



## Glenn Allyn Van Haitsma

September 3, 1927 - May 2, 2024

One of Glenn's favorite images was the historic 1972 Apollo 17 photo of Earth, the blue planet suspended in space. A believer in the oneness of creation, Glenn was a humanist, scholar, poet, professor, parishioner, civil rights activist, world traveler, gardener, devoted son, brother, spouse, father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

Born and raised on a Vriesland, Michigan dairy farm, Glenn was the eldest of 4 children born to Martha and Clarence Van Haitsma. One of 6 classmates who went through all 9 years in the 2-room Vriesland school house, Glenn worked hard on the family farm while participating broadly in school and community life, from theatre to journalism to catechism and student council. He graduated co-salutatorian of Zeeland High School in 1945, continued his studies at Hope College, then earned a Ph.D. in English literature from Syracuse University. Mid-graduate studies, Glenn was drafted into the US Army, and later placed in a State Department refugee program in Germany. Just prior to being stationed abroad, Glenn met a captivating woman named Ruth Romaine who was, herself, just leaving for an assignment as hospital dietician in Assiut, Egypt through a Presbyterian mission program. Glenn and Ruth courted for 3 years, mostly through prolific letter-writing. When Ruth completed her term, they married in Frutigen, Switzerland, began married life in Hamburg, Germany, then returned to Syracuse, where they started their family. In 1958, Glenn accepted a position in the English Department at Carroll College (now University) in Waukesha, WI, where he would remain for his

teaching career. Glenn became a highly respected member of the faculty, serving as the first Faculty President, pioneering a core curriculum of interdisciplinary studies, and launching the popular NCEP (New Cultural Experience Program) inter-term courses that have been formative for many Carroll students.

Glenn and Ruth were active in their Waukesha community. Founding members in 1962 of the Waukesha Council on Human Relations (now the Equal Opportunity Commission), they organized a city-wide fair housing campaign and helped establish groups that continue to serve Waukesha today, including La Casa de Esperanza, Hebron House and Plowshare. In his teaching, Glenn introduced the first Black, Chicano, Native American and Third World Literature courses at Carroll, and he led students in immersive cross-cultural learning experiences to the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, Rust College in Mississippi, and the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago. Glenn was active in several regional academic groups that fostered incorporating ethnic studies and social justice into teaching, and he and Ruth were involved in the Society for Values in Higher Education for many years.

Glenn's conscientious teaching style meant many late-night hours preparing for class and reading hand-written student papers, but in the summers, he and Ruth loaded up their 4 children and tent-camped across the country, spending time helping Glenn's father on the family farm in Michigan and time at Ruth's parents' cottage in New Hampshire. These were wonderful summers for the children, and Glenn was revitalized through his love of hiking and exploration with his family.

Glenn remained fit for his age, and Ruth would marvel that he could go straight from handing in his grades to pitching sheaves of wheat all day during threshing on the farm. He team-taught several Wilderness Studies courses that included canoeing in the Boundary Waters, and he portaged canoes as handily as students a third his age. Glenn particularly loved mountain-climbing, and at age 71, he was the eldest of an inter-generational group of Carroll students and faculty who trekked the mountains of Nepal.

Glenn could make literature come to life. He read poems to his young children at bedtime and then began a tradition of reading aloud to the family at dinnertime. His children remember listening spellbound to the Tolkien series, excited for each night's new chapter.

Glenn and Ruth were core members of the First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha, with Glenn serving multiple stints as Sunday School teacher, Adult education leader, and Elder, among other roles. Active members of the United Nations Association, Glenn and Ruth were always interested in expanding community diversity. They shared their home with international students and sponsored immigrants from Vietnam, Nicaragua, Cuba, Ethiopia, Korea and Ghana. During Glenn's final teaching years, he and Ruth taught for a year in Japan and a year in China through a Carroll exchange program. They were eager, curious, skilled, and frugal travelers, making the most of every opportunity.

After Glenn's retirement, he and Ruth continued to travel through Global Exchange and Elderhostel (now Road Scholar) programs in the US and abroad, and Glenn taught several Elderhostel courses. They crisscrossed the US, van-camping into their 80's, visiting national parks, friends and family. By their example, they lived their core belief that greater cultural and environmental understanding leads to better human relations.

In 2011, Ruth and Glenn moved to Freedom Village in Holland, Michigan, just a few miles from Glenn's birthplace, where they remained as active as possible in church and community activities. After Ruth died at age 90 in 2015, Glenn continued to appreciate the supportive community at Freedom Village. In 2020, Glenn contracted COVID, which accelerated cognitive decline, but he retained his inner gentleness. His most common expression was "thank you." Glenn's family is likewise grateful to the kind staff at Freedom Village, Anchor In-Home Care and Hospice for all the good care they gave Glenn through his final years.

Glenn is survived by many beloved friends and family, including Hua and Van

Truong and their children and partners, Trang Dinh (Hao Dinh), Linh Chen (Tom Chen), Trinh Chang (Albert Chang), Hai Truong (Regina Truong) and Tim Truong; his siblings, Dale (Charlotte) Van Haitsma, Terry (Judy Bruinsma) Van Haitsma and Carol DeKorte; his four children and their partners, Susan Van Haitsma (Jeff Webster), Martha Van Haitsma (Chip Bamberger), Sara Wagner (Dean Wagner) and Daniel Van Haitsma (Maryanne Van Haitsma); grandchildren and their partners, Josh Wagner (Kate Wagner), Aaron Bamberger (Rachel Agner), Nathan Bamberger (Carolyn Raithel), Emily Van Haitsma and Abigail Van Haitsma; and great-grandchildren, Austin, Allie and Anna Dinh, Ian and Khai Chang, Eian and Ruth Chen, Sara and Andrew Truong, Owen and Elinor Wagner and Arthur Andrew Bamberger. Life on Earth continues to bloom and grow.

