

# Remembering Wendell E. Jeffrey

November 25, 2015



**Wendell E. Jeffrey**

APS Fellow Wendell E. Jeffrey, known as Jeff, took an unusual path to developmental psychology. He finished high school at the age of 16 and enrolled at the University of Iowa, planning to study moral philosophy. He left after one semester, feeling the need to aid the war effort. Too young to be drafted, he took a job as an usher until he found a training position in the nearby defense industry. This path led to a job at Lockheed Aircraft in California. When he was drafted, he moved from one Army training site to another in the United States, including to several sites on university campuses. Part of his Army training abroad was at a camp near Biarritz, France. There he met a psychology graduate student who introduced him to experimental psychology. Their conversations led him to discover that he was “a scientist at heart.”

His return to the University of Iowa put him in a leading psychology department, where faculty shared the Hull–Spence commitment to stimulus-response behaviorist theory. Faculty included Kenneth Spence (the Chair), Carl Seashore, Robert Sears, Donald Lewis, Alfred Shephard, and John Whiting. Jeff finished his bachelor’s degree in 2 years and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He went on to graduate school at Iowa and soon became part of a group working to create the field of experimental child psychology, which shared its theoretical roots with the Hull–Spence doctrine.

Jeff was one of the early researchers who found that preschool children learn to discriminate shape more easily than they do color. He also showed that 4-year-olds could learn to distinguish left from right when figures that held up a left or right arm were associated with different proper names. This task, in turn, facilitated their learning to push buttons that pointed left or right. In a different study, Jeff demonstrated that young children could pair low and high notes when they played the same relative difference on a piano but not when they sang or used words. Although Jeff did not put it this way, these efforts

amounted to an interest in the performance–competence distinction. In retrospect, it is not surprising that he eventually developed a keen interest in attention and encouraged students to study it.

Jeff finished his PhD in 3 years and joined Barnard College at Columbia as an assistant professor of psychology. There, he met APS Fellow Bernice Wenzel, a physiological psychologist. Their decision to marry led nepotism rules to rear their ugly heads. Jeff was told that he would get tenure but that Bernice could only remain an untenured assistant professor. In one of his finest moments, Jeff responded, “Well, then I guess I will need to look for another job.”

Not long thereafter, the chair of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), psychology department offered him a faculty position, and the young couple decided to move west. Bernice left a tenure-track position eager to attend seminars and research meetings at the highly regarded UCLA medical school. Her fundamental contributions to these meetings led to a postdoctoral fellowship and then to a tenure-track job in the physiology department, which began a very distinguished career.

After arriving at UCLA, Jeff initially taught clinical psychology, but he soon became the area head for developmental psychology. Jeff was the “go-to” man for developmental graduate students. He almost single-handedly ran the developmental area, from being Principal Investigator of an NIH training grant to holding celebrated postcolloquium cocktail parties where graduate students mingled with famous developmental scientists. He also supervised much of the developmental research in the department at that time.

One of Jeff’s many talents was an almost uncanny ability to recognize budding scholars’ potential and to encourage them to find a coadvisor who could facilitate their research. Through his mentorship, he helped launch the careers of such stellar developmental scientists as Past APS Board Members Rochel Gelman and Diane Ruble; APS James McKeen Cattell Fellow Gail Goodman; APS Fellows Leslie B. Cohen, E. Mark Cummings, Marshall Haith, and Katherine Nelson; and Richard Bogartz, Patricia Goldman-Rakic, Tamar Zelniker, and many others.

Jeff’s idea of training was not prescribing particular content or methods-training courses. Instead, he was motivated by the belief that good students should acquire an independent line of research. To help them accomplish this, he coordinated office spaces that placed developmental students close to each other. This helped encourage cohorts to talk about their work as well as to socialize. His graduate courses invariably covered emerging hot topics, including attention, infancy, ethology, language acquisition, stage theories, memory, theories of cognitive development, and so on. Students were expected to read new, original papers and present them in class. Perhaps most importantly, if students’ research ideas could be facilitated by another faculty’s lab, Jeff worked to make this happen.

Jeff encouraged students to join the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) and present at its conferences, where he made sure that they networked with experts. To connect UCLA students and visiting faculty, he facilitated informal gatherings on campus and parties at the Jeffrey–Wenzel home. His Mentor Award from Division 7 of the American Psychological Association indicates the deep appreciation his students have for his role in their careers. All of his strategies fostered in-depth learning about various topics in developmental psychology and gave his students the wherewithal to make leading contributions and become excellent mentors themselves.

