In Memoriam: Gisbert Winnewisser

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Gisbert Winnewisser, emeritus Professor of Physics at the University of Köln, passed away in March 2011 after a long illness. His dedication to molecular spectroscopy in the laboratory and in the interstellar medium, coupled with his very influential voice for molecular science will be extremely difficult to replace.

Born in Karlsruhe on September 7, 1936, Gisbert moved with his family to a farm in the Black Forest where they lived until 1946. Gisbert’s brother Manfred, his twin sister Ingrid, and Gisbert lived simply and independently with their mother, after their father died near Moscow. This tragic event marked Gisbert deeply. The family went back to Karlsruhe in 1946 where Gisbert graduated from gymnasium in 1956. He then became a physics student at the Technical University of Karlsruhe and graduated with a Master of Science degree in 1963. His brother Manfred had then become a post-doctoral fellow in the laboratory of Walter Gordy, a well-known molecular spectroscopist whose book on the subject, co-authored with Cook, is still known as a bible in the subject. Gisbert decided to follow the same career path, and became a PhD student under Professor Gordy at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina where he stayed until 1968. In the interim, he married Helga ter Jung in 1964 in Karlsruhe, and the couple stayed in Durham where their son Carsten was born in 1966. Gisbert defended his PhD thesis in 1967, the topic of which is the rotational-torsional spectrum of the internal rotor molecule HSSH, an intriguing molecule on which he kept working for decades, along with similar species such as HOOH and HSOH.