

## Obituary

B. Lindman, H. Wennerström and B. Ninham

Chemical Center, Physical Chemistry 1  
University of Lund, Lund, Sweden

Krister Fontell died May 6, 1994 after a brief illness. Sweden mourns and the world of surface chemistry is diminished by his passing. While he retired formally eight years ago, the Chemical Center in Lund gave him haven and he remained full in active research until the end of April. Those activities embraced a myriad of collaborations throughout the world. As late as February this year he participated in the Eighth International Conference on Surface and Colloid Science in Adelaide, and returned from Australia invigorated and with many new ideas. He was to have taken up a guest professorship at the University of Rome, and we can be grateful that he had just completed a major review article on surfactants with his friend and colleague Kozo Shinoda of Yokohama National University, Japan.

Krister Fontell completed his undergraduate studies at Åbo Akademi, Turku, Finland, just after World War II, during which he spent three years at the front. He continued at the same university with research studies under the supervision of Professor Per Ekwall. Together with Leo Mandell, they pioneered the studies of association colloids in Scandinavia and they set the stage for development of the entire field. Fontell joined Ekwall when he moved to Stockholm to set up the Laboratory for Surface Chemistry, presently the Institute for Surface Chemistry. There, Fontell was instrumental in building up the experimental program of the Institute. In 1973, Krister moved to the Chemical Center and Lund, where he actively contributed to the development of the Departments of Physical Chemistry and Food Technology.

The question of what constitutes lasting scientific contribution is a matter for history to judge. Yet over the long period of his career, Krister's work has increasingly loomed larger in value. Those sustained contributions were in the field of surface active substances where he emphasized



**Krister Fontell (1921–1994)**

and showed the importance of phase equilibria. In particular, his pioneering studies (with those of Luzzatti and Larsson) on cubic liquid crystals and consequences that follow can now be seen to have enormous ramifications in membrane biology.

Krister had all those good characteristics of the dedicated scientist to which our generation too often pay only lip service. He appreciated the vital importance of systematic long-term studies. Published results had to be correct, and if correctness required ten more years of work, then so be it. He was a gentleman in all the best senses of that old-fashioned word, undervalued himself to a fault, and was always willing to share his knowledge and experience with anyone, be it a young graduate student or a distinguished university professor. That openness will be apparent, as his published papers include more than sixty colleagues worldwide as coauthors.

In family life Krister was as gentle as in science, and we extend our sympathy to his wife Maj-Lis, also a chemist and his chief supporter, and to his daughters Christina and Ylva.

It was a privilege to learn from and work with such a man. The void left by his passing will not be easily filled.