I am delighted and honored to receive the ASIS&T Award of Merit. It is especially gratifying to be recognized for my work on the information search process (ISP), which has grown over the years and continues to be important. Back in the late 80s when I was starting out, bringing emotion into the conversation seemed more than a little strange to many in information science. But early on ASIS&T was open to giving me a hearing by accepting my papers for conferences and publication.

ASIS&T has been a wonderful affiliation for me. This association provides a collaboration and dialog of research and researchers that has been immensely important for me. I have benefited from being able to share ideas with researchers in the field and hear their work year after year. It has been an annual conversation of sharing and learning over the years. I have received good feedback on my ideas and some very practical advice. I remember after my first ASIS&T presentation, one I approached with considerable trepidation, Evelyn Daniel kindly took me aside to let me know that my slides were terrible – way too cluttered and not readable from the back of the room. You can be sure that I didn’t make that mistake again. ASIS&T enabled me to see how my research fit into the whole spectrum of information science research. Our recent name change reflects the international nature of the field, and many of my most interesting collaborations have been with international colleagues.

This year – 2013 – marks the 30th anniversary of my work on the ISP, starting with my doctoral dissertation in 1983. I began by wanting to understand more about how students learn from multiple sources and why it seemed so hard for them to engage in their own inquiry. My research into their perspective of information seeking opened up the “big problem” that got me started on my scholarly journey and that still intrigues me today.
When I studied for my MLS at Rutgers in the early 70s, it was called library school. But it was very much a library and information science program. So from the beginning I took an information science perspective of librarianship.

I have been interested in theories on the boundaries of library and information science. My undergraduate work was firmly grounded in Deweyan philosophy of education along with other learning theorists, particularly the constructivists as opposed to the behaviorists. In light of this orientation, while studying for my master’s degree I realized that I was most interested in libraries for learning. So in the early 80s, when working on my doctorate, I concentrated on information behavior that resulted in learning, and Kelly’s personal construct theory from psychology clearly influenced my information search process model.

When I joined the Rutgers faculty, library and information science had recently merged there with communication and journalism bringing in a wide range of converging perspectives. Tefko Saracevic and Nick Belkin joined the LIS faculty as senior professors. The Ph.D. was a joint program across the school prompting lots of discussion on theories and application. Communication brought social construction into the conversation, and that was particularly pertinent to my work. It was an especially fruitful environment for exploring ideas, and it was fascinating to be a part of it all.

Of course the 1990s were a time of tremendous advances in information technology. I started researching information behavior in a contained-collection library world, and everything changed in amazing ways in a short time. It was a fantastic time to be doing research in library and information science and still is.

Three important changes in information science occurred during that time:

1. Use became an important area of interest. Questions of purpose became important. Why do people seek information? What’s their purpose? How do they use it after they find it? That was right up my alley. Today it may seem strange to think of purpose not being important, but only as information became available “where you are all the time” did serious questions of use come to the fore. SIG/USE is now one of the most active special interest groups in ASIS&T.

2. Users’ experiences in information seeking became an area of interest.

When I came into this field emotions were thought to be outside the paradigm of information science. But once the “black box” of users’ experience was opened there was no denying the importance of emotions in information behavior.

3. The concepts underlying information behavior became an increasingly important area of interest. Researchers looked into their findings for concepts to build the theoretical framework of information science.

It may sound like the really interesting work is behind us. I don’t think so. The broad range of information science research offers important insights into the most pressing problems of the complex information environment of the 21st century. But information science research is something of an insiders’ game. We are interested in each other’s research findings and build on each other’s work. For the most part there has been only minimal transport outside the field in this time when it would seem our work would be most valued. We each need to ask, “What is the value-added that my work brings to society as a whole?”

My own area of information seeking for learning is an example in point. Educators are struggling to transform schools to prepare students for living in the information society. My research offers some important insight into the process of learning from multiple sources of information, which is central to this task. We have developed a design framework called Guided Inquiry, based on the ISP model, that makes these concepts and insights accessible for school administrators, teachers and librarians to put into action in schools.

Information science is a relatively young discipline, but it is right at the center of every aspect of people’s lives. We are just at the beginning of the age of information that holds tremendous potential for the future of information science. The big question is how information retrieval and information behavior research influence the way systems and services enable people to be smarter, wiser, more creative, productive and perhaps even happier. In my view this is the challenge before every researcher in information science today. What are the implications of your work? I urge you to consider this question seriously. How does your research contribute to the good of society? How can you make your findings accessible outside the field? This is a wonderful time to be in this field. There is much work ahead. Let’s get going.