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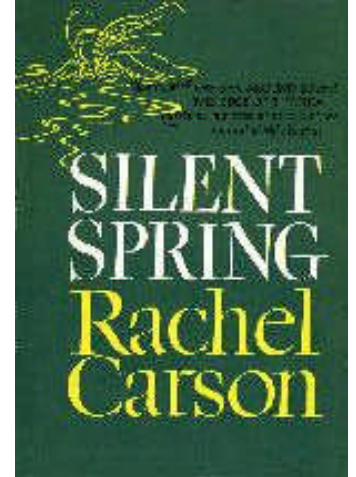
## RACHEL LOUISE CARSON

### *Mother of the Modern Environmental Movement*

In 1962, Rachel Carson had a chilling vision. She saw a time when “On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh.” Carson took action based on her vision, starting the modern environmental movement.

Rachel Carson was born in 1907 in the rural Pennsylvania community of Springdale. She quickly developed a love of nature, which she credited to her mother. During college, she studied biology at the Pennsylvania College for Women (now Chatham College) and later received an M.A. in Zoology from Johns Hopkins University in 1932.

Rachel Carson then went on to become the first woman to take and pass the civil service test for federal employment. In 1936, the Bureau of Fisheries hired her as a full-time junior biologist. With a strong interest in writing, she wrote several books on the environment, including *Under the Sea Wind* (1941) and *The Sea Around Us* (1951). That book won the National Book Award, and Carson left the Bureau of Fisheries in 1952 to pursue a full-time career in writing.



After her departure from the Bureau of Fisheries, which later became U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Carson wrote several articles and books illustrating her belief that “man, however much he may like to pretend, is part of nature.” Carson grew concerned about the increasing use of pesticides and other chemicals. She wrote that “man’s attitude towards nature is today critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature.”

Carson noticed that widespread use of a pesticide called DDT (and other chemicals) was no longer effective in killing insects -- they were slowly developing immunities to the poisons. However, the pesticides were killing other animals—like the Bald Eagle and other birds—as their concentration increased each step up the food chain. She feared this would cause an extreme ecological catastrophe, such as the one she envisioned before. These ideas were explained in Carson’s 1962 book, *Silent Spring*.

Carson’s writings were attacked by chemical manufacturers, which tried to paint her as an alarmist, even attempting to dismiss her findings because she was a woman. President Kennedy set up a special commission to investigate Carson’s findings in 1963. She testified before the Congress and called for new policies to protect human health and the environment. Her activism led to a ban on the use of DDT. For the first time, people were beginning to understand that “man is a part of nature and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself.” Unfortunately, Rachel Carson died of cancer in 1963, before the commission’s findings were released.

Rachel Carson’s warnings still apply. Even though DDT was banned, today pesticides are produced at a rate one thousand times higher than in 1962. “[W]e’re challenged as mankind has never been challenged before,” she wrote. “To prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves.” Otherwise, Carson’s chilling vision may yet come true.