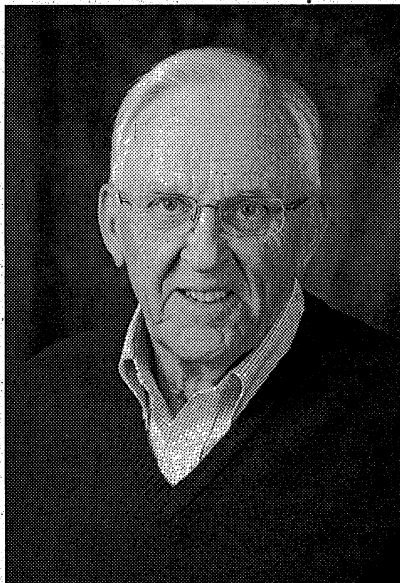


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## Luther Erickson

Luther Erickson passed away on Tuesday, July 4, 2023, at the Mayflower Community in Grinnell, aged 90. He was born and raised on a dairy farm in rural Pulaski, Wisc. Luther graduated from Pulaski High School in 1951 as class valedictorian. He then earned his bachelor's degree in chemistry at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn., in 1955 and a doctorate in physical chemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1959.



Luther married Jenny Payne in 1957 and together they raised two children, Louise and Hans. Luther and Jenny moved to Grinnell, Iowa, in 1962 after teaching chemistry for three

years at Dickinson College, Carlisle, Penn. Luther went on to serve Grinnell College as a Professor of Chemistry for the next 41 years. He transitioned to senior faculty status in 1998 and was named Professor Emeritus in 2003.

During his career, Luther maintained an active research program in nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, the coordination chemistry of platinum group metals, kinetics and mechanisms of solution reactions, molecular mechanics, and molecular modeling. Luther's research work was reported in more than 30 publications, most often with Grinnell undergraduate co-authors.

Luther was widely respected by his colleagues and fellow faculty members, and within the academic chemistry profession. Notable among the many honors and distinctions he earned were a national Catalyst Award for teaching excellence from the Chemical Manufacturer's Association, and recognition as a Camille and Henry Dreyfus Scholar. He was a member of the American Chemical Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He also was an active member of the Iowa Academy of Sciences, where his service included membership on the Board of Directors and a term as president. He also served multiple terms as Chair of the Chemistry Department and of the Science Division, and one term as Chair of the Faculty at Grinnell College.

In the lab and classroom, Luther was an outstanding motivational teacher and mentor and a kindhearted friend to his students. Jenny and Luther were known for opening their home to any student in need of a little encouragement or a homemade meal. They regularly hosted large gatherings of students, faculty, and friends. Their devotion to Grinnell College and the community was inspiring. Luther was also a longtime member of the Fortnightly group in Grinnell and the UCC Church.

In 1973, Jenny and Luther purchased "26 acres more or less" seven miles from Grinnell and had a pond dug, built a log cabin and enjoyed decades of swimming, skiing, hiking, planting, harvesting and enjoying the outdoors at their little piece of heaven. Many Grinnell residents, friends and family members have caught a fish, cut a Christmas tree or picked some apples at "The Farm." And of course, growing up near Green Bay, Luther was a loyal Packers fan, and closely followed Grinnell College athletics and his children and grandchildren's activities. Luther and Jenny were also avid golfers playing all over the state and country.

Luther is survived by Jenny, his wife of 66 years; daughter, Louise Mistry; son-in-law, Bomi Mistry (Grinnell College '84); son, Hans Erickson; grandchildren, Cyrus Mistry (GC '11); Eric (Jennifer) Mistry (GC '14); Ole Erickson; Hana Erickson; and great-grandchildren Grace and Theodore Mistry; brother, Homer (Carolyn) Erickson; and many nieces, nephews, and extended family.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Elmer and Luella Erickson; stepmother, Agatha Erickson; brothers, Clarence and Leonard; and daughter-in law, Erika Erickson.

The family suggests memorial remembrances can be sent to the "Grinnell College Luther and Jenny Erickson Endowed Professorship of Chemistry" (online at <https://alumni.grinnell.edu/give>, select "Other" in the "Fund to Support" dropdown menu and enter the fund name). Or call 866-850-1846 or email [alumni@grinnell.edu](mailto:alumni@grinnell.edu) to inquire about a memorial gift. Memories and condolences may be shared online with Luther's family on the Smith Funeral Home and Crematory website at [www.smithfh.com](http://www.smithfh.com).

Per his request, there will be a private family burial with immediate family members attending. Information about any public celebration of life arrangements will be shared when those become available. As many have noted, Luther was a man of true integrity. He was kind, devoted to his family and community, open-minded, funny, loved the outdoors and being active, and was just a wonderful person to be around. He will always be in our hearts.

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great sadness that I share news of the death of Professor Emeritus of Chemistry Luther Erickson, who passed away on Tuesday, July 4, in Grinnell, aged 90.

