

Fascia Insights

Remembering Thomas W. Findley:
Physician, Researcher, Rolfer®, Visionary Leader

Contributors: Jason DeFilippis, Libby Eason, Ed Hemberger,
Eric Jacobson, Helene Langevin, and Robert Schleip

ABSTRACT *Close associates contribute to this remembrance of Thomas W. Findley, MD, PhD, who wore multiple hats as a Rolfer, researcher (fascia, rehabilitation medicine, structural integration), physician, editor, and organizing force behind Fascia Research Congresses. Findley was indeed a visionary, and he propelled the understanding of fascia in research and manual therapies well into the future. Those of us who are interested in the properties and mechanisms of fascia will be forever indebted to him for his contributions not only to the field of structural integration, but all manual therapies and basic science research as they are related to each other.*

The Rolwing® Structural Integration (SI) and fascia research community recently lost a great friend and contributor with the passing of Thomas W. Findley, MD, PhD, from cancer on April 18, 2021. Findley wore many hats and was instrumental in many activities that bear upon our community and our work. On the interweaving of his many roles, Findley wrote the following to describe his work in a biographical summary: “As a

physiatrist he treats many disorders of the musculoskeletal system. As a scientist he strives to understand their pathophysiology in order to develop focused treatments and prophylactic regimens. Fascia, part of the connective tissues that permeate the human body, may be the unifying structure and concept that is essential to elucidate the mechanisms of these dysfunctions” (Hoff & Findley 2016, 32).

Findley described his career as connecting clinical practice, basic theory, and applied measurements in rehabilitation research, with a heavy dose of mathematical modeling.

This memorial is a tapestry woven from pieces various close associates shared about Findley's life, career, contributions, and the indelible impression he made.

The Person

Findley did not lack for accomplishments. He earned an MD in 1977 (Georgetown University), did a residency physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Minnesota, subsequently earning a PhD in 1983 in rehabilitation medicine. He trained with the Guild for Structural Integration (GSI; basic training in 1991) and the Rolf Institute® (advanced certification in 1998). He had a significant career as both a clinician and researcher, and was also an educator, teaching at the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ; later merged with Rutgers University), and one of the propelling forces behind the Fascia Research Congress (FRC). Findley described his career as connecting clinical practice, basic theory, and applied measurements in rehabilitation research, with a heavy dose of mathematical modeling.

Born on October 3, 1949 in Columbus, Ohio, Findley came from a family lineage of folks who, in the face of poverty and hardship, were high achieving, resourced, and ethical. He was smart but also loved building things and working with his hands. His inquisitive nature needed to try things, but was satisfied and ready to move on once he succeeded at an endeavor: a lucky trait for the child who once successfully built a bomb.

He studied psychology as an undergraduate and was active in protesting the Vietnam War. He was subject to the draft, but as a Quaker was granted conscientious objector status and did alternative service. After working as a mechanic for a while after college, he realized he wanted to fix people not cars, so he entered the field of rehabilitation medicine.

Findley lived with a steadfast reference to integrity, his Quaker faith, curiosity, humility, and an unwavering commitment to help alleviate human suffering. His "insistence" for novelty, and on giving himself to his interests, often compelled him to take risks, disrupt his life, and find success on the other end. Besides anti-

war activism, Findley advocated for disability access and the establishment of rehabilitation centers. He learned to be "radical but untouchable" (Becker 2018), a trait that allowed him later in his career to keep valuable medical positions while introducing alternative ideas into the system. Outside of his career and activism, family was important, and this included his first wife Sally, his two children Molly and Peter, his second wife Patricia, and one grandchild, Benjamin.

The diagnosis of prostate cancer came in 2010. With typical zeal, Findley went to work to find out how best to pursue treatment. He utilized allopathic approaches and participated in clinical trials while also utilizing alternative approaches involving diet and exercise. True to his nature, his research was not just personal: in looking for exercise interventions for his cancer, he studied Delorme's research from the mid-1900s and picked up on an overlooked element – that certain types of muscle contraction can soften tissue. This led to a project studying two different types of muscle contraction and how those affect muscles differently (Hoff and Findley 2016).

Jason DeFilippis notes: "In these last few years, I was able to spend a little bit of time with Tom. It was beautiful to see him slow down and give his attention to himself. The last few times I saw him were very sweet: he was vulnerable, generous, and funny. I wondered where that great mind was taking him."



Tom Findley hiking at Yosemite, 2001.