No biographical sketch about Jeff can fail to praise his brilliant job as Editor of *Child Development* and *Cognitive Development*. Here, too, he used his breadth and depth of knowledge to attract outstanding reviewers capable of picking important papers. This feedback led to an overall increase in high-quality submissions. Jeff also was on two important SRCD boards, the Governing Council and the Ethics Council. His time on the boards overlapped with the period that put SRCD on a strong organizational footing.

Jeff's commitments to excellence and community are threads woven through his life with Bernice. The couple established the psychology department's Jeffrey–Wenzel Cognitive Neuroscience speakers series as well as a Junior Research Chair for the psychology department. In turn, the department has honored both of them with its library–seminar, the “Jeffrey–Wenzel Room.”

Fortunately, Wendell Jeffrey's academic values live on in the work of his many famous students. He epitomized the role of a university faculty member whose goal was to offer an education that would prepare the next generations of undergraduates and graduate students for their futures.

**-Rochel Gelman**  
Rutgers University

## **Diane Ruble**

*New York University*

It brings a smile to my face to think about and honor Wendell E. Jeffrey. I was a graduate student in the developmental program at UCLA in the 1970s, when Jeff was the head and organizer of the program and the developmental seminar. Although Jeff was not my primary mentor, he provided masterful guidance and encouragement in so many ways throughout my career, as he did for most of the students in his program. I knew I could count on him for letters of recommendation, phone calls on my behalf, and so on — whatever was needed to foster my career.

Jeff ran the program with great finesse. Any graduate student with interest in developmental processes was welcome, but was not limited to a specific set of developmental faculty with whom to work. In contrast, Jeff believed developmental students should have diverse interests and apply the notion of developmental process broadly. Thus, we were encouraged to have multiple interests and conduct research with faculty members in the many different specialty programs within the department. These diverse ideas were pulled together in the weekly developmental seminar, which was the centerpiece of the program. Students received extraordinary guidance, mentoring, and tough love in that seminar, and it served as a model for me in my subsequent academic positions.

Perhaps Jeff's most important influence on me was through his approach to teaching the graduate developmental core course. He explained at the beginning of the course that he would distribute 3–4 journal articles on a topic (e.g., effects of early experience), and we were to pull together the ideas in those papers into a 10-page paper every other week. Initially, I thought it was odd that he was not going to lecture on a set of topics and give exams. I soon realized, however, that I was learning more in his course than I ever had before. It was an eye-opening experience for me, and I became a great promoter

of his belief that students need to master the material on their own if they are to learn. Jeff's pedagogical technique led to give-and-take with overall structure, feedback, and high standards supplied by Jeff.

## **Gail S. Goodman**

*University of California, Davis*

Wendell E. Jeffrey changed the course of my life, as he did for many others. Jeff was at the forefront of research on infant perception and also the editor of the most prestigious journal in the field, *Child Development*. His background at the University of Iowa showed in his rigorous behaviorist training, but by the time I came along in the early 1970s, he had moved beyond behaviorism to embrace the study of cognitive development and later of developmental neuroscience.

I awkwardly stumbled into Jeff's office as a *naïve* undergraduate at the start of my senior year at UCLA, looking for a sponsor for my honors thesis. I don't remember who suggested I talk to Jeff; probably it was one of the wonderful secretaries in the psychology office, who always seemed to look out for us poor lost undergraduates in what was a huge department. To my surprise, Jeff agreed on the spot to sponsor my research. I was so shy in those days that for a full year I could barely speak in Jeff's presence, but he let me use his laboratory trailer at a local preschool, which permitted me great freedom to explore the "preoperational" mind. This work resulted in my first publication, jointly authored with Jeff, showing that the preoperational mind was actually quite "operational" under the right circumstances.

Jeff then took a big risk in accepting my application for graduate studies in the prestigious UCLA doctoral program. I learned later that one of my letters of recommendation, written by another professor, consisted of only five words, all in caps: TOO SHY FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL. Jeff nevertheless could see through that veneer — he perceived my passion for developmental psychology, my tenacity, my unrelenting determination to contribute to science and better the lives of children. Somehow I was admitted, and I knew it was largely thanks to Jeff.

