

RACHEL CARSON: THE COMING OF A SILENT SPRING

“Only within the moment of time represented
by the present century has one species—man—acquired
significant power to alter the nature of his world.”

—Rachel Carson,
Silent Spring

Born on May 27, 1907, Rachel Carson grew up on 65 acres of pristine countryside in Springdale, Pennsylvania. Her mother, a former school teacher, encouraged Rachel’s interest in all that lived in the grass, trees, and streams. One day Rachel would popularize the term *ecology*, and forever change the way the world viewed the environment.

Rachel’s life-long aspiration was to become a writer. She majored in English at the Pennsylvania College for Women where her teachers instantly recognized her talents. As a course requirement, Rachel took a class in biology. Suddenly, her life changed, and science became her passion. Her professors and fellow students warned her that the world would not embrace a woman scientist. Not persuaded, Rachel changed her major to zoology. She graduated from college with a B.A. in Science, magna cum laude. Later she attended Johns Hopkins University earning an M.A. in Zoology. The real test was yet to come. Could a woman find employment as a scientist?

In the 1950s, Rachel began to see ominous signs of poisons in the environment. Pesticide manufacturers produced deadly products, such as DDT. Pesticides poisoned livestock which made its way to America’s dinner tables. Silently, Rachel began her quest to warn the world of a coming disaster. During this time her beloved mother died, and Rachel suffered from arthritis, flu, and a stomach ulcer. Not even a diagnosis of terminal cancer kept her from her work.

Rachel Carson’s crowning achievement came in 1962 with the publication of *Silent Spring*. She alerted the world to a future where spring would come in silence, and pesticides would devastate the earth’s ecology. *Silent Spring* became an immediate bestseller. Scientists argued that Rachel was an alarmist, but no one could disprove her facts. *Silent Spring* prompted a congressional investigation, and Rachel spent her last days defending her work. Rachel died on April 14, 1964, at the age of 56.