligence, wit, and charm will be sorely missed.*

*Patsy (Lutwack) Bloom*

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**Patricia Bloom** - March 31, 2020 at 04:23 PM