

Hidden Faces

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Dr. Matthew Radnofsky (1924-1993), the developer of the Apollo, Gemini, and Mercury space suits and gear was a research scientist at NASA who also served as an adjunct faculty member at The University of Houston in the late 1970's. At the time, NASA, as well as most other organizations, was not citing the names of individuals with major accomplishments, as we have seen in the recent movie and book, "Hidden Figures."

I had the privilege of working with Dr. Radnofsky at The University of Houston before going into work in the fiber industry. With him, nothing was ever impossible. Every day when he arrived at school, he had a list of new ideas that could range from mattresses and bedding for burn patients to using the liquid cooled garment (LCG) for industrial workers outside in hot environments. The students loved his knowledge and enthusiasm.

The lack of recognition of Dr. Radnofsky's work hit me when I went to the 2005 exhibition, Extreme Textiles: Designing for High Performance, at The Smithsonian's Cooper Hewitt Museum in New York City. The LCG developed by Dr. Matthew Radnofsky, was on display in a glass case without credit being given to the developer.

Recently, I found a video documentary featuring footage that I did not know existed. It was done by his granddaughter, Caroline Radnofsky, on October 15, 2015, and titled "Putting Man on the Moon." You can retrieve it from <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeracorrespondent/2015/10/putting-men-moon-151013082436203.html>. The documentary is an excellent resource for students to gain insights into the space suit developer and what went into the development. I share this in the hope that the documentary can help to inspire today's design students, as well as faculty, and illustrate the systems approach in product design in our profession. Dr. Radnofsky is pictured below on a tour of NASA in Clear Lake, Texas.



Left to Right: Claude Laymen, owner Jen-Cel-Lite; Kaye Crippen; Matthew Radnofsky; Sally Boyle; and Gertrude Boyle, Chair of the Board of Columbia Sportswear