My path to the Hutch and to leading a cancer research lab has not been the most direct one. I was born and grew up in what used to be Yugoslavia, in a large, dynamic and sociable environment, where skills such as practicality, which I came to view as one of my greatest assets, and adaptability, were constantly honed. Following a move to Canada, I enrolled in an undergraduate program at the University of Toronto, fully intending to study physics, only to be sidetracked by an emerging passion for biology. I stayed at the University of Toronto for my graduate training with Dr. Ulli Tepass. While investigating genetics of epithelial cell polarity establishment in Drosophila, a gene I was working on turned out to be responsible for a particularly debilitating retinal pathogenesis. The ensuing realization that what I did at the bench could have a bearing on a person’s life and wellbeing had a profound effect on my future. It drove my decision to next join the lab of Dr. Elaine Fuchs at the Rockefeller University for postdoctoral training. There I investigated complex genetic interactions that regulate tissue growth, but in a mouse skin epithelium where the link between the experimental subject and human disease is often more direct. My final transition to a research program firmly squared on cancer was driven by a conviction that cancer is the problem of our time, and that, with the unprecedented wealth of information and experimental tools, it is our responsibility to gain control of this disease.