

OBITUARY
TRIBUTE TO GLENN ELLIS WEISFELD –
ISHE’S SCHOLAR, COLLEAGUE, AND FRIEND

Nancy L. Segal¹, John Richer²

¹California State University, Fullerton, CA, USA

²Formerly of the University of Oxford and the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, UK



Glenn E. Weisfeld, *1943 †2025

Detroit, Michigan, 2022. Courtesy of Carol Weisfeld.

We write this tribute with a heavy heart. Dr. Glenn Ellis Weisfeld was a beloved scholar, colleague, and friend to the membership of the ISHE community. Thus, his triple hybrid stature warrants a tripartite tribute to his passing and a tripartite celebration of his life.

Glenn the Scholar

Glenn researched and wrote about many topics, among them emotions, marriage, and olfaction. His curriculum vitae boasts seven books and over one hundred articles and book chapters. Rather than list these contributions, it is more important to say that Glenn was always a willing reader and critic, and I (NLS) took his opinions very seriously. I was thrilled when he agreed to author a commentary on my 2023 paper on parenting (Weisfeld, 2024). And I was

gratified when he requested a copy of a 2025 twin-based article on humor production that I had co-authored (Greengross et al., 2025)—sadly, our exchange over that paper was in August 2025, the last time we were in touch.

As Glenn said on his website, his “early research was on peer relations among adolescents and employed observational, questionnaire, and cross-cultural methods to discover correlates of popularity and dominance.” Unlike many human ethologists, Glenn first trained in the more solid ground of zoology, before moving to the scientifically shakier ground of psychology. To Robert Hinde, the term “Human Ethology” was an oxymoron: since the comparative approach was essential, one could not have an ethology of a single species. However, one can retain the comparative approach while studying one species, and Glenn’s early training helped him do just that. However, he was also aware that studying humans required special methods, so he combined observational work with cross-cultural studies and asking questions of his subjects. His first chosen group (adolescents) was one for which some people might have expected that grunts and snorts would have greeted his questions! But eventually, and with the help of the evolutionary framework within which all behaviour needs to be set, this work culminated in Glenn’s 1999 book, *“Evolutionary principles of human adolescence”*. Subsequently, his work branched out into cross-cultural studies of marital relations, humor (a necessary ingredient of lasting marital relations?), and olfaction in kin recognition. Glenn also continued his interest in peer relations, and social dominance including studies of the emotions of pride and shame. His interest in linking animal and human studies was shown in the book edited with his wife and myself: *“Uniting Psychology and Biology: Integrative Perspective on Human Development”* (Segal, Weisfeld & Weisfeld, 1997), that included papers from a Festschrift honoring Dan Freedman, as indicated above.

Glenn’s wife (and frequent collaborator) Carol observed that Glenn was creative and clear-minded during the last days of his life. “That’s the way he wanted it!” In fact, Glenn has a book chapter in press to which we can all look forward to (DeLecce, Weisfeld, & Weisfeld, 2026). Upon hearing of Glenn’s passing Dr. Gil Greengross, at Aberystwyth University in Wales, reflected, “He [Glenn] was one of the reasons I got into humor research ... he showed that you can study what others might consider a niche topic, or a topic not very important, and have insights about it.” These words resonate.



*Glenn and Carol Weisfeld, taken in 2019 at the ISHE meeting in Zadar, Croatia.
Courtesy of Carol Weisfeld*

Glenn the Colleague

Glenn was a very prominent and active member of ISHE. He served as editor of the *Human Ethology Bulletin* (HEB) between 1991 and 1998 (The *Human Ethology Newsletter* was renamed into HEB in 1995), then as Vice-President from 2002 until becoming President between 2006 and the end of 2009. As editor of the *Human Ethology Bulletin*, Glenn was interviewed in July 1992 by Frans Roes at the ISHE meeting in Amsterdam. The interview was published in the *European Sociobiological Society Newsletter*. Towards its conclusion, Glenn was asked whether sociobiological ideas could be used to justify racism or sexism. He replied, “No ... if it turns out that there are some aspects of human nature that are inconsistent with some ideological conception or some social ideal, I would say we have to be realistic. We can't erect a social system that is based on a misunderstanding of human nature. Any good social system is realistic. The more we know about human nature, the better our social systems will be. In other words, I don't think that ideology ought to dictate the facts, the facts have to dictate the appropriate social policy.”

