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Light Young Biochemist

Motherhood 'Myth' Miffs Mother Who Works

By Sue Cronk

AN AWARD-WINNING Washington biochemist who combines a more-than-full-time job with marriage and motherhood "will have no truck with the great American myth that children turn out terrible if their mothers are not at home to watch them every day."



Miss Cronk

On weekdays, Maxine F. Singer sees her three

youngsters — Amy, 4, Ellen, 2, David, 11 months—only briefly. "Yet I think my children are happy, alive, interested in the world around them, and not difficult to deal with," she said last week. Mrs. Singer always tries to get home on time from her job at the National Institute of Arthritis and Metabolic Diseases to play with the children before their bedtime. Even when she is in the middle of an experiment and is "tempted to stay late" in the laboratory, she heads for home, "taking my paper

work with me to do late at night. The men around here can work much longer hours than I, but that's one of the compromises one has to make." At home, near Chevy Chase Circle, the children's hour ends when the supper hour begins. She and her husband, attorney Daniel M. Singer, "eat alone, because if the children ate with us, we'd never have a chance to talk."

The children get their say

on weekends, when the Singers take them to playgrounds and read to them. A PETITE, 32-year-old brunette with an "Oliver" haircut and green eyes, Mrs. Singer met her husband when both were students at Swarthmore College. Although her primary interest is in biology, she took her bachelor's degree in chemistry "because I felt that one understands more about biology through chemistry — and nothing I've

learned since then has ever dissuaded me from this view." She earned a PhD. in biochemistry at the National Science Foundation at Yale University and came to NIAMD as a postdoctoral fellow. Now a permanent staff member, she is a GS-13. In a ninth floor laboratory in the sprawling red brick Clinical Center at the National Institutes of Health, she works on the chemistry

of heredity in the general area of nucleic acid. For her contributions on the mechanism of action of the enzyme polynucleotide phosphorylase — "which catalyzes the chemical reaction which results in the formation of nucleic acid-like materials" she recently received the Iota Sigma Pi Research Award. The award, which carries a \$300 honorarium, is given every three years by the national honorary society for

women in chemistry to an outstanding woman chemist under 40. She was chosen from 14 candidates around the country. CHEMICAL structures and reactions in genetics fascinate Mrs. Singer. "Best of all," she said, other scientists in this field "are active all over the world. It would be impossible not to be excited. The curve is just cresting. If you stay away from your work for two weeks, you're behind." Nevertheless, she left yesterday with her family for a month-long vacation at Bethany Beach, Del. "The

schedule I'm on is very exhausting, and I feel the need of a long vacation," she said. But she took a briefcase "full of lab work" in addition to a bathing suit.