The International Academy of Sex Research: 
In the Beginning

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I am delighted to return to Cambridge University and to Caius College where, through the good offices of Joe Herbert, I was privileged to spend a sabbatical year. But this pleasure is overshadowed by another—this meeting marks the first decade of the International Academy of Sex Research.

Attending this meeting is very significant for me. It was also difficult. To be here, I sacrificed lecture and study time from my first weeks as a student at the Yale Law School. Only somewhat confused in this new venture when I left two days ago, I expect to be totally bewildered when I return two days hence. But whatever the course of my career during the next years, I will always reflect with pride on two professional accomplishments. These are paramount to me because they are my legacies—they will live beyond my hour upon this stage—or the grander one. One accomplishment was the founding of the journal, Archives of Sexual Behavior. The other was the founding of the organization, the International Academy of Sex Research.

At last year’s meeting, the ninth, it became apparent to me that the Academy had come of age. It is so well established and “taken for granted” that many newer members know little of its inception. At that meeting, individual members told me they had just learned that I had “started this whole thing.” I was shocked, realizing that history becomes “ancient” so quickly. This, then, is a good time for memorializing the inception of the Academy. Why and how was it started? Who were the first members? What were the earliest goals?

In the beginning, there was the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex. Then there was the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists. (I saw them and said they were not “good.”) These organizations’
financial constraints—the need to remain solvent via a large membership or via a certification or "quasi-licensing" program, made each of them that much less scholarly. This was not what progress in the field of sexology demanded in the early 1970s.

That time in history was a watershed period for sexological science. Two books by William Masters and Virginia Johnson were professionally acclaimed and international best-sellers. They ushered in an era of "hands on" human sex research and a program of effective sex therapy. Politically, the World Health Organization (WHO) addressed and defined the concept of sexual health. Educationally, from a point where a mere handful of medical schools were teaching human sexuality to fetal doctors, soon nearly every medical school incorporated this new health science into its curriculum. At the legal level, the right of sexual partners to use contraceptives and the right of pregnant women to interrupt pregnancy were affirmed by the highest United States court. It was also the time of great excitement in the Gay Rights movement. And it was the time when millions of middle-class adults, males and females, queued to watch Linda Lovelace perform in the film Deep Throat. In another era, she would have been merely a sword swallower.

As the science of sex research grew, its subdisciplines included clinical outcome studies assessing diverse strategies of sex therapy, sexual physiology with penile and vaginal measures of erotic arousal, and developmental studies of persons occupying scattered points on the sexual identity spectrum—transsexuals, transvestites, homosexuals. For other researchers working with non-humans, rats bumped, gorillas humped, kangaroos jumped, and neurotransmitters pumped.

We were all pursuing the hidden knowledge of our new science. But we were members of too diverse a group of "home" disciplines and of isolated professional organizations. There was no common meeting ground for exchange between the relatively few scientists, world-wide, whose exclusive professional commitment was sex research. There was no special opportunity for sharing, either in person or on the printed page.

The first remedy was the establishment of Archives of Sexual Behavior. The second was the establishment of the International Academy of Sex Research. These two remedies are linked historically. They are linked legally. They are linked, for me, personally. These links will be elaborated upon in the context of the history of the establishment of the Academy.

The process began with a series of letters. Three will be summarized:

1. a letter to members of the Editorial Board of Archives, exploring interest in establishing a new organization;
2. a follow-up letter acknowledging the extent of their support and nominations for membership; and
3. a letter to Academy nominees.