The Clinician – Physician and Rolfier

Findley was a physician and researcher before he became a Rolfier, but he had learned about Rolfing SI in 1969 through Sharon Wheeler and Richard Wheeler and went through the Ten Series between college and medical school. One of his mentors at Georgetown University medical school was Frank Wenger, MD, who invited Ida Rolf, PhD, and Richard Wheeler to work on his patients, demonstrations that convinced Findley that Rolfing SI has a role to play in physical medicine.



With Libby Eason (then President of the Ida P. Rolf Research® Foundation) at the fourth FRC in 2015, holding the proceedings book, *Fascia Research IV: Basic Science and Implications for Conventional and Complementary Health Care*, co-edited by Findley.

While Director of Research at the Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation in New Jersey (1988-1996), he organized a training for nine Kessler physical therapists (PTs) and himself, taught by the GSI in 1991. Subsequent to that, the PTs did SI work on patients, and Kessler had a structural integrator on staff for fifteen years. Findley was also a tenured professor at UMDNJ, and continued to teach there (and elsewhere) after he left Kessler in 2001 to work for the Veterans Administration Medical Center in East Orange, New Jersey, first as the Associate Director

(Hoff and Findley 2016), he expressed disappointments that few SI practitioners wanted to join him at the VA or take VA referrals.] One application was for treatment of anxiety: ease and balance in the body is a condition for the same in perception. His primary research at the VA was in unexplained illness; this work was broad, and yielded very good research. One would often see him with a mountain of articles on his desk; he would speed-read these by the end of the day, while also accomplishing other tasks and assisting colleagues in their research.

clinical outcomes of our work. In his own practice, he'd bring clients to the VA to make use of various assessment protocols to gauge balance, nerve conduction, and the like.

Working with severely injured patients, his SI work could have life-changing results. Ed Hemberger recalls seeing a video from the VA hospital where a Ten Series helped a veteran with a spinal cord injury regain the ability to stand. Findley was also credited for his work with Christopher Reeves, the actor (Superman) who was paralyzed in a riding accident. With Findley's help, Reeves was able to get enough muscle strength to have periods off of his ventilator. This story is shared in Reeves' autobiography, and also depicted in a movie about the actor.

Jason DeFilippis remembers that Findley was genuinely excited about his research, his practice with fascia and SI, and the evolution of the systems that contextualize human progress. He says, "I look back and see that what seemed to me a very clinical approach to life was actually imbued with a deep love, and respect for humanity. He was a kind boss; always teaching, and fostering the best in me and in his colleagues."

Research and Other Publications

Findley had a prolific career as a researcher with an abundance of studies as author or co-author. These included studies into structural integration, manual therapy, rehabilitation medicine, and fascia. In a

Findley noted, "As I am uniquely positioned between the science and clinical practice of both fascia and exercise, collecting data on both clinical aspects and the cellular mechanism has become a high priority for my research."

for Research at the War-related Illness and Injury Study Center. At the VA, he conducted research and did clinical work treating patients with pain.

As he had done at Kessler, Findley brought SI into his VA hospital by getting it credentialed, obtaining an NIH (National Institutes of Health) grant, then doing sessions. [In an interview with this journal

Findley also had a private practice in Roling SI with offices in New York and New Jersey. He brought his understanding as a physician to bear on his Roling work, utilizing a critical eye as to whether Roling sessions or other care was needed. He felt Rolers would benefit from more engagement with the healthcare system, especially as we lack assessment of the

personal statement, Findley (2016) noted, "As I am uniquely positioned between the science and clinical practice of both fascia and exercise, collecting data on both clinical aspects and the cellular mechanism has become a high priority for my research."

With an eye to how SI could be validated through research, Findley shepherded

and had senior authorship on an article (James et al. 2009) based on a huge amount of clinical data compiled by Helen James, a Rolfer and PT. He also initiated a follow-up study on a larger selection of James' case records, Eric Jacobson, PhD, and Katja Bartsch, are currently preparing that for publication. Moreover, case studies on the effects of Rolfing SI were published in FRC proceedings. Findley reviewed most of the published abstracts and also gathered many of the other articles published in those same books and/or collaborated with others who were scientific committee chairs of individual FRCs.

Findley co-authored several papers on the viscoelastic properties of muscles and associated fasciae, and the characterization of the stresses and strains experienced by these tissues during manual therapies. He understood early on that the nascent field of 'fascia research' would need input from many angles, and his own research also reflects this collaborative and multidisciplinary approach. One of his papers co-authored with Hans Chaudhry, PhD, and others was awarded with the George W. Northup, DO, Medical Writing Award by the American Osteopathic Association in 2009. This paper, with the title "Three-Dimensional Mathematical Model for Deformation of Human Fasciae in Manual Therapy" contains a calculation of the amount of force needed for a plastic deformation of different fascial tissues in the human body. According to Robert Schleip, PhD, co-author of the paper, "This paper has become one of the most frequently mis-quoted publications in social media debates around fascia-oriented therapies. Many subsequent authors have used our calculations as evidence that it is impossible to induce a lengthening effect with manual therapy on dense fasciae, such as the iliotibial tract. While we showed in this paper, that such an effect is very unlikely when examining fascia in vitro – i.e., on a cadaver tissue analysis – we clearly discussed that when working on living tissues, many additional responses may be possible to account for a palpable tissue elongation."

