

## In Memoriam Dr. *habil.* Friedrich Geiss (1932–2015)



Dr. *habil.* Friedrich Geiss, a doyen of the community of the theoreticians and serious users of thin-layer chromatography, passed away on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015, at the age of 83 years in Lugano (Switzerland). He was an unsurpassed expert on the physicochemical background of this technique, and throughout all of his professional life he was actively involved in the development and introduction of advanced applications of thin-layer chromatography to analytical and physicochemical studies. Two editions of his famous thin-layer chromatographic “bible” helped train many generations of chromatographers worldwide, not only those utilizing thin-layer chromatography in their everyday work. This “bible” first appeared in 1972 published by Vieweg as *Die Parameter der Dünnschichtchromatographie*, and was

then published again in 1987 by Hühthig in an updated and expanded English version titled *Fundamentals of Thin Layer Chromatography*. It was a rare example of a perfect handbook written in a fascinating manner founded on the principle of never compromising absolute logic and able to comfortably guide motivated thin-layer chromatography beginners from absolute fundamentals of the technique across the complex yet universal physicochemical aspects to eventually obtain a successful separation.

Fritz will be remembered by his colleagues and friends not only as an outstanding theoretician of the thin-layer chromatographic principles but also as a brilliant humanist. By nature he was endowed with a rich spectrum of diverse talents, and, owing to his insatiable intellectual appetite, possessed profound knowledge reaching from the sciences to fine arts, with strong personal preferences such as artistic photography, contemporary history, and global politics. He will be remembered as a wonderful instigator of witty and at the same time dead serious discussions, charming even his adversaries by skillfully using his favorite weapon, which was engaging his interlocutor with a paradox often being a hidden Socratic didactics. He will be dearly remembered as a high-spirited and generous person, who together with his wife Helga was always eager to host under their hospitable Italian and Swiss roofs legions of friends and acquaintances gathered on their diverse tracks of life.

Mourning a dear old friend can have no end, and especially not a friend of Fritz's human and intellectual dimensions. Here we purposely omit the (otherwise enormously important) threads of Fritz's accomplished professional career, which included his high level managing positions with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission in Ispra, his ultimately becoming the first Director of the Environment Institute in the history of Ispra, and his pioneering initiative to establish the European Centre for Validation of Alternative-to-Animal Testing Methods. We have focused mainly on his contribution to chromatography because we – his friends – know best that at the bottom of his heart, Fritz always remained a dedicated separation scientist and an excellent chemist, avidly tracing each progress connected to the natural and life sciences. For this reason, he never stopped attending multiple chromatographic conferences, later as a venerated invited and distinguished guest, who was always ready to initiate heated discussions with his perfectly chosen small questions. As a proper humanist and educator, Fritz always had great confidence in the young generation. Being a retired man with hardly any access to a chromatographic laboratory, he was able to deliver the most fascinating and illuminating conference talks on fundamentals of liquid chromatography, especially addressed to the young in his audience. A bit uncomfortable about no longer being able to present new experimental research results and at the

same time clearly aware of the indispensability of the (otherwise neglected by many) theoretical fundamentals of chromatography, he used to start his talks in a typically provocative tone by stating that his lecture was going to be a great scientific novelty because his book on the theory of chromatography was published almost three decades ago, and in scientific statistics it is a well recognized fact that in each decade almost 90% of earlier findings are totally forgotten.

The thin-layer chromatography community has lost a treasured colleague who provided us with indispensable sources of information needed by all to this day in order to truly understand our work, and we are thankful for his life-time scientific accomplishments and human qualities.

TERESA KOWALSKA AND MIECZYŚLAW SAJEWICZ, Co-Editors-in-Chief  
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MONIKA WAKSMUNDZKA-HAJNOS, Editors

*Editorial Board*

Friedrich Geiss, former Director in the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission died on February 14, 2015 in Lugano (Switzerland), shortly before his 83rd birthday. In 1981 he was appointed head of the JRC chemical division in JRC-Ispra, and became then the first director of the Environmental Institute in 1988. After retiring in 1994 from 35 years of working at the European Commission, Friedrich Geiss worked in the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact before he started an entirely new field of activity by teaching media history at the Technical University Berlin. In 1960 Friedrich Geiss discovered the potential of thin-layer chromatography and published a number of studies on this subject. His 1972 book *Die Parameter der Dünnschichtchromatographie* was a great success in the German speaking scientific community. Since 1987 the book is also available in English under the title *Fundamentals of Thin Layer Chromatography*. He can be truly considered as one of the fathers of thin-layer chromatography.

