

Biography of rachel carson

[Literature](#), [Autobiography](#)



A zoologist, biologist, environmentalist, writer, ecologist and a champion of nature conservation- Rachel Carson was all this and much more. From writing radio scripts during Depression to being the author of the best selling “ Silent Spring” her journey was long, illustrious and motivational. The way she battled all odds, struggled with financial troubles and then later suffered all the indignities thrown at her after the publication of “ Silent Spring” teaches us a lot about life and makes us look up to her with respect and admiration.

Her early life was instrumental in making her the person she was. Her interest in nature was kindled during her childhood. Rachel Carson was born on May 27, 1907 of a father who was an ambitious real estate developer and a mother who was a teacher. Her father’s plans for their estate in Springdale, Pennsylvania did not quite materialize and thus from the very childhood, Rachel was no alien to financial difficulties. Her mother instilled in Rachel her own love for nature and books.

Hence the training of a future environmentalist and a best selling author began early in life. Rachel started writing at a very early age and her publication was for a children’s magazine at the age of ten. Thus the die was cast and she was to follow this course till the very end of her life. After passing out from Parnassus High School, she enrolled in the Pennsylvanian college for Women (now Chatham College). She majored in English but later changed her subject to zoology.

In 1932, Carson received her master’s degree. Her financial condition took a turn for the worse during the Depression and especially after the death of her father in 1935. Desperately trying to make ends meet for her family, she accepted the job of a radio writer for a programme on fishery and marine life

produced by the United States Bureau of Fisheries. There seemed no end in sight to her miseries on the personal front. Her sister died in 1936, leaving behind two daughters.

Carson took the girls in as part of family and they shifted to Silver Spring, Maryland to counter problems like her commutation to her job, the girls' education and her mother's old age. Following her excellent performance in the civil services examination, Carson went out to become the first ever female biologist to work at the Bureau. This was the beginning of a career that would see her influence the whole world with her writings.

Her essay "Undersea", published by Atlantic Monthly in September 1936, was the much needed and richly deserved breakthrough for her dual career. Bringing in rave reviews from scientists as well as literary circles, it lent weight to Carson's belief that she could synchronize both her interests- of writing as well as nature- successfully. Impressed by her writing flair and lyrical style, famous author Hendrik William Van Loon ("The Story of Mankind") persuaded his publisher to contact Rachel Carson who agreed the "Under the Sea Wind".

Presenting a naturalist's picture of oceanic life, this book was a beautiful and sensitive description of the struggle for life of aquatic species. Her writing prowess succeeded in making an extremely engrossing reading out of scientific facts. The book was well received in both scientific and literary circuits. However it was not a commercial success as the release clashed with Pearl Harbor and consequently sales dipped.

During World War II, she worked in the capacity of the Assistant to the Chief of the Office of Information in the Fish and Wildlife Service. Food was in short supply and her four pamphlets involving information on fish as food served multiple purposes of information source for print as well as radio media. Her series of twelve booklets, four of them authored by her, called “Conservation in Action” came out in the post war years.

They propagated her ideal views of co-existence of nature and humans and sought to inspire in people a respect for nature and an attitude for conservation. In 1948, she was appointed the editor-in-chief of the information Division- a noteworthy achievement in a male dominated profession. Meanwhile her research on the oceanic world continued in all the leisure time that she could afford. This research was what made the “The Sea Around Us” the bestseller that it was.

“The Sea Around Us” was a bestseller beyond everyone’s imaginations. The pre-publication release of the first chapter by Yale Review was just the beginning of the fanfare. Carson won the George Washington Science Writing Award. When it was finally released by Oxford University Press in 1951, it was already a bestseller and topped charts for the following 81 weeks. In the euphoria created by “The Sea Around Us”, her publisher decided to re-release “Under the Sea Wind”.

This book also got the success it deserved, though a little belated. The phenomenal success of both the books helped Carson get her finances in order and she was able to quit her job at Fish and Wildlife Service to devote all her time to writing. “The Edge of the Sea” was published in 1955 and instantly became a huge success and remained so for the twenty-three

weeks to come. It was a straight- from- the- heart account of the aquatic life on the sea shores.

Again her writing capability and the deep seated feelings for oceanic species made it much more than a mere collection of scientific data and a dull set of guidelines. Around the same time, her article “ Help your Child to Wonder” written for the women’s Home Companion, was another mover and shaker. In this article she gave directions to the parents to make their children aware of the wonders of nature and make them conscious of their natural environment.

The personal touch that made the article strike a chord among the readers came from her own affection for her nieces and her grandnephew who she later adopted legally. An unmarried woman, with no children of her own, wrote the piece with all the nuances of a mother inspiring her children to look around with curiosity. In 1962, came the book that made the world sit up and notice. “ Silent Spring” attracted many opinions; not all of them were flattering.

Based on her research on the ill effects of pesticides on animal and human world, it brought a deluge of savage comments from those whose interests clashed with the ideas expressed in the book. Agricultural and trade journals, pesticide producers and owners of chemical factories- all attacked Carson and generated a lot of negative publicity. But nevertheless, “ Silent Spring” appealed to the public and became a best seller. It generated a wave of environmental concerns. Even President John F.

Kennedy was moved by the book and appointed a special panel to examine the various points the book raised. All the research, investigation and hard work that Carson had put in the book bore results and even the Presidential Committee confirmed Rachel's concerns about the pesticides. The book raised genuine concerns about the concentration of DDT in the food chain and these timely concerns led to early action and averted what could have been a catastrophe after a few years.

But what Carson had to suffer for making her views public was unbelievable. Her health failed her and yet she endured the barrage of ill meaning comments thrown at her after publication of " Silent Spring". Breast cancer finally took its toll on her life and Rachel Carson died on April 14, 1964. Many laurels were bestowed on her during her lifetime and she deserved each one of them. She was presented with the Schweitzer Medal of the Animal Welfare Institute.

She was also given