

Born and raised in New York City, I was given the name “Ismor” as a concatenation of two names: “Israel” – my father’s brother – and “Mordecai” – his uncle, who along with the vast majority of the rest of his family, was massacred in the Nazi Holocaust. After serving as a military officer in Eastern Europe during that period, my father eventually immigrated to the United States, where he married my mother in 1955. I was born a year later, and lived in the Washington Heights/Inwood area of upper Manhattan until my mid-twenties. From a very early age, I developed an interest in science (especially the life sciences), but it wasn’t until my attendance at George Washington High School that my aptitude for mathematics eventually emerged.

As a Mathematics/Biology double major, I received a B.S. from the City College of New York, and an M.S. degree in Mathematics from Polytechnic Institute of New York University in Brooklyn. There I specialized in the area of Numerical Analysis, and wrote a thesis on “global continuation methods” for solving nonlinear equations. At age 26, I began my Ph.D. studies in Mathematics at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, under the supervision of Professor [Richard Askey](#), a world-recognized expert in the field of “Special Functions of Mathematical Physics.” After writing a dissertation entitled “Discrete Orthogonal Polynomials” (which eventually gave rise to two published papers: [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#)), I obtained my doctorate in 1989, and accepted a temporary appointment teaching advanced mathematics courses to commissioned military officers at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA until 1994. However, due in part to shrinking university budgets, as well as an exodus of top research mathematicians from the economically collapsed Soviet Union to the U.S., the subsequent employment market in academia had become extremely poor. After much thought, I reluctantly decided to return to Madison and change my professional field, eventually accepting a postdoctoral position at the UW Department of Biostatistics and Medical Informatics. Two years later, I married a genuinely beautiful woman whom I had first met at a party shortly before leaving Madison for California, and with whom I had been having a long-distance relationship the entire time I was there. (She was the Human Resources director of the Office of the Wisconsin State Public Defender.) Sadly though, she was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer the following year, and after just short of nine years of a wonderful marriage, unfortunately punctuated with cycles of grueling chemo- and radiation therapy treatments followed by periods of temporary remission, Carla passed away peacefully, at home, in the summer of 2006. As the one person who was of course closest to her, I strongly felt the need to write and deliver her eulogy... the second hardest thing I had ever had to do.

The experience I had gained as a biostatistician proved invaluable during my wife’s illness, as I consulted with her oncologist and his team here at UW-Madison. We were able to discuss results of published drug studies that appeared in professional research journals, in deciding the best treatment options for her. Although I am not personally a big believer in human fate or destiny, I do find it curious how the circumstances and circuitous path of my life and career significantly contributed to giving her the best chance of surviving – *and enjoying* – the happy years we did share, and it truly gives me great pleasure to be able to pass along the knowledge that I have acquired to future generations. (Hopefully, done well; I do have several teaching awards to my credit.)

Who knows what life next has in store for me... or for that matter, any of us?