

RACHEL CARSON

By Macy Thompson

When Rachel Carson was young she always felt a connection to the sea. From the day she was born in 1907 in Springdale, Pennsylvania, she always knew that one day she would meet the ocean. As she grew up, she was in love with two things – nature and writing. Her mother taught her everything she knew about the outdoor world and Rachel remembered her words. As for writing, she wrote lots of short stories and had several of them published in magazines. Rachel knew that when she grew up, she was going to be a writer. In a way, she was right, but that wasn't all she was going to be...

When Rachel entered college, she followed her dream to be a writer. But one year she was required to take a biology class. She liked it so much she decided to change majors from writing to science despite the fact that there were few jobs open to female scientists. She wanted to go to Johns Hopkins University, but lack of money stood in the way. During the summer, she studied marine biology at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts. Then she finally started at Johns Hopkins, studying zoology. She obtained a job in a lab to earn money for her schooling. In June 1932, she got her Master's degree in zoology.

In 1935, her father died and she had to quit school to get a job in order to support her family. She found one, writing seven-minute radio stories about ocean life.

Rachel's boss loved her work and she was hired as a junior aquatic biologist. Finally, she had a full time job with the ocean.

One day, at the suggestion of a publisher, Rachel decided to write a book. She soon learned that it was very hard to write a book while working full time. But every night after her mother went to bed she would go up to her typewriter and start typing. Finally, in 1941, she published her first book, *Under the Sea Wind*. This gave readers a view of the sea from the perspective of the creatures that live in it. After that she was given a fellowship grant that allowed her to take time off from her job to write two more books – *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955).

Three years later, Rachel received a devastating letter from her friend Olga Owens Huckins, who owned a bird sanctuary. That day, a plane had sprayed a batch of DDT, a pesticide, over Olga's sanctuary. It was sprayed to kill mosquitoes, but it also killed seven songbirds. Rachel needed to do something. Should she write an article? No, that wouldn't persuade enough people. So, what should she do? Write a book! She started writing. When her mother died in 1958, Rachel was sad, but she didn't stop writing. Finally, in 1962, *Silent Spring* was published. It claimed that DDT and other pesticides were bad for the environment – especially for birds – and would eventually be bad for humans. It also accused chemical companies of telling lies. The country was in an uproar! Pesticide companies were trying to stop Rachel, but she fought on. Rachel was asked to make speeches and interviews. She was famous.

On January 7, 1963, Rachel was awarded the Schweitzer Medal of the Animal Welfare Institute. This was a great honor for her. Then, after picking up three other awards, she retired to Maine, where she could be away from cameras and newscasters. Once again, she could rest by the sea.

As a result of *Silent Spring*, DDT was eventually banned in the United States. However, some scientists argued with that decision because DDT helps kill mosquitoes that carry malaria. Disagreements about *Silent Spring* and DDT continue today. Regardless, Rachel worked tirelessly to bring these significant pieces of information to the world. She made a difference. Without Rachel's hard work and determination, we might truly have a "silent spring."

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