Glenn's attachment to facts and the scientific method is well illustrated here. Also evident is his sense of the social implications and value of this work, and underneath that, a strong moral stance. All these qualities helped him steer ISHE through some fractious times. When Owen Aldis generously bequeathed to the Society a large sum of money it allowed many new projects to be undertaken, but, inevitably, it created tensions. We weathered that period, thanks in no small measure to Glenn's hard work, done with courtesy and honesty and, at times, necessary firmness. He possessed the objectivity and courage to see when he needed to change his mind if the facts and logic dictated that he do so. Glenn is owed a large debt of gratitude from the Society for this stewardship.

Glenn the Friend

I (NLS) knew Glenn as a fellow graduate student at the University of Chicago's Committee on Human Development. Glenn, his wife Carol, and I became acquainted through attending Dan Freedman's weekly sociobiology reading group. Sociobiology was the label du jour of the budding and exciting field that examined human behavior through an evolutionary lens. The three of us were intrigued by Freedman's fresh take on behavior—where some students and staff saw genetic determinism and overt sexism, we and the other student participants saw fresh ideas and fair-mindedness. Glenn graduated in 1978, two years before Carol and four years before me. Upon leaving the University of Chicago, Glenn and Carol both secured faculty positions in Detroit, Michigan. During the years that followed, Glenn, Carol, and I, as well as Dan Freedman, attended ISHE conferences, and our friendship grew.

Freedman retired in the mid-1990s, providing a perfect opportunity for his former students to recognize his professional contributions. Glenn, Carol, and I organized a festschrift in his honor, held at the University of Chicago, in October 1995. We were fortunate to secure a generous grant from the American Psychological Association's Science Directorate, allowing us to invite Freedman's close colleagues from the United States and around the world. A condition of the grant was the production of an edited volume containing the papers presented at the event. Working alongside Glenn was a pleasure—his knowledge and enthusiasm were present in just the right mix, allowing the three of us to host a memorable conference that yielded the promised book. I recall that we struggled a bit to find a fitting title—I also cannot recall how we finally decided. *Uniting Psychology and Biology: Integrative Perspectives on Human Development* was published in 1997 (Segal, et al., 1997).

Glenn had many interests and talents that I appreciated increasingly over the years. I think of Glenn as a “scholarly comedian.” He had a keen sense of humor and a great turn of phrase. Anyone who receives the Weisfeld's holiday newsletter will understand—for those who do not

receive the newsletter I suggest you find a copy. Glenn was also a fantastic artist who could quickly sketch a face with remarkable accuracy. In fact, he designed the cover of the Freedman festschrift program booklet, capturing Freedman's imposing yet casual demeanor.

I (JR), based in Oxford, UK, knew Glenn mainly through our membership in ISHE and latterly when we were both members of the Board of Trustees. I and my wife Mary Honor would meet up with Glenn and Carol for dinner. I remember Carol once saying after Glenn had entertained us with some very amusing conversation, "You see what a wonderful man I married." Indeed.

No tribute to Glenn can pass without a tribute to his wife Carol, also a distinguished scholar, who worked with Glenn on many research projects and joined him in support of ISHE.

All of us cherish and honor Glenn's memory.

REFERENCES

- DeLecce, T., Weisfeld, C. C., & Weisfeld, G. (2026). History of evolutionary psychology. In S. Kanazawa (Ed.) *Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*. Cheltenham, United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Greengross, G., Segal N.L., Zellers, S., Silvia, P., & Kaprio, J. (2025). Heritability of humor production ability— A twin study. *Twin Research and Human Genetics*, 28, 265-272.
- N.L. Segal, G.E. Weisfeld, & C.C. Weisfeld (Eds.) (1997). *Uniting psychology and biology: Integrative perspectives on human development*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press.
- Weisfeld, G. (2024). Commentary on Segal (2024). *Assortative parenting and assortative cross-parenting: New views of parental preference for selected children*. *Early Human Development*, 194, 106035.