Luther and Jenny Erickson came to Grinnell in 1962 when Luther began teaching in the Chemistry Department where he served as a professor for 41 years, retiring in 2003. Jenny was director of the Forum for 20 years before retiring in 1997. Together they taught, encouraged, mentored, and supported thousands of students while also serving as pillars of the Grinnell community.

In the lab and classroom, Luther was an outstanding motivational teacher and mentor and a kindhearted friend to his students. Even in the first few years of their time in Grinnell, the Ericksons were known for opening their home to any student in need of a little encouragement or a homemade snack. They enjoyed hosting large gatherings of students, too, going so far as to buy folding tables to seat everyone. Alums recall that a student might first have known Luther from Chemistry or Jenny from the Forum but would soon get to know the other.

The Ericksons' loving, enduring connections to students were widely reciprocated; Jenny was nominated for honorary class membership by the Class of 1997 and Luther was named an honorary member of the Class of 1998. After their retirements, a large group of alums undertook a crowdfunding campaign to honor the Ericksons by creating a new professorship in their names. Many who contributed recounted the couple's ability to inspire students as they joined together to honor the Ericksons by making gifts to establish the Luther and Jenny Erickson Endowed Professorship of Chemistry.

Grinnell College Trustee Ed Senn '79, who worked for Jenny as a Forum desk attendant and took a first-year course from Luther, helped spearhead the campaign. When the new professorship was formally announced in 2019, he noted that "Luther and Jenny had a tremendous impact on generations of Grinnellians. Their relationships with students ... didn't end with the coursework or when the job was over at the Forum. That was just the beginning of a lifelong friendship and mentorship. It was heartwarming and reaffirming to know that the Ericksons are beloved by generations of the Grinnell alumni community."

Luther earned his bachelor's degree in chemistry at St. Olaf College in 1955 and a doctorate in physical chemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1959. Prior to joining the Grinnell faculty, he began his teaching career at Dickinson College, where he was an Assistant Professor from 1959 to 1962. He came to Grinnell as an Assistant Professor, was named Associate Professor in 1965, and was promoted to Professor in 1969. From 1974 to 2003, Luther was the William F. Dodge Professor of Chemistry. He transitioned to senior faculty status in 1998 and was named Professor Emeritus in 2003.

During his career, Luther maintained an active research program in nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, the coordination chemistry of platinum group metals, kinetics and mechanisms of solution reactions, molecular mechanics, and molecular modeling.

He was responsible for teaching the Physical Chemistry course (Chemistry 363-364, including the lab) for more than 35 years. Many alumni of the course went on to complete Ph.D. degrees in physical chemistry. As a research mentor he directed the research projects of almost 100 undergraduate research students. Much of this effort was concentrated in the 10-week summer research program. Luther's research work was reported in more than 30 publications, most often with Grinnell undergraduate co-authors.

Luther was widely respected by his colleagues and fellow faculty members, and within the academic chemistry profession. Notable among the many honors and distinctions he earned were a National Science Foundation (NSF) Science Faculty Fellowship for post-doctoral research at the University of North Carolina, a national Catalyst Award for teaching excellence from the Chemical Manufacturer's Association, and recognition as a Camille and Henry Dreyfus Scholar.

Luther served multiple terms as Chair of the Chemistry Department and of the Science Division, and one term as Chair of the Faculty. He also served on many standing and ad hoc committees of the College, including the Joseph Wall Alumni Award Committee, Environmental Studies Committee, Medical Professions Advisory Committee, Science Building Planning Committee, College Grant Board, Sesquicentennial Planning Committee, and Presidential Selection Committee.

He was a member of the American Chemical Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, to which he was elected a Fellow in 1981. He also was an active member of the Iowa Academy of Sciences, where his service included membership on the Board of Directors, a term as president, and work on the Awards Committee.

Luther is survived by Jenny, his wife of 66 years; daughter, Louise Erickson Mistry, and son-in-law, Bomi Mistry '84; son, Hans Erickson; grandchildren, Cyrus Mistry '11, Eric '14 (Jennifer) Mistry, Ole Erickson, and Hana Erickson; and great-grandchildren Grace Mistry and Theodore Mistry. He was preceded in death by his daughter-in law, Erika Erickson.

The family suggests memorial remembrances can be sent to the Grinnell College Luther and Jenny Erickson Endowed Professorship of Chemistry (online at <https://alumni.grinnell.edu/give>, select "Other" in the "Fund to Support" dropdown menu and enter the fund name). Or call 866-850-1846 or email [alumni@grinnell.edu](mailto:alumni@grinnell.edu) to inquire about a memorial gift.

Luther's legacy as a teacher, mentor, and friend will be celebrated in future communications. Information about any public celebration of life arrangements will be shared when those become available.

Grinnell College was greatly enriched by Luther's many years of devoted service, and he will be missed. Through our memories he will remain a cherished member of our community. I ask that you keep Luther and his family in your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Beronda

Beronda Montgomery

Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the College