

ASIS '99 Award of Merit Acceptance Speech

by José-Marie Griffiths

Editor's Note: The ASIS Award of Merit is bestowed annually to an individual who has made noteworthy contributions to the field of information science. Dr. José-Marie Griffiths is the recipient of the 1999 ASIS Award of Merit. She was cited for her research and innumerable other professional achievements and, in particular, for her "strong combination of vision, collaborative approach, extraordinary communication abilities, advocacy and explicit values that have become the hallmark of her leadership and her contribution to the information sciences." Dr. Griffiths is a past president of ASIS, an NCLIS commissioner and the Chief Information Officer of the University of Michigan. Dr. Griffiths is writing a follow-up article for the *Bulletin* about the relationship between information science research, education and practice. Look for it soon.

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Good evening. I am deeply honored by this award. There are many others much more deserving of this award than I am. I believe it was last year that Henry Small, in accepting his award, used Isaac Newton's quote: "If I have seen farther than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." Well, I'd like to tell you about some of the giants who have helped me.

The person to whom I owe the greatest debt for introducing me to information science and persuading me to make the leap from nuclear physics to information science – a decision, by the way, that I've never regretted – was Bertie Brookes, known to many of you for his work on bibliometrics. Bertie invited me to his office, sat me down and over a glass of sherry talked about the emerging discipline of information science. Bertie believed that information science would eventually be acknowledged as one of the fundamental sciences. This was so different from the interaction in the physics department that I was intrigued and, whether it was Bertie's persuasive rhetoric or the sherry we'll never know, the rest is history.

A second person who helped shape my information science career was Robert Fairthorne, with whom I engaged in an extended correspondence on the techniques and merits of combinatorial algebra – an area he created while a student at Oxford. And since this didn't fit the mathematics of the day as taught at Oxford, he was "sent down," a polite euphemism for being "thrown out."

A third person who may never fully know the influence she had on me is Karen Sparck-Jones, whose academic rigor and rapid-fire, aggressive

questioning toughened me up and gave me the highest research standards to aim for.

The fourth person who shaped my thinking was Fritz Machlup, who was always a fascinating conversationalist on any topic, but particularly in the areas of economics – specifically the knowledge economy – and on education, especially the differences among the United States, United Kingdom and central European approaches.

This occasion cannot be complete without my expression of gratitude to Michael Buckland who brought me to this country through a visiting appointment at UC-Berkeley, and to Donald King, now my long-time professional and personal partner, for keeping me here. Don broadened my perspective on quantitative methods and taught me many things, including how to write a winning proposal, how to run a business and, in the increasingly hectic pace of life, how to be patient.

I believe I have been truly privileged to have worked with these giants over the last three decades. I have had the opportunity to perform research in areas as diverse as economics of information, metadata structures and retrieval algorithms, information user studies and technological developments. If research is where my heart is, teaching has refreshed my soul! I have been fortunate to have had academic affiliations almost continuously since 1972. Most recently I've been able to play a role in academic administration and national policy-making. I very much doubt that these opportunities would have come my way had I remained a research physicist.

Annual Meeting Coverage



José-Marie Griffiths

Now, I'd like to address the role ASIS has played in my life. I joined ASIS in the mid-1970s. In 1978 I participated in a NATO Advanced Study Institute, organized by Tony Debons and held in Chania, Crete. This was my first introduction to the group I labeled "The Americans."

Many ASIS members were there and I enjoyed many hours of discussion and debates with them in the rather conducive environment of the beach, poolside or hotel patio.

I attended my first ASIS meeting exactly 20 years ago in Minneapolis-St. Paul. It is memorable not the least for the seductive dancing of Joe Ann Clifton, Toni Carbo, Darlene Myers and Bonnie Carroll. I do remember the friendliness and welcoming environment of ASIS.

In 1980 I joined King Research, moved to the Washington, DC, area and joined the Potomac Valley Chapter, which was very active. ASIS and the chapter provided me with a professional "home away from home." ASIS is, and always has been, my primary professional association. Like going home to England, coming to ASIS meetings is a comfortable activity for me – I can speak the language; I see familiar faces; I can relax!

But what is possible within ASIS is the ability to mix and mingle both with the giants of the field and the newest recruits and visitors. Further, the opportunity to interact with people from very different backgrounds with different interests who work in very different roles is truly rewarding. We should celebrate this diversity.

I've spent considerable time recently contemplating the rapid approach of the new millennium and thinking about the past. As I thought about what I should say this evening, I decided that I would like to dedicate this award to three people.

First are my parents, Bernard and Riet Griffiths, who lost a large chunk of their youth. My father, as a 19-year-old college student, volunteered and joined the British 8th Army in 1939. He spent from 1939 through 1945 as an advance artillery spotter – not the safest kind of role. He was in every major battle and campaign from El Alamein in North Africa through Sicily and the Normandy invasion, the Ardennes and following the Marketbasket campaign in the Netherlands. That he survived at all is remarkable. He also spent 1945-46 in Berlin – in all eight years.

My mother lived from age 14 to 20 under German occupation in northeast Netherlands. Her father was in the Dutch resistance and my mother gave up her own college ambitions to become the breadwinner for the family.

It took me quite a while to fully understand and appreciate the extent of their sacrifice, but I am firmly in their debt because they never let me believe that I could not achieve what-

ever I set my mind to. So I count my parents as the two tallest giants in my life.

Now, having looked backwards in time, I'd like to turn our attention to the future. So the third person to whom I dedicate this award is our daughter, Rhiannon King, who until first grade was a regular ASIS meeting attendee and

self-proclaimed head of SIG/KID. She might be short of stature, but she is a giant in heart and represents the future to me.

I believe we all have a great responsibility to the future. As I've already mentioned, I am certainly aware of those who have preceded me, whose work has made possible my contributions.

We are living at a time in history when we, as information professionals, may have more impact on the creation, sharing and use of knowledge than our predecessors could ever have imagined. This is a responsibility we must take seri-

ously and creatively. As John Buchan said, "We can only pay our debt to the past by putting the future in debt to ourselves."

As we pay that debt, I am encouraged that we can simultaneously acknowledge the history and foundations of our profession and move forward into the future with new and expanded roles and responsibilities.

As Allen Kayso aptly stated: "The best way to predict the future is to invent it."

I look forward to inventing the future of information science – and technology – with all of you and to hearing about it at future ASIS meetings.

Thank you.

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