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Memories from my time at the Max-Planck Institut
where I obtained my Diplom and Doctoral degrees.

In celebration of the 95th Birthday of Jan Peter Toennies



I joined Peter's group in 1976. My wish was to perform a theoretical, numerical study. For an experimental institute that was quite unusual. But it was an exciting new time for numerical studies as computers just became useful. When I started, punch cards were still being used and the core memory of the mainframe was 256K! of which only 64K was available to the user.

Peter explained to me that a numerical study would be fine. He said that he could not help me with equations, but there would always be visitors doing theoretical work who could support me. It worked out fine. Peter enjoyed theoretical questions and one could also talk to him about calculations. He had a great feeling what effect a certain potential modification or approximation in the equations might have on the final and measureable result. I would say Peter was an enthusiastic and successful intuitive theoretician!

Doing theory I was only once in contact with the manufacturing lab. I was 'volunteered' to organize a barbecue. A grill and equipment should be at the lab. I found the grill but not the equipment. The people there told me that they would look for it and if not found they would manufacture it. At lunch I mentioned it to my colleagues. They stated that the lab did very good work but it would take quite some time. I should better plan to buy the equipment. But later the same day the lab called that I could pick up the stuff. They had made it new. When I repeated the comment of my colleagues they said that everyone thinks his requirements are the most important and urgent and should have absolute priority. That would of course not be possible. But if something really important came up they would do it immediately. My relationship with the manufacturing lab was always the very best.

Peter was not an early bird. Usually he arrived just before lunch time but then stayed late. I was reminded about that during my doctoral examination. The oral exam with Peter should start at 10:00. At 10:10 I was the only one still waiting for his examiner. We called him at home and found out that he had simply overslept. He rushed in and the exam still worked out fine.

I could mention many other issues, like the (in)famous Friday seminar, his daily inquiry 'Stimmung gut?', the 'Doktoranden Symposium' which survived many years after I had left, the Jule Club event before Christmas or when the window cleaners had moved Peter's large stacks of papers and he was at a complete loss for a week.

But one thing that stuck out very positively was Peter's enthusiasm for science. He was always prepared to talk about ideas, results and papers. His continued science activities after official retirement are another prove.

After I left the MPI in April 1987 I joined the European Space Agency at ESTEC in the Netherlands. I stayed there for 30 years until my official retirement. Since 2017 I support as volunteer the University of Oldenburg in the field of astrophysics, giving a lecture on the space environment, supervising students, etc. I had always loved space activities and enjoyed my work at ESA. I still keep very positive memories about my time in the group of Peter Toennies and I am grateful for his dedicated supervision and guidance.