

Born: June 28, 1906, Katowice Poland
Died: February 20, 1972, San Diego, CA



Maria Goeppert Mayer By: Austin Kepley

Into the past: Interviewing Maria Goeppert Mayer.
By: Austin Kepley
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I went back in time to interview MG Mayer. I entered her office at the University of Chicago and started the interview.

Question 1: What inspired you to do physics given the circumstances of woman?

“I always found the puzzles of nature to be interesting which is what physics is. I wanted to be a good scientist because my dad always wanted me to not be a typical housewife but something more.”

Question 2: How did you produce the nuclear shell model?

“To save you the details I studied quantum mechanics and with the help of Jensen after a couple of years I produced the model. But people questioned it due to me being a woman.”

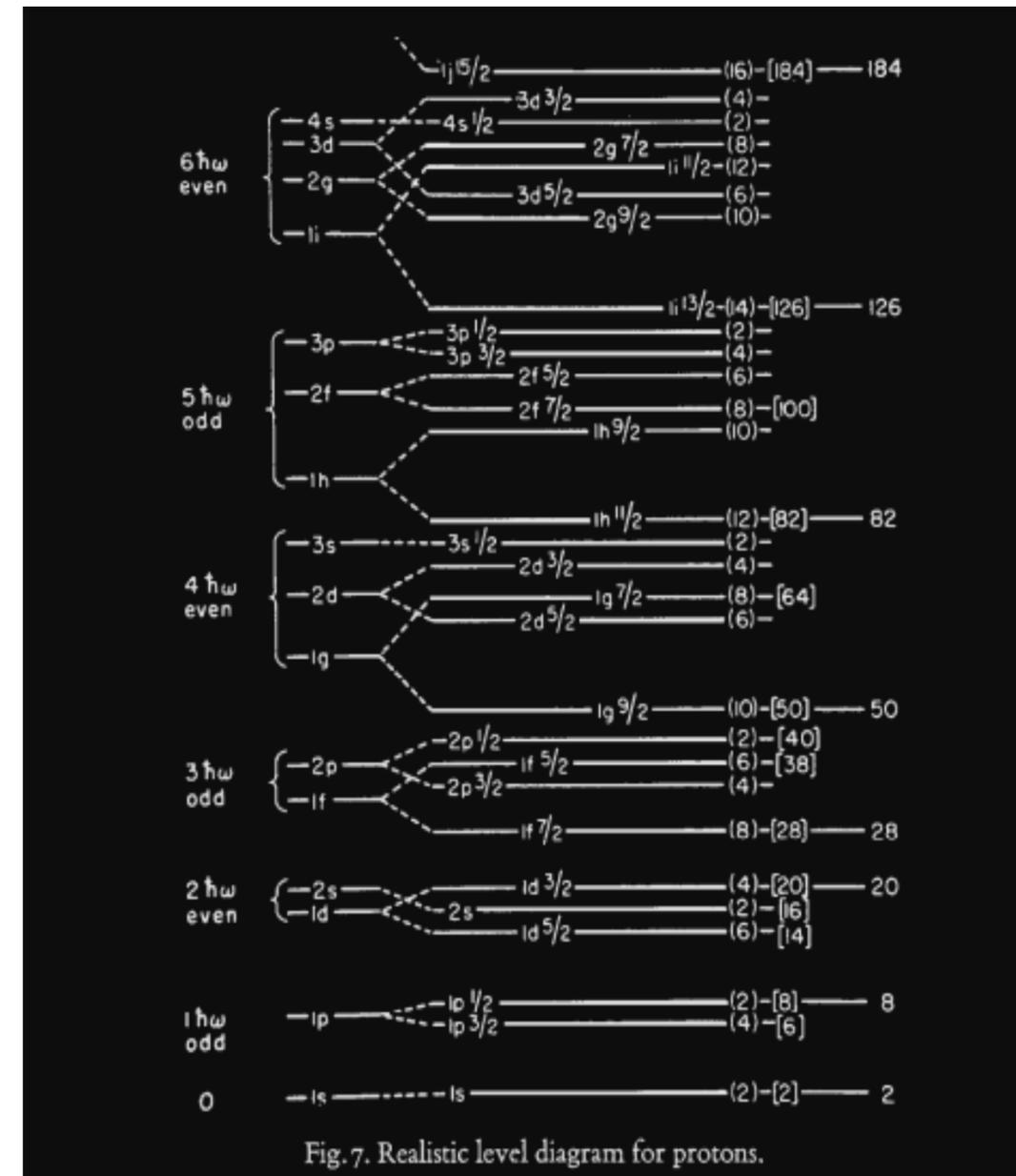


Fig. 7. Realistic level diagram for protons.

Taken from her Nobel lecture
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/physics/1963/mayer/lecture/>

Question 3: What would you say to the inspiring woman in science?

“I would say to go for it and not let people tell you otherwise. Intelligence is not bound to only one gender. Anyone who studies any field can succeed in it.”

This ended the interview, and I went back to 2024.

Maria Goeppert earned her PH.D for physics from University of Göttingen (Germany). She went to the University of Göttingen due to it being the leading center of physics research. It also had distinguished faculty such as Max Born. After she received her PH.D she went to the University of Chicago where she did her work on the nuclear shell model and would eventually win the Nobel Prize in it. A fun fact about Maria Goeppert is she is one of two woman to win the Nobel Prize in physics.

For most of Maria Goeppert Mayers career she was just “doing physics for fun”. Due to being a female in the early 1930s no universities gave her a salary or full-time position as a Professor. Maria Goeppert is best well known for her Nuclear shell model which she proposed that inside the nucleus, protons, and neutrons are arranged in a series of nucleon layers, like the layers of an onion, with protons and neutrons spinning on their axes.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/womenwhochangedscience/stories/maria-goeppert-mayer>