In lieu of flowers, gifts can be made to Plowshare at 219 W. Main St., Waukesha WI 53186 - <https://www.plowshareftm.org/> or First Presbyterian Church of Holland MI at 659 State St., Holland MI 49423 – <https://www.fpcholland.org/>.

A memorial service in the auditorium at Freedom Village will be held at 1:30 pm on Friday, May 10, 2024.

The Van Haitsma Family is being served by Yntema Funeral Home, 251 South State Street, Zeeland, MI 49464. [www.yntemafh.com](http://www.yntemafh.com)

# Cemetery Details

## Vriesland Cemetery

Zeeland Township

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

MAY 10. 1:30 PM (ET)

Freedom Village Auditorium  
145 Columbia Ave.  
Holland, MI 49423

# Tribute Wall

DR

“ *My most revered professor at Carroll 1967-71. He made a huge difference in my life. A most kind and learned man, humble and compassionate.*

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**David Rohrer** - March 22, 2025 at 04:02 PM

EJ

“ *In high school I hated English for several reasons. I fell in love with literature in Van Haitsma's freshman English class. He was my advisor after switching majors. My last semester he agreed to be my advisor on a course on minority literature — a course that didn't exist - but one that he later pioneered. It was interesting to see how many ways he broadened the horizons of Carroll students both on campus and around the world. Trips included Boundary Waters canoeing adventures, encountering the Third World, and trekking in Nepal. He was also very active in community justice.*

*I owe much to him as his course not only led to a love of literature, but also a 35 year teaching career. When I left Carroll, I tried to thank him by giving him a water color painting of a wilderness cabin —his vision of Utopia. Carroll students were fortunate to be touched by this gentle, noble man who was committed to a more peaceful world. Earl Jewett, Carroll '71*

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**Earl Jewett** - December 19, 2024 at 08:03 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



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Susan Van Haitsma - May 22, 2024 at 01:49 PM



“ 48 files added to the album Photos of Glenn



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Susan Van Haitsma - May 22, 2024 at 07:45 AM

MC

“ Dr. Van Haitzma was my English professor for two years. He was an excellent teacher and helped me out in my sophomore year when I failed to work at my best for a quarter. I recall a stunning moment when he used class time to challenge members of a fraternity in the class who had injured a pledge during Hell Week to defend themselves. I also remember a hilarious speech he gave at a Student Union event using his poetry analysis method to dissect the the Beatles song "I Wanna Hold Your Hand". He passed away in my hometown. I wish I had known he was there as I would like to have seen him during my visits back home.  
Mancer Cyr 1964

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**Mancer Cyr** - May 18, 2024 at 11:31 AM

AW

“ I knew Glenn and Ruth through their membership in the Holland-based Alliance for Cultural and Ethnic Harmony (ACEH), where it was always a joy to see them in attendance at ACEH meetings. Learning more about their life before Holland, I can understand why they became involved in this local effort for diversity, equity, and inclusion. They were special people.

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**Ann McGlothlin Weller** - May 17, 2024 at 10:33 AM

K1

“ Dr. Van Haitzma was my freshman English teacher in the fall of 1969. His patient encouragement helped me find self-confidence as a writer. I will never forget the day he praised my essay about *Germinal* by Emile Zola and read it out loud in class. He was gifted teacher who quietly influenced the lives he touched. His classroom was a place to safely explore the many ways of knowing.

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**Kris Adams Wendt, CC Class of 1973** - May 16, 2024 at 07:17 PM

EH

“ Glenn, you and your wife Ruth have always been "pro-peace" in numerous ways! Your legacy for PEACE will be forever remembered AND expressed in your honor also in many ways by an array of individuals and groups. Thank you, Glenn, for being our model for peace in selected readings, public presentations, international trips with college students/faculty and Standing for Peace in public contexts. And during your memorial service in Holland, MI, we and others will be "Standing for Peace" by the Waukesha, WI Library. You and Ruth have been true Heroes for so many of us! Peace and love to you and your family, Sara and Bud Hudson

Earl Hudson - May 09, 2024 at 11:14 AM

RW

Just learned of Glenn's passing (10/9/2024) Glenn was a friend and faithful donor to the ministry of The Outreach Foundation from 2005-2021. We are eternally grateful for the way Glenn shared his gifts and talents for our global Kingdom work. Rest in peace Friend.

Ralph Wheeler - October 15, 2024 at 11:17 AM

BP

“ Dr. Van Haitsma was my freshman English teacher at Carroll College in 1983. Such a kind teacher who inspired his students to work to their utmost potential. His legacy at Carroll lives on his students.

Barbara King, Ph.D. - May 06, 2024 at 04:53 PM

RE

“ I always enjoyed biking with Glenn and the Freedom Village bike group. I was amazed how he could keep up with we who were riding light weight 10 speed cycles and he rode a rusty 3 speed.

Ron Ten Elshof - May 04, 2024 at 07:26 PM