

Dear Jan Peter Toennies,

My heartfelt congratulations on your 95th birthday and all the very best for the years to come! Unfortunately, I won't be able to attend your birthday celebration and the reunion party, but I have firmly set my sights on making it to your 100th! 😊

I often think back to the time I had the privilege of spending in your group in Bunsenstraße — it was a stroke of luck that, after my postdoctoral stay with John C. Polanyi in Toronto and back at the University of Hannover, I had the opportunity to also work in your group and investigate adsorbates at insulator surfaces with helium atom scattering. For me personally, it was an important part of my habilitation and certainly laid a solid foundation for my later appointment to the Chair of Physical Chemistry at the University of Magdeburg. Above all, however, it was a true pleasure to work in the inspiring environment of your institute — open doors everywhere, a spirit of discussion and willingness to help, both from you and from all members of the institute, with whom I had the pleasure of working closely. I learned a great deal during that time.

Physical Chemistry in Magdeburg is embedded within the Faculty of Process and Systems Engineering — a more engineering-focused environment. With my research, I have always been somewhat isolated here, and so I was persuaded 20 years ago to take on the role of Vice Rector for Financial Planning and Academic Development — initially for four years. Apparently, the university has been satisfied with my work, as I have now been re-elected for a fifth term. While this is, of course, not a scientific role in the narrow sense, but one of science management, there are parallels: a university has at least as many knobs and switches as a helium atom scattering apparatus, and just like in the lab, you're never quite sure what might go wrong on any given day — or what surprises await you — but when everything runs smoothly, the results can be remarkable!

In other words: I now probably hold one of the most varied positions at our university, and I have just extended my active service by another three years. This, of course, is also because my responsibilities are not merely administrative but involve strategic guidance — something that, much like a scientific experiment, requires observation and measurement on the one hand, and analysis and interpretation on the other. These are things I learned from you and also in Joachim Heidberg's group in Hannover. Thank you once again for the opportunities you helped open up for me!

With best wishes from Magdeburg,

Helmut Weiß