

A Conversation with Frank Proschan

Myles Hollander, with Albert W. Marshall in attendance

Abstract. Frank Proschan was born on April 7, 1921, in New York City. He earned a B.S. in mathematics from City College of New York in 1941, an M.A. in mathematical statistics from George Washington University in 1948 and a Ph.D. in statistics from Stanford University in 1959. He has held positions with the federal government at the National Bureau of Standards (1941–1952), with Sylvania Electric Products (1952–1960) and with Boeing Scientific Laboratories (1960–1970). Since 1970 he has been Professor of Statistics at Florida State University. He has also been a visiting lecturer at U.C. Berkeley (1964–1965), Distinguished Visiting Professor at Texas A & M University (summer 1967) and Stanford University (1960–1970). His many honors include the following: the Von Neumann Prize Award presented by TIMS-ORSA (jointly with R. E. Barlow, 1991); the Townsend Harris Medal (Alumni Association of City College of New York, 1983); the Wilks Medal Award (American Statistical Association, 1982); the Distinguished Alumni Award (George Washington University, 1978); Winner, Best Moderator Award (Annual Reliability and Maintainability Symposium, 1973); and Winner, Ford Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Award (1959). He is a Fellow of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics, a Fellow of the American Statistical Association and an elected member of the International Statistical Institute. Since 1984 he has held the title of Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor at Florida State University. He is now Professor Emeritus at Florida State University, after retiring in December 1992.

The following is an amalgamation of two conversations that took place in Tallahassee, Florida. The first, with M. Hollander, took place on Valentine's day, February 14, 1992, in Hollander's office. The second conversation, with M. Hollander and A. W. Marshall, took place in Duane Meeter's office on November 7, 1993, one day after Florida State University had honored Frank by hosting "Frank Proschan Festivities." Edna (Pudge) Proschan accompanied Frank.

LIFE IN NEW YORK CITY

Hollander: You grew up in New York City—what part?

Proschan: I grew up in the slums of Manhattan on 8th Street, between avenues C and D near the

East River. "Drop in sometime" was our favorite quote.

Hollander: What was your family like in New York?

Proschan: Six people crowded into a one-bedroom tenement. Half the time watching the older, bigger members fighting each other, the other half the time fighting off bedbugs and cockroaches.

Hollander: Frank, would you like to tell us a little bit about your mom and dad?

Proschan: My mother and father came over in the early 1900's to escape the Russian pogroms and nastiness, I never saw my grandfather. Money was the big difficulty in our family as in most families; after all I grew up during the depression and my father lost his job in about 1930 and never again got another job. So he would walk and read historical novels. He probably knew more than anybody in the family about the United States because of his great amount of reading. It's interesting to go back and see what motivated me later on in life. My father and mother's picture was that everybody in the family, all the children, should get college degrees. That was all he asked for in this life. My

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