In his later years, the interaction between fascia and cancer became a research subject, following on ideas proposed by A. T. Still, DO. The effect of exercise on reducing the spread of cancer was one research topic, where Findley presented at the 2015 Joint Conference on Acupuncture,



Findley holding his lifetime achievement award from the Ida P. Rolf Research Foundation at the fourth FRC in 2015. Pictured with fascia researcher Antonio Stecco, MD, PhD.

Oncology, and Fascia (referenced below with video link. Videos are available at <https://oshercenter.org/joint-conference-2015-video-presentations/>).

Findley was the first board president of the Ida P. Rolf Research Foundation (<https://rolfresearchfoundation.org/>), which was established by the Rolf Institute as an independent organization in 2007 and announced at the first FRC. With an eye to supporting the development of future researchers, he authored a series of articles on research design and analysis. These can be found at <https://rolfresearchfoundation.org/resources/fascia-research-resources> (click on the ^ at the end of the first paragraph on that webpage to open the substantial list of elements to consider to create and conduct a credible research project related to SI or fascia).

Together with Jacobson, Schleip, and a few others, Findley also founded the Fascia Research Society (FRS; see <https://fasciaresearchsociety.org/>) in 2012. It began under the umbrella of the Ida P. Rolf Research Foundation, and was spun off as an independent organization that includes the Fascia Research Congress, effective June 1, 2020.

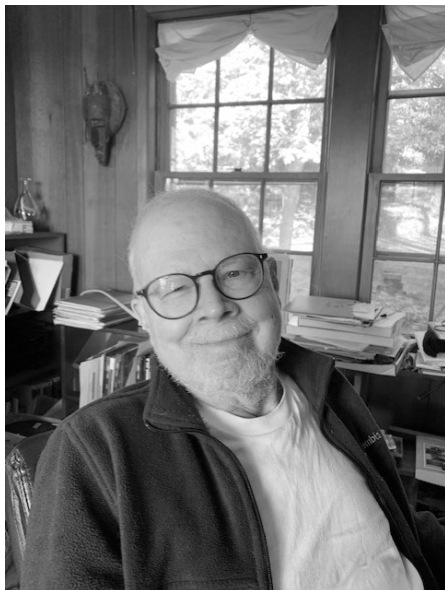
Findley also used his research background to contribute in important editorial roles. He was co-editor with Schleip of all the Fascia Research proceedings books (I-IV) associated with the first four FRCs and one

of the co-editors of the leading textbook in the fascia field, *Fascia - The Tensional Network of the Human Body* (Schleip et al. 2012) and its recent update in 2020. He served in an editorial capacity for various publications (including *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork*, *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapy*, and *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*). Articles and abstracts from the 5th Fascia Research Congress in Berlin, 2018, were published in the *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* (Elsevier).

Networker Behind the FRC and Other Inter-Disciplinary Congresses

Findley brought his pioneering spirit and excellent networking skills to bear as he closely collaborated with Schleip, Jacobson, Stephen Evanko, PhD, and several others to submit a respective conference support proposal to the NIH. The concept was to bring leading academic scientists from different fields related to fascial connective tissues together to exchange their insights and questions related to aspects relevant to manual and movement therapies.

The result was the first Fascia Research Congress, held at Harvard University Conference Center in 2007. It was hugely successful and triggered a lineage of



In his study, 2020.

subsequent international FRCs, for all of which Findley served as one of the leading organizers and a member of the scientific committee: Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009; Vancouver, Canada, 2012; Washington, DC, 2015; and Berlin, Germany, 2018. Participant numbers have been steadily growing, reaching beyond 1,000 (plus waiting list) at the most recent congress in Berlin.

The FRCs have put fascia research into the hands of SI practitioners, and also brought SI into scientific discourse. Since that time, many collaborations have expanded understanding for both researchers and manual therapists and built lasting bridges between the two worlds.