Once I was in graduate school, Jeff was the clear choice to be my doctoral advisor. I met with him frequently throughout my graduate training at UCLA. Thanks to his attentiveness, I gradually came out of my shell and was able to engage in long debates and discourse with him. Over time, sitting in his office in Franz Hall, I learned it was okay to argue about developmental theory, discuss and critique recent articles, debate feminism, and much more. Until then, I didn't know that professors were actually human. This lesson, in the end, was probably as important as the academic content I was rapidly absorbing. Despite my initial shyness, we grew to enjoy a deep friendship. It didn't hurt that we also shared a love of Los Angeles, gourmet restaurants, UCLA, and Jaguar cars, which he drove. (Jeff was a very sophisticated person generally in his knowledge of music, food, intellectual trends, and the arts, and he was also one of the best chefs I've ever known.)

Although Jeff's own research at the time focused on infant perceptual development and individual differences in children's information processing, his broad knowledge of the field and supportive approach toward his students permitted me and others to conduct research on many topics, such as my own work on memory development. Jeff was also excellent at connecting his students with additional

mentors, and in that capacity, I was thrilled to be coadvised on my dissertation research by a brand new faculty member at UCLA, Robert Bjork (a brilliant memory researcher who, when I questioned my future, so kindly told me, “There is a place for everyone in psychology. Don’t ever give up.”), and later to obtain a postdoctoral fellowship with an illustrious developmentalist, Marshall Haith (who supported my early work on children’s eyewitness memory), another important turning point in my academic life.

In the 1970s, when I was Jeff’s doctoral student, the Vietnam War was in full swing, there were riots on campus, “free love” was in the air, and feminism was coming of age. Psychology had recently transitioned from behaviorism to a cognitive approach. It was an exciting time to be a developmentalist and to be developing. As professors, we should never forget that graduate school is an immensely important developmental period and a formative stage of life, both intellectually and socially. Mentors like Jeff change our lives forever, giving us the intellectual, emotional, and professional foundation for greater heights. Jeff was a major influence on developmental psychology at the time, but his legacy in the end is as a mentor who helped form the next generations of developmental scholars. That will probably be true for many of us, and its importance should be venerated.

The last time I saw Jeff was at the Association for Psychological Science meeting in Chicago in 2012. It had been over 30 years since I left UCLA, and I was a very different, much bolder person by then. But there he was, probably in his 80s, still attending symposia. I was excited that Jeff and his wife Bernice Wenzel (Professor Emerita of Physiology at UCLA) came to my invited presentation. Knowing he was there, I started the talk by having Jeff stand up and take a bow, as the audience applauded in warm appreciation. I am so glad I could recognize him in this way. The three of us chatted briefly after, and he was very approving of how far I’d come.

I am eternally grateful for all that he did for me. He gave me my start, believed in me, and encouraged my own creative directions. His support, style, and enthusiasm continue to influence several generations of his students, their students as well, and through them, surely many students to come.

## **Marshall Haith**

*University of Denver*

Jeff was not my target mentor when I entered UCLA graduate school in 1959. In fact, I entered as a clinical child psychology graduate student, on probation, because I lacked the 8 courses to be a full-fledged student. After a semester of making up some of the courses and selling shoes on Thursday nights and Saturdays, I decided clinical psychology was not for me, although child psychology was still attractive. Jeff saved me after my second semester from the shoe fate and from my RA as a tester of smog mixtures on eye irritation in the engineering school with an invitation to take a National Institutes of Health (NIH) fellowship in child development. I didn’t even know that I was ready for graduate work, but I guess Jeff did, and he became a major force in my life.

Throughout my graduate career, I benefited from Jeff’s philosophy (which I adopted when I became a mentor): to be there when you needed him and step aside and observe if growth was on track. Monthly evening gatherings at his house with invited dignitaries such as Seymour Levine and Victor Denenberg leave strong positive memories, as does his willingness to let graduate students take the reins. He agreed

to supervise, but let us conduct, our own seminar on The Effects of Early Experience, which launched Patricia Goldman-Rakic, me, and others on productive research ventures. As I became interested in human infancy, Jeff introduced me to Hawley Parmelee, and we started psychological research on newborns in the UCLA medical school — another indication of Jeff’s self-confidence and willingness to share “ownership” of grad students.

