

## Remembering Paul Winchell— A Man With Heart To Spare



(Courtesy Roger Passero).

Remember Paul Winchell? Sure you do—if you are a child of the '50s. Who of that period does not recall ventriloquist dummies Jerry Mahoney and Knucklehead Smiff—the “headliners” of Winchell’s popular NBC Saturday morning kids show (*The Paul Winchell Show*)? Later generations of kids have no clue of him, but millions of them have heard him—whether they know it or not—as the voice of Tigger in the Disney animated kid classics *Winnie the Pooh* and the *Blustery Day* and *Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too*, for which he received a Grammy in 1974. Son of an immigrant tailor, a shy child with a pronounced stutter and a polio survivor, Winchell (formerly Wilchinsky) went on to voice other familiar cartoon characters, including Gargamel (*The Smurfs*), Fleegle (*The Banana Splits Adventure*) and many, many more. Also a talented, sometimes actor, Winchell appeared on hit TV shows including *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *The Brady Bunch*.

And not to bury the lead, but here’s something that almost nobody knows: Winchell, who died in 2005 at age 83, was also an inventor and the holder of some 30 patents.

That is impressive on its own, but among those patents was U.S. Patent # 3097366 for the design—with assistance from noted physician Dr. Henry Heimlich; yes, that Heimlich—of the first implantable, artificial heart. Other medical patents awarded include those resulting from Winchell’s humanitarian work for what is now known as the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and the American Red Cross. Patents awarded for a blood plasma defroster and a piezo-electric diaphragm were a direct result of his work for those organizations. And, Winchell, then in his

50s, found time to attend and graduate from The Acupuncture Research College of Los Angeles in 1974; he also worked as a medical hypnotist at the Gibbs Institute in Hollywood.

And while some may think it a stretch to cite Winchell in *Power Play*, his heart pump design and aforementioned piezo-electric diaphragm are concrete examples of power transmission accomplishment.

Quoting (regarding his artificial heart design) from the Winchell website ([paulwinchell.net](http://paulwinchell.net)):

“I applied for a patent and then I awaited the examiner’s report. The initial search revealed that the device was cleared for patent and no prior art had been found. I filed in the summer of 1956. It took me almost eight years to convince the examiner of the device’s possibilities. He, too, thought I was wacky, but he finally acceded, making me the first inventor to ever receive a U.S. patent for an artificial heart.”

Winchell, upon request, subsequently donated his patent to the University of Utah. However, a debate eventually arose over how much of Winchell’s design was actually used by Dr. Robert Jarvik—commonly credited as the originator of the artificial heart. Jarvik at that time was working with a team at the school on his own heart device. Over the years, Jarvik has long denied that any of Winchell’s design elements were incorporated into the device he fabricated for humans—the Jarvik-7—which was successfully implanted for the first time in human guinea pig Barney Clark in 1982.

But the plot thickens, according to the *Internet Accuracy Project* website ([accuracyproject.org](http://accuracyproject.org)):

“After Jarvik was repeatedly—and erroneously—referred to as the inventor of the artificial heart, Heimlich

made a television talk show appearance (*The Merv Griffin Show*) alongside Winchell to confirm not only the story of Winchell’s early work and patent of his artificial heart device, but also to verify the fact that Winchell’s work had occurred many years before Jarvik’s artificial heart was produced. (During the appearance Heimlich stated): ‘I saw the heart. I saw the patent and I saw the (application) letters. The basic principle used in Winchell’s heart and Jarvik’s heart is exactly the same.’”

And this, too, from the *Internet Accuracy Project*: “Contrary to popular public perception, the artificial heart was not invented by (Jarvik). Documents from the United States Patent Office show that February 6, 1961, Paul Winchell filed for a patent on his artificial heart. He was granted a patent on July 16, 1963. (The patent paperwork explains in part): ‘This invention relates to an artificial heart and, more particularly, to an artificial heart capable of substituting for a natural human heart in moving blood through a human body...and in which the moving parts are sealed within a container made of a material which is non-toxic and non-irritating to the human or animal body and inert with respect to body fluids, the several moving parts being made of tough, durable material which will not wear out in use, such as nylon, and the like.’”

And did we mention his invention of the first disposable razor?

Not bad for someone perhaps best known as Knucklehead Smiff’s alter ego.

And so, as Tigger would say: “Ta-ta for now.”