

George Dantzig

- master's in mathematics from Univ of Michigan (1937)
- Junior statistician, Bureau of Labor Statistics ('37-'39)
- doctoral program in math at UC Berkeley, where he studied statistics under Jerzy Sława-Neyman.

During his study in 1939, Dantzig solved two unproven statistical theorems due to a misunderstanding:

Near the beginning of a class, Professor Sława-Neyman wrote two problems on the blackboard. Dantzig arrived late and assumed that they were a homework assignment. According to Dantzig, they "seemed to be a little harder than usual", but a few days later he handed in completed solutions for both problems, still believing that they were an assignment that was overdue.

Six weeks later, an excited Sława-Neyman eagerly told him that the "homework" problems he had solved were two of the most famous unsolved problems in statistics.

This story began to spread and was used as a motivational lesson demonstrating the power of positive thinking. Over time, some facts were altered, but the basic story persisted in the form of an urban legend and as an introductory scene in the movie Good Will Hunting.

Dantzig recalled in a 1986 interview in the College Mathematics Journal, "A year later, when I began to worry about a thesis topic, Sława-Neyman just shrugged and told me to wrap the two problems in a binder and he would accept them as my thesis." [8]