Helene Langevin, MD, shares:

It is not an exaggeration to say that Tom was a visionary. I first met Tom in 2007 when the first FRC was being conceived. It was a totally new idea, and to everyone's astonishment was pulled off with over 700 attendees, overflow room, and groundbreaking presentations. The meeting was significant for bringing together scientists from radically different disciplines (biomechanics, cell biology, anatomy) and clinicians with expertise in the 'hands-on' knowledge of fasciae that is completely missing from conventional medical education and practice. There was electricity in the crowd, and the atmosphere at times felt more like a World Series game than a scientific meeting. It was an eye opener for many, and started a whole field.

Findley also served as close collaborator and keynote presenter for the quadrennial congress series Connective Tissues in Sports Medicine, held at Ulm University in 2013 and 2017, and then most recently at the Technical University of Munich in 2021. Working with Langevin, he was one of the organizers of the Joint Conference on Acupuncture, Oncology and Fascia of 2015, at Osher Institute for Integrative Studies, Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital, that brought together the Fascia Research Society (at that time under the umbrella of IPRRF and part of the 2015 Fascia Research Congress), Society for Acupuncture Research, and Society for Integrative Oncology. Once again, there were 'lightbulb' moments among the various presenters, discussants, and audience participants that can only happen in this kind of multidisciplinary setting.

Another unique contribution from Findley was the creation of academic think tanks. The first one, held the day after the Fascia, Acupuncture and Oncology Congress in 2015, invited collaboration between several of the keynote speakers. Findley made sure they had excellent food and wine, and managed to motivate them to start writing a consensus statement. After several months of additional work, this was published in a prestigious academic journal (Langevin et al. 2016). The second think tank, associated with the Connective Tissues in Sports Medicine 2017 congress, produced a consensus statement on fascia research and sports medicine (Zügel et al. 2018). A third think tank, again inspired by Findley, happened at the FRC in Berlin in 2018 and focused on the cellular dynamics of fascial tissues and a related publication is close to completion.

In closing out our memorial to Findley and all that he contributed to the fields of Rolwing SI and fascia research, Langevin shares:

Tom's energy and eternal optimism permeated all he did, but especially his total commitment to advance the field of fascia research. Just thinking about Tom's contagious smile is enough to brighten anyone's day. His bravery in facing the challenges of his illness was truly amazing, as was his curiosity and enthusiasm for new ideas. He is leaving a huge void.

You can read much more about Tom in the interviews conducted for this journal (DeFilippis 2018a, Hoff and Findley 2016), and in his biography (Becker 2018) and our review of that (DeFilippis 2018b). The

reference list below includes those as well as a selection of his research papers and other contributions.

Jason DeFilippis is a Certified Advanced Rolfer in New York City. He worked with Findley in 2004, as a research assistant at the VA hospital in East Orange, New Jersey, as well as assisting him with his private Rolwing practice.

Libby Eason, Certified Advanced Rolfer, Faculty Member, current chair of the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute® Board of Directors, and past president (2012-2019) of the Ida P. Rolf Research Foundation worked with Findley assisting in FRC production, FRS creation, as well as managing organizational and board business during those years.

Ed Hemberger is an SI practitioner in New Jersey. He assisted Findley in his SI offices in New York and New Jersey for about a decade (from around 2005 until Findley's retirement) and conducted SI research under Findley's tutelage that resulted in a paper and poster presentation at the 2007 FRC.

Eric Jacobson, PhD, MPH, Certified Advanced Rolfer has a private practice in Rolwing SI in Boston and teaches medical anthropology and investigates alternative medicines at Harvard Medical School. He worked with Findley in formation of the first FRC in 2007, and conducted the first NIH funded clinical study on SI, Structural Integration for Chronic Low Back Pain. He collaborated with Findley on the first FRC in 2007, and is currently President of the Ida P. Rolf Research Foundation.

Helene M. Langevin, MD, is the Director of the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health at the National Institutes of Health. She worked with Findley on organizing the first Fascia Research Congress in 2007, as well as the Joint Conference on Fascia, Acupuncture and Oncology in 2015 and participated in many of the FRCs.

Robert Schleip, PhD, is a Certified Advanced Rolfer, fascia researcher, and Executive Director of the Fascia Research Project. He worked with Findley on numerous congresses, co-authoring four peer-reviewed journal publications, and as a co-editor of Fascia - The Tensional Network of the Human Body and contributor to the second edition, as well as Fascia Research (I-IV).

Selected References

Biographical

Becker, S. P. 2018. *Fascia pioneer: Dr. Thomas W. Findley, Jr. A Lifetime of Stories.*

DeFilippis, J. 2018a. What shapes a life? An interview with fascia pioneer Thomas Findley. *Structure, Function, Integration: The Journal of the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute* 46(3): 67-70.

DeFilippis, J. 2018b. A Life of Mind and Action. *Structure, Function, Integration: The Journal of the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute* 46(3): 93-94.

