

Dr. Maria Goeppert Mayer, Nobel Laureate, Physics, 1963

November 5, 1963

Maria Goeppert Mayer, who today shared the Nobel Prize for Physics, is a Professor of Physics on the faculty of the University of California, San Diego.

She was born in Kattowitz, Germany, on June 28, 1906. While attending the University of Gottingen, Germany, she met Californian Joseph E. Mayer, a graduate student in chemistry. They were married in 1930, the same year that Mrs. Mayer earned her Ph. D. in physics. Her doctoral committee consisted of James Franck, Adolf Windaus, and Max Born. Franck won the Nobel Prize for physics in 1925; Windaus for chemistry in 1928; and Born for physics in 1954.

Following her marriage, Mrs. Mayer came to the United States. She taught at Johns Hopkins University from 1930 to 1939. She lectured at Columbia University and Sarah Lawrence College from 1941 to 1945.

She went to the University of Chicago in 1945, where she also had an appointment as Senior Scientist of the Argonne National Laboratory.

Mrs. Mayer and her husband came to the University of California, San Diego in 1960.

She is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the nation's foremost scientific body (as is her husband). She has received honorary Doctor of Science degrees from Russell Sage College (1960) and Smith College (1961).

Mrs. Mayer is a theoretical physicist of world-wide renown. She has made important contributions to the fields of quantum electrodynamics, spectroscopy, statistical mechanics, crystal physics, and especially to nuclear physics.

According to some physicists, her "shell model" interpretation in nuclear physics is the greatest single piece of progress in theoretical physics accomplished since World War II.

She is the co-author of three monographs in various branches of theoretical physics: with Max Born on the dynamical lattice theory of crystals; with her husband, Joseph Mayer, on statistical mechanics; and most recently, with J. H. D. Jensen, of Heidelberg, on the shell model of nuclei. Her book with Jensen, who shares the Nobel Prize, is "Elementary Theory of Nuclear Shell Structure." Jensen visited San Diego during the 1962-63 academic year to work with Mrs. Mayer.

The Mayers live in La Jolla. They have two children, a girl and a boy.

Their daughter, Maria, 29, is Mrs. Donat G. Wetzel.

Her husband is in the astronomy department of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The Mayers' son, Peter, 24, is a graduate student in economics at the University of California, Berkeley.

Mrs. Mayer is the second woman in history to win the Nobel Prize. The other was the great Marie Curie, so honored in 1903 for the discovery of radioactivity.

President Clark Kerr of the University made the following statement:

"This further recognition of the distinguished faculty of the University of California is, of course, very gratifying. Mrs. Mayer becomes the twelfth member of the University of California faculty to receive the Nobel Prize and the sixth faculty member to be given this award in the last four years --undoubtedly some sort of a record. I join her friends and colleagues in extending warmest congratulations for the high honor she has brought to herself and her University.

"It is with justifiable pride that we point out that of all the Nobel laureates living in North America, approximately one-fourth are members of the University of California faculty."

Chancellor Herbert York of the San Diego campus said:

"I feel almost as good as if I had won it myself. It's completely obvious that it is entirely deserved. I think it's tremendous."