

Robert Joseph Finch

April 4, 1930 - August 9, 2016



Robert "Bob" Finch, beloved husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, died of a brain hemorrhage on August 9 at Swedish Hospital. He was 86.

Bob had a wide variety of interests and an adventurous nature. His many pursuits included archery, photography, and sailing. In 1947, at the age of 17, he talked his way on to the Dagmar Salen M/S, a Merchant Marine ship traveling to China, and spent the summer as a deckhand.

Bob built his first boat in the 1950s from plans in Popular Mechanics and thus began a lifelong interest in sailing that led to a passion for designing, building and racing his own sailboats. He designed 16 production boats, including boats for Catalina and Islander Yachts. He also designed and built numerous custom sailboats. He began building his last sailboat, Swan Song, at the age of 71, based on the Islander 30 design. He finished four years later.

Beginning with a collection of the earliest National Geographic magazines, he launched Bob Finch Books in the 1970s and became a well-known dealer of the magazine. He developed an interest in polar exploration and renamed his business High Latitude, earning a reputation as a noted expert on rare Arctic and Antarctic books and artifacts. In a tribute dinner for Bob in 1999, cardiologist and collector William D. Priester summed up Bob's contribution to the preservation of Arctic exploration this way, "I think everyone here would agree that no one has done more for the exciting field of polar collecting than Bob. He is congenitally honest and forthright... his humor is wry. His advice is always reliable and trustworthy. ... I want to extend my heartiest congratulations to the finest bookman I have ever known."

Robert Joseph Finch was born to Margaret and Robert Arnold Finch of Houston, Texas on April 4, 1930. He grew up in Los Angeles, California and married Carol, his high school sweetheart, in 1950. They raised their five children in Torrance, California. He was a captain on the Culver City Fire Department, retiring in 1980. He and Carol then moved to Bainbridge Island, where they built three houses in the ensuing years. He and Carol traveled extensively, including two photo safaris to Africa and a cruise around the world.

Bob is survived by his wife, Carol, their children David Finch, Linda (Nelson) Dueñas, Rick (Ellen) Finch, Ken (Melissa) Finch, and Margie (Willy) Brooke, as well as six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

A private memorial service will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Bainbridge Island Fire Department.