



Autobiography

I was born in Uppsala Sweden in 1924, the youngest of five children. My father, Fritz S. Wiesel, was chief psychiatrist and head of Beckomberga Hospital, a mental institution located on the outskirts of Stockholm. We were brought up by my mother, Anna-Lisa (b. Bentzer), at the hospital and were sent by bus to Whitlockska Samskolan, a coeducational private school in the city. I was a rather lazy, mischievous student, interested mainly in sports. My election as president of the high school's athletic association was my only memorable achievement during that period. Suddenly, at the age of 17, I became a serious student and I did reasonably well as a medical student. My curiosity about the workings of the nervous system was stimulated by the lectures of Carl Gustaf Bernhard and Rudolf Skoglund, my professors in neurophysiology. Because of my background I was also interested in psychiatry, and I spent one year while I was a medical student working with patients in different mental hospitals.

When my studies were completed I returned to Professor Bernhards's laboratory at the [Karolinska Institute](#) in 1954 to do basic neurophysiological research. The following year I had the good fortune to be invited to the United States as a postdoctoral fellow in Dr. Stephen Kuffler's laboratory at the Wilmer Institute, Johns Hopkins Medical School. Dr. Kuffler had just published his now classical study of the receptive field arrangements of cat retinal ganglion cells. This was an important extension of the pioneering work of Drs. [Hartline](#) and [Granit](#), for which they received the 1967 Nobel Prize. [David Hubel](#) joined the laboratory in 1968, and the two of us decided to explore the receptive field properties of cells in the central visual pathways. This marked the beginning of our twenty year collaboration.

In 1959 Dr. Kuffler was invited to become a professor of pharmacology at Harvard Medical School, and he brought a group of young and enthusiastic investigators with him from Johns Hopkins Medical School. The effectiveness of this group of neuroscientists in research and teaching, and the foresight of Dr. Ebert, then the Dean of the Medical School, led to the formation of the Department of Neurobiology with Stephen Kuffler as the chairman. In addition to David Hubel and myself, the original group of emigres from Johns Hopkins included Edwin Furshpan and David Potter; together with Edward Kravitz we became the original faculty of the new department. David and I now had the opportunity to continue our work in a stimulating environment. Our collaboration continued until the late seventies. In the past several years I worked with Charles Gilbert, a young investigator in the Department. In 1973 I was asked to be head of the Department of Neurobiology. Dr. Kuffler, who meant so much to all of us, continued his work as a University Professor until he died suddenly in 1980. My only regret is that he could not join David and me in the celebration of the Nobel Prize.

I was married to Teeri Stenhammar 1956-1970 and Ann Yee 1973-1981. My daughter

Sara Elisabeth was born in 1975. Aside from my work my interests lie in the arts and in world affairs.

Honors and Awards

- 1967 A.M. (Hon.), Harvard University
- 1971 The Dr. Jules C. Stein Award, presented by the Trustees for Research to Prevent Blindness
- 1972 The Lewis S. Rosenstiel Prize, presented by Brandeis University
- 1972 Ferrier Lecture (Royal Society of London)
- 1975 The Freidenwald Award, presented by the Trustees of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology, Inc.
- 1976 The Grass Lecture (Society for Neuroscience)
- 1977 The Karl Spencer Lashley Prize, presented by the American Philosophical Society
- 1978 The Louisa Gross Horwitz Prize, presented by Columbia University
- 1979 The Dickson Prize, presented by the University of Pittsburgh
- 1980 The Ledlie Prize, Harvard University
- 1980 Society for Scholars (Johns Hopkins University)
- 1981 The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

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Addendum, October 1997

In 1983, I moved to The Rockefeller University as Vincent and Brook Astor Professor, establishing a new Laboratory of Neurobiology. At Rockefeller, I continued my close collaboration with Charles Gilbert on the circuitry of primary visual cortex, concentrating on the specificity and dynamic nature of the long-range horizontal connections that Charles and I discovered at Harvard. Charles is now a professor at Rockefeller who heads his own laboratory. Many others in the lab, including Lawrence Katz, Daniel T'so, and Amiram Grinvald - made major contributions to our understanding of the functional architecture and development of visual cortex, and developed new tools for studying visual processing in the brain.

In December 1991 I became president of Rockefeller, where I have focussed on recruiting new faculty, expanding Rockefeller's programs of scientific research, and finding new resources to support the university's scientific activities. This has been a challenging, and, perhaps to my surprise, an extremely enjoyable part of my career.

Since 1994, I have served as chairman of the National Academy of Science's Committee on Human Rights. In 1995 I became chairman of the board of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center.

I married Jean Stein in 1995. In 1997, my daughter Sarah graduated from the University of Pennsylvania.

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