I first met Friedrich Geiss 2001 in Lillafüred, Hungary when I presented a new diode-array scanner for TLC evaluations. I remember the situation quite well. It took place in a very nice room with paintings covering the wall instead of one of the rather cold and clinical rooms commonly used for lectures. Friedrich Geiss was my chair. In the middle of my presentation he surprisingly interrupted me to ask a question. At that time I was rather annoyed, answered him shortly and continued with the lecture. It was clear

that Friedrich Geiss could not wait to open the discussion. The same evening he took me aside and tried to explain the reason for his interruption even though it sounded a bit like an excuse. However, we both agreed that firm discussions were always the fastest way to clarify differences. Throughout the next years we continued this habit, which resulted in some rather harsh four-eye debates. Sentences like “you simply cannot say this in that way” were everything but uncommon. I learned a lot in these discussions because they gave me valuable hints and inspired me. Friedrich Geiss also wrote short E-mails consisting of simple questions like “Concerning your book please explain what you mean with your statement below fig. 2.5” or “I cannot understand your conclusion”. Personally I preferred this direct and almost rude style of debates because it best reflected my own personality and my idea of a fruitful discussion.

Beside TLC-papers Friedrich Geiss also wrote travel literature, radio broadcasts and political commentaries. He spent more than 50 years of his life outside Germany, from where he carefully followed the development of German contemporary events. In 1999 the latter resulted in the publication of the political book: *Nichts mehr los mit den Deutschen*, which could be translated as *Nothing in Particular about the Germans*, in which he criticized German provincialism and mediocrity. The book is still available on the market and is well worth reading.

The year I took over the duties as JPC Editor-in-Chief we discussed my presentation as well, again shortly after my lecture. At the time we were on a ship between Helsinki and Stockholm, standing in a dark corner. At the end of this discussion he gave me an advice: “Bernd, as Editor-in-Chief you will have to take over international responsibilities. Treat people with more reserve, especially you as a German”.

BERND SPANGENBERG

Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Planar Chromatography – Modern TLC*

Dr. *habil.* Friedrich (Fritz) Geiss passed away. He was and remains “the pope of understanding” in the scientific community of planar chromatography.

His career was extraordinary. He was born in Reisen, Hesse, Germany, on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1932. Later, he studied chemistry at the Technical University of Darmstadt (from 1951 to 1956). He defended his doctoral thesis in organic chemistry at the Saarland University in 1958. After a short period as a chemist at Agfa (1959-1960), he joined the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and

received various positions between 1960 and 1994. Within the scientifically fruitful period as a team leader in analytical chemistry (1960-1973), he wrote his highly recognized book and also obtained the *venia legendi* in Analytical Chemistry at the Technical University of Darmstadt in 1976. Later in 1988, he obtained the top position as Director of the JRC in Ispra, Italy.

His lifetime achievement has been honored by my colleagues before, and the list of the diverse areas that Fritz had studied and influenced would take a separate review. He had not only a superb understanding of planar chromatography, but also of people and the human condition and spirit. He is the author of several books related to societal and political matters. Fortunately, a substantial part of his work was tied to the various aspects of planar chromatography. In the prosperous work environment at the JRC in Ispra, and often together with his coworker Helmut Schlitt, he investigated factors of influence on TLC separations. So, they invented the Vario KS Chamber, whose successor is frequently in use for planar chromatographic optimizations. His resulting book on fundamentals of TLC was made available in languages like German (1972), Japanese (1980), English (1987) and Russian (1989). He defined terms, created understanding and turned the trial-and-error approach into a scientific and sound methodology. He himself explained his passion in this way: to describe “what happens in TLC, or what the practitioner should know that happens, why it happens, and how he can control what happens”.

Throughout his scientific career he was a man who stood for logical and clear thinking and the honest presentation of planar-chromatographic fundamentals. With his clear logic, he was able to succeed in many critical discussions. This open-minded and dedicated view on subjects made him a deeply-respected internationally recognized scientist of the highest repute in planar chromatographic analysis. He was awarded the prestigious M.S. Tswett Medal in 2002.

The contact with scientists of all nations and students always gave him great pleasure. He spoke at least 5 languages. He inspired the French Club de Chromatographie sur Couche Mince (CCCM) meetings or the international Katowice-Szczyrk symposia in Poland or the international HPTLC symposia and enjoyed their overwhelming hospitality. Over 50 years of his almost 83 years, he was a passionate teacher in TLC. His statement of 1987 “Although TLC is the most versatile and most complex of the chromatographic methods it is the one analysts know least about. Most people approach it with feeling rather than with knowledge, with the inevitable consequence of haphazard results and disorientation about TLC’s real potential” impressed me when reading his book as a student. The essence got instantly clear, and the book turned into my bible of TLC.

Several times at symposia, he was accompanied by his beloved wife Helga, also experienced in the analytical field and a perfect counterpart for such a restless and motivated character, reminding of the saying "behind every great man there's a great woman". Besides writing and science, he also liked landscape gardening.

The planar chromatographic scientific community is deeply grateful for his treasured contributions and for his inspiring lifework. We will deeply keep Fritz in our hearts. Sounding like one of my favorite Gershwin songs "Love is here to stay", he wrote in the Preface to his book of 1987 "TLC is here to stay" – so true. He was here to stay, too.

GERTRUD MORLOCK

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