At a more personal level, just after I married Sue following my second year of graduate school, and as we were between houses, Jeff and Bernice offered up their house for us to live in for several weeks as they traveled abroad; for second-year graduate students, their house was as close to heaven as one gets — but only one example of his warmth and personal touch with his students.

There are branches in one’s life that lead who knows where. Jeff’s influence led to a career that has been more gratifying than I could have hoped in those early years. He made many contributions to the field, through his research, editorial work, and administration, but his legacy through his students’ ranks at the top.

## **Katherine Nelson**

*City University of New York Graduate Center*

My career in developmental psychology would never have happened without Jeff’s strong support. He supported and enabled me as a graduate student to complete my course work and dissertation in 3 years, with a postdoctoral fellowship from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) that led me to Yale for work with Bill Kessen. He helped me to finalize my first published work (with Tamar Zelniker and with Jeff as third author) as I made my way from Los Angeles to New Haven in 1968. He also nudged me to work with Tom Trabasso on my dissertation on categorization in memory by 5- and 7-year-olds. In turn, Tom became a strong supporter of my work. I am deeply indebted to both of them.

As editor of *Child Development*, Jeff made me a member of the board, and after his 5 years as the founding editor of *Cognitive Development*, he persuaded me to take on the editorship. I never felt that I was a special case regarding his support; I observed that he was close to and supportive of many students, and his attentiveness to my needs (both before and after I left California), though special for me, seemed in line with his general approach to mentoring. Regrettably, I never adequately expressed my gratitude directly to Jeff for all his support. Without it, I simply would not have done the work that I have; and I would not have taught the students I did, trying to follow his model.

## **Richard S. Bogartz**

*University of Massachusetts, Amherst*

Before the first day of classes, I memorize the face–name pairs of the students in my classes — including the statistics class with about 65 undergrads. Jaws drop when I call on students I’ve never met by their names. I think the inclination to do this can be traced not only to my delight at the students’ surprise and bewilderment, but also to a day I walked around the UCLA campus with Jeff and marveled at his ability

to call by name numerous undergraduate students we encountered.

The UCLA psychology PhD program during my time (1957–1961) involved three sets of preliminary exams and a dissertation. I finished my PhD work in less than 4 years — due largely to Jeff informing me that I was ready for the next exam set when I did not imagine it was time to move ahead. Once I got the push, I looked around at who had just passed the exams, knew I was at least as advanced as they were, girded my loins, prepared, and aced the tests.

Jeff put me on an NIH predoctoral training grant for 3 years. I worked in a lab at a children's school on campus, mostly learning the psychology of discrimination, principles of control, counterbalancing, and the like.

Our program had two foreign language reading requirements. I chose Russian and a math substitute of 15 credits. I learned the value of choosing the harder path and never forgot it. This led to my studying mathematical psychology with Richard Atkinson and Norman Anderson. My sense is that as a graduate student the tremendous amount that I learned was not only due to my voracious appetite for psychology but also to the freedom that Jeff afforded me.

## **Leslie B. Cohen**

*University of Texas at Austin*

I have known Jeff for almost 60 years. To say he was instrumental in my academic life and career would be a gross understatement. I first met him when, as an undergraduate at UCLA, I took his child psychology class. He later asked me to serve as his undergraduate teaching assistant (TA) for the course and then offered me a fellowship to become a graduate student with him in the psychology department at UCLA. I accepted without even applying to other graduate programs. It turned out to be one the best decisions I ever made.

We published a couple of articles together on mechanisms of children's learning, but his main contribution to my career was introducing me to other people and special opportunities from which I could grow and learn. The Iowa Child Welfare Research Station was the hotbed of experimental child psychology at the time, and he helped make arrangements for me to work there as a research assistant one summer with some of the top scientists in that area. The following year, he encouraged me to attend a special summer workshop at the University of Minnesota. I made many friends at that workshop who either already were, or were destined to become, leaders in the field. Although I was only a third year graduate student at the time, I accepted a postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute for Child Development at Minnesota.

