The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the American Society for Information Science evokes for me an image of an anniversary cake with 50 candles on it. Every one of the cake’s glowing candles reminds me of an event, an idea or a face.

The candles of the early events shine with their attention on new handling techniques required when the traditional publishing and library methods are not ready to cope. Thus, auxiliary publication services, microforms, edge-notched cards, peak-a-boo cards, punched cards and new kinds of indexes, abstracts and thesauri evolve. Through the candlelight, I see the studies of big abstract/index publishers like Chemical Abstracts and Biological Abstracts seeking new ways to handle the growing volume of scientific and technical information; the federal government’s encouragement and support of these efforts; and the early Gordon Conferences to discuss research and cooperation.

Many of these candles glow, too, with the intellectual concern for the representation of the information being squeezed, stored and brought forth again and the chances for its high relevance and good recall. Early on, the disciplines pioneering these systems are chemistry, medicine, law, physics, biology, social sciences, arts and humanities. The candles for their research and development efforts burn brightly, as do candles representing user studies, information resources management, privacy of information and transborder data flow.

As the eye moves to other lit candles, we recognize the magnetic tapes, diskettes and laser disks; the information and analysis centers and clearinghouses; automated library systems; online searching; user friendly systems; the currently-popular optical information systems; artificial intelligence; hypertext; the move from the large centralized computing systems to distributed databases to the scholar’s workstation and desktop publishing, then back again to emphasis on the big systems. Forth and back, back and forth.

As IBM and Remington Rand and Eastman Kodak and many other companies developed new technology and sold their equipment to large buyers—government and industry—terms like hardware and software, machine language, assembly language, compilers, Fortran and COBOL became familiar. In time, the generations of equipment spawned new families—minicomputers, dumb and intelligent terminals, PCs and their clones. Close relatives are the modems, telecommunications and networks.

Moving to another section of candles, I see the databases—bibliographic, numeric and im-
age; the database-dictionaries and directories; Boolean logic, Polish notation, truncation; the database producers and vendors; writers, editors, publishers; abstractors and indexers; online searchers and entrepreneurs; theoreticians, practitioners; user studies; bibliographic coupling and citation analysis. Who of us has not been involved in the construction and use of databases and enthused over the magical results one can obtain, yet aware of what doesn’t appear, but should have, in the search results?

With all candles glowing, the ones lit later stand tall and bright, while the older ones, dimming, still give light.

And what of ASIS in all of this? ASIS is the people, the meetings to share research results and applications, the fights over terminology and concepts—though regretfully far fewer now than when the organization was in its teens and twenties.

Some candles represent the variety of members—managers, researchers, educators, proposal writers, systems analysts and designers, product developers—the people with an understanding of the capabilities of the ever-growing new generations of large and small computers. Early on these systems are kindly, but often somewhat distant. (Are you old enough to remember the long walk or bus trip to deliver decks of punched cards to where the 101 sorter or computer resided and the return trip to pick up the printouts? And the way you marked the decks in case the rubber bands broke and all the cards toppled?)

ADI/ASIS members staff the educational programs of the library schools where some of the first information science courses and programs appear. As the schools mature, they grow the second generation of faculties by awarding degrees in information science or information studies. Yet, the schools and the profession itself continue to search for appropriate labels: Are we information scientists? Information professionals? What should we call ourselves? Schools in other disciplines—business, medicine, engineering, communication and psychology—begin offering information science degree programs, acknowledging the vastness of the field of information studies.

But the part that ASIS shares is the part that helped and continues to help shape the field and the Information Age, while continually trying to integrate the concepts, educate practitioners and teachers, and work for a public information policy.

ASIS has been in the midst of it all—its members designing, exploring, testing, building, using and marketing information products and services. ASIS has prepared publications to disseminate information about information; developed continuing education programs to bring professionals up to speed; encouraged the formation of chapters to provide local meetings and outreach; and approved special interest groups to focus on specific matters such as technology and society.

ASIS stands for collegiality, support, seriousness and fun; a mix of old-timers and newcomers at conferences; concerns with national and international issues; and people—warm, interesting people from many diverse disciplines and with varied expertise. If you could join only one professional society, this would be the one.

**Dreams to Realities—Sometimes**

While we have moved from emphasizing the analysis of the content of the information we process to emphasizing the rapid transfer of that information, we have shifted attention from the intellectual underpinnings of the field. Nonetheless, some of the candles continue to shine bravely on the few theoretical constructs and fundamental concepts that have engendered. But a nagging question remains: With information and communication perhaps the most distinguishing basic human activities, why are the fundamental concepts of information science so few? Are we wearing blinders, confining ourselves too narrowly to a picture? Or is the chuck too large to chew in a short time? Is this our agenda for the second 50 years?

Two hundred years ago, George Washington saw the need for an independent organization with a user-friendly administration—a notion which eventually became the United States of America. Thomas Jefferson helped him with the enunciation of principles involved in information and its communication. If Washington and Jefferson were here now, I think they would be amazed with the growth of the country and the ways in which we have promulgated their beliefs. Jefferson would applaud ASIS for remembering his words, "Whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government."

We keep the faith. Bravely, doggedly, ideistically we trudge forward. If Washington and Jefferson are gladdened by what we have accomplished and what we aspire to achieve—and I think they would be—so should ASIS.

The 50 candles still shine boldly and, at this auspicious time, they are joined by two more—one to grow on and one just for good measure.

Happy anniversary, ASIS!

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