Findley, T. W. 2016. Curriculum vitae, September 2016. Shared by Robert Schleip.

Hoff, A. and T. Findley. 2016. Fascia Pioneer: An Interview with Thomas Findley. *Structural Integration: The Journal of the Rolf Institute* 44(4): 28-32.

Findley's Research and Other Contributions

Avila Gonzalez, C. A., M. Driscoll, R. Schleip, S. Wearing, E. Jacobson, T. W. Findley, and W. Klingler. 2018. Frontiers in fascia research. *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* 22(4):873-880.

Chaitow, L., T. W. Findley, P. Huijing, and R. Schleip (Eds.). 2012. *Fascia: The tensional network of the human body.* London: Elsevier Urban & Fischer.

Chaitow, L., T. W. Findley, and R. Schleip (Eds.). 2012. *Fascia research III: Basic science and implications for conventional and complementary health care.* Munich: Keiner Press.

Chaudhry, H., B. Bukiet, E.Z. Anderson, J. Burch, and T. W. Findley. 2017. Muscle strength and stiffness in resistance exercise: Force transmission in tissues. *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* 21(3):517-522.

Chaudhry, H., B. Bukiet, Z. Ji, A. Stecco, and T. W. Findley. 2014. The deformations experienced in the human skin, adipose tissue and fascia in manual medicine. *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* 114(10):780-787.

Chaudhry, H., B. Bukiet, M. Roman, A. Stecco, and T. W. Findley. 2013. Squeeze film lubrication for non-Newtonian fluids with application to manual medicine. *Journal of Biorheology* 50(3):191-202. Available at www.academia.edu/13883926/Squeeze_film_lubrication_for_non-Newtonian_fluids_with_application_to_manual_medicine.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Tom was a visionary . . . [At] the first FRC . . . there was electricity in the crowd, and the atmosphere at times felt more like a World Series game than a scientific meeting. It was an eye opener for many, and started a whole field.

Chaudhry, H., M. Roman, A. Stecco, and T. W. Findley. 2012 Apr. Mathematical model of fiber orientation in anisotropic fascia layers at large displacements. *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* 16(2):158-164.

Chaudhry, H., Z. Ji, N. Shenoy, and T. W. Findley. 2009. Viscoelastic stresses on anisotropic annulus fibrosus of lumbar disk under compression, rotation and flexion in manual treatment. *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* 13(2):182-191.

Chaudhry, H., R. Schleip, Z. Ji, B. Bukiet, M. Maney, and T. W. Findley. 2008. Three-dimensional mathematical model for deformation of human fasciae in manual therapy. *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* 108(8):378-390.

Chaudhry, H., B. Bukiet, T. W. Findley. 2008 Dec. Mathematical analysis of applied loads on skeletal muscles during manual therapy. *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* 108(12):680-8.

Findley, T. W. and R. Schleip (eds.). 2007. *Fascia research: Basic science and implications for conventional and complementary health care.* Elsevier Urban & Fischer.

James, H., L. Castaneda, M.E. Miller, and T. W. Findley. 2009 (July). Rolfing structural integration treatment of cervical spine dysfunction. *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* 13(3): 229-238. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19524847/>

Langevin, H., P. Keely, J. Mao, L.M. Hodge, R. Schleip, G. Deng, B. Hintz, M.A. Swartz, B.A. de Valois, S. Zick, and T. W. Findley. 2016. *Connecting (t)issues: How research in fascia biology can impact integrative oncology.* *Cancer Research* 76(21):6159-6162.

Schleip, R., T. W. Findley, L. Chaitow, and P. Huijing (eds.). 2012. *Fascia - The Tensional Network of the Human Body.* Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone Elsevier.

Schleip, R., P. A. Huijing, P. Hollander, and T. W. Findley (eds.). 2009. *Fascia research II: Basic science and implications for conventional and complementary health care.* Elsevier Urban & Fischer.

Wearing S. C., R. Schleip, L. Chaitow, W. Klingler, T. W. Findley (eds.). 2015. *Fascia research IV: Basic science and implications for conventional and complementary health care.* Munich: Keiner Press.

Zügel, M., C. N. Maganaris, J. Wilke, K. Jurkat-Rott, W. Klingler, S.C. Wearing, T. W. Findley, M. F. Barbe, J. M. Steinacker, A. Vleeming, W. Bloch, R. Schleip, and P. W. Hodges. 2018. Fascial tissue research in sports medicine: From molecules to tissue adaptation, injury and diagnostics: Consensus statement. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 52(23):1497. Available at <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/52/23/1497.full.pdf>