

# A Conversation With Herbert Solomon

Paul Switzer

*Abstract.* Herbert Solomon was born in New York City on 13 March 1919. His parents had arrived in the United States at rather young ages around the turn of the century, and like many Jewish immigrants from Russia they came to find a better life. He profited from the New York City public education system, receiving a B.Sc. from City College in 1940 with mathematics as his major subject. In 1941, he completed a master's degree in mathematical statistics under Harold Hotelling and Abraham Wald at Columbia. The Second World War intervened at this point, delaying a Ph.D. in statistics until 1950 at Stanford.

Through Hotelling he secured an appointment with the Mathematical Research Group and subsequently, the Statistical Research Group at Columbia, both of which were engaged in military research during the Second World War. From 1948 to 1952, he served in the newly established Office of Naval Research, where he was named the first head of a newly created statistics branch. Some 25 years later he was invited to serve as Chief Scientist for the 2-year period 1978 and 1979 for the Office of Naval Research in London.

In 1952, he accepted an associate professorship at Teachers College, Columbia University and was promoted to professor in 1957. This position provided him with opportunities for research in statistics in the behavioral sciences, and an affiliation with the Department of Mathematical Statistics kept him in touch with theoretical and methodological issues in statistics and probability. After a sabbatical year at Stanford, 1958-59, he was invited to serve there as chairman of the Department of Statistics. He held this post for 5 years. During his initial chairmanship the number of master's and doctoral students grew dramatically. He also was chairman from 1985 to 1988.

Solomon has enjoyed a wide variety of research interests in statistical and probabilistic methodology and in their applications to engineering, the behavioral and social sciences, marketing, law, education, health and military issues. He is a fellow of both the American Statistical Association and the Institute of Mathematical Statistics, for which he served as president in 1964-65. In 1975, the American Statistical Association awarded him the Wilks Medal for his contributions to statistics, and in 1977, the City College of New York presented him with the Townsend Harris Medal for his contributions to knowledge. The Secretary of the Navy awarded Professor Solomon the Navy Department Distinguished Public Service Medal in 1978 for his research contributions and for his leadership in furthering basic research in the academic community for Navy Department programs. This is the highest civilian award offered by the Navy Department to an individual not employed by the department.

Solomon has authored or co-authored about 75 papers and several books in statistics and probability.

He married Lottie Lautman, a violinist, on 1 January 1947. Their daughter, Naomi, is a vice-president in database management for a large bank in New York City, and their two sons, Mark and Jed, are lawyers in the San Francisco area.

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