

Reminiscences of Jerry Cornfield

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and Statistics**

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**Jerry's
Serious
Face**



Jerry, Pitt and me

**~1940 Antonio Ciocco Deputy Chief of Div.
Public Health Methods, USPHS.**

Harold Dorn starts NIH biostatistics group

46-49 Dorn recruits Cornfield (and others)

~49 Ciocco founding chair at Pitt SPH

**Appoints Cornfield, Schniederman, Mantel
to faculty, visit 1 day/week.**

JL to Pitt 1969-1972.

**Knew Jerry's joint paper with Tukey on
E(MS), seminal papers on logistic and
discriminant functions.**

Jerry, Pitt and me

Took Jerry's 6 h advanced biostat course.

Jerry reviewed my dissertation.

1972 accepted position in VA starting 7/1.

~ June 30, the call....

**9/73 joined the GWU Biostatistics Center to
work on the National Cooperative
Gallstone Study (NCGS) under Jerry and
Larry Shaw.**

Jerry the Mentor

Asked me to write applications for new projects. Would meet on Saturday to review and critique my work. Like Waller.

Encouraged me to pursue methodological work. Stressed daily routine. His was 5-7 AM daily and Saturday mornings.

Don't throw anything away. He kept notebooks on every topic he researched.

**Fed me many important papers to read:
CDP, DRS, UGDP.**

Jerry the Mentor

**Threw me in the briar patch – NCGS
protocol committee, SIGE Varenna Italy.**

**NCGS sample size evaluation – Peter
Bennett questioned Jerry.**

Max agreed with Peter.

**Asked me to research the area. I agreed
with Peter and Max.**

**Led to my 1978 and 1981 papers, and career-
long interest.**

Jerry the Scholar

Published widely, others to review

Could work from scratch to solve most problems (no reference texts). Sam, Nathan, Max likewise.

Became Bayesian, actually an adherent of the likelihood principle – his RBOs (now called Bayes Factors), perhaps the first “valid” approach to group sequential analysis.

But a pragmatist – Bayes and Randomization.

Jerry the Scholar

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Edited By ERNEST RUBIN

*U. S. Department of Commerce
and American University*

Statistical Relationships and Proof in Medicine

The American Statistician, Vol. 8, No. 5
(Dec., 1954), pp. 19-21

**Clinical Trials versus Observational
Evidence**

Jerry the Scholar

“To distinguish between statistical association on the one hand and relationships that are established by experimentation on the other, without any reference to alternative variables that are present in one case but not the other, seems to us to be neither good statistics, good science, nor good philosophy—though it may be good red herring.”

Jerry the Leader

Disliked administration. Preferred to “guide”.

Delegated the day-to-day work to others – Larry Shaw ran the Biostatistics Center.

Loved opportunity to expound, and to argue a point, especially with Max, Nate and Sam.

Mornings to himself, afternoon open door.

Like the pied piper in a group.

Jerry the Leader

**Liked having Sam, Max and Nathan around,
they loved to argue.**

**Greatly admired Nathan Mantel, who drove
him crazy.**

Nathan knew no boundaries -- mail.

Jerry had lock installed, but

Jerry the Anachronism

Contributor to *Smoking and Health*

But loved to smoke water pipe and cigars, the latter at the office. Fortunately the building had windows.

~1977 developed pancreatic cancer, had Whipple surgery, survived almost 2 years.

Traveling, always sat in the last row of the plane – crash tests, and the smoking section.

Left at last minute – if didn't miss a plane periodically then leaving too early.

Jerry the Pioneer

Jerry and Ruth bought a farm in Great Falls, VA.

Started with cabin and a tractor. No running water.

Built their home on Civil War battle site – became local war buff.

Loved the country

Conclusions

**Clinical Trials and epidemiology “were
built on the shoulders of giants”**

One can only imagine ...