Once I returned to UCLA, Jeff and some of his other graduate students introduced me to a truly great man on both a personal and professional level, Arthur "Hawlee" Parmelee. Hawlee was a research neonatologist, and he allowed me to conduct my dissertation on infant attention in his laboratory. During my postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Minnesota, two members of the earlier summer workshop invited me to apply for an academic position in the psychology department at the University of Illinois. I stayed there 13 years before moving on to the University of Texas. In a very real sense, Jeff

and his actions guided my entire early career. In the later years, Jeff and I kept in contact through Christmas letters describing our activities and travels. One thing I regret the most is not telling him explicitly how much I appreciated his actions on my behalf. It is now too late, but I can still say it belatedly: Thanks for everything, Jeff.

## **Rochel Gelman**

*Rutgers University*

I did not expect to become a developmental psychologist. I went to UCLA from Toronto, in no small part because it was in Los Angeles, a long distance from home. Much of what I want to say about Jeff has been said over and over again by others: Jeff was early to encourage women to take advanced degrees. His students include many well-known women. For him, what mattered was evidence of potential talent, and he was not shy about arguing for their admission to graduate programs.

He also never hesitated to show off his students: At an SRCD meeting, he walked me up to John Flavell and said, “You need to know about her dissertation.” (It was a successful conservation training study that was done within the framework of attention theory of the day.) John then told Herb Pick, who told Eleanor Gibson. A detailed description of the study appeared in Gibson’s book — before I published it. I also ended up spending a fabulous intellectual and social summer at the Institute of Child Development at Minnesota with Flavell, the Gibsons, the Picks, and others.

Jeff sensed that I was not sure that I wanted to be an academic. He contacted universities to encourage them to interview me (this was the 60s, before advertisements), but he also encouraged me to interview with a famous toy company, which made an open offer for 2 years. My first job was problematic, but I never switched into the toy business; I shared my concerns with my referees, who also included George Mandler and Tom Trabasso and Jeff. When they found out, invitations to give talks at top universities were forthcoming. I accepted an offer from the University of Pennsylvania and found myself in an incredibly exciting and nurturing intellectual environment.

When Randy Gallistel and I decided to marry, we too faced the potential problem of nepotism rules. After extended conversations about possible moves for one of us to another unit on campus, the department decided it would simply ignore the rule. My husband and I eventually had the good fortune to become Jeff’s colleagues as well as friends of his and Bernice’s. Their deep interest in music, architecture, art, and travel overlapped with ours and encouraged us to be bolder participants in all our interests. I miss him a whole lot.

## **Tamar Zelniker**

*Tel-Aviv University, Israel*

I came to UCLA in the early 1960s as a foreign student, and soon after my arrival Jeff introduced me to infancy research at Arthur Parmelee’s lab. It was a beneficial introduction to habituation research, which was at that time a rather innovative measure of nonverbal early learning. A few years later, Jeff constructed a semiformal model of learning in infants based on habituation. The article was published in



*Psychological Review.*

While Jeff came from a traditional S–R background, he was open-minded and had good judgment and a good sense of what would be practicable new frontiers in developmental psychology. With respect to habituation, Jeff moved beyond strict memory interpretations of habituation measures of reaction time, response duration, etc., to more conceptual interpretations of perception and learning (with Leslie Cohen).

With his ability to recognize new directions in the field, Jeff led his students to formulate and research meaningful questions. He offered them assistance and freedom to develop their own conceptualization and methodology, which eventually enabled many of them to grow and achieve outstanding careers.

Jeff's ability to judge and promote significant issues informed his work as an excellent editor of two major journals in the field — *Child Development* and *Cognitive Development* — and later as Editor-in-Chief of Wiley Books in psychology. In these capacities, he had a substantial influence on the field and its development.

As for me, Jeff provided guidance that led me to a very good start when I returned to Israel. However, a few years later, due to personal circumstances and the political situation in the region, I shifted my focus. I continued doing some work on cognitive development, but focused most of my work on the relationships, dynamics, perceptions, and aspirations of Arab and Jewish students within the academic milieu at Haifa University. In addition, for 10 years I had worked in Gaza with leading Palestinian psychologists, with some collaborative work continuing until today. Jeff was not at all thrilled about this shift of mine, but was, as always, supportive.

Jeff was always very generous with his graduate students. Following guest lectures, Jeff and Bernice hosted us in their lovely home, providing a wonderful context for both professional contacts with distinguished scholars and pleasant social interactions among students and faculty. Those events were greatly appreciated then, and are remembered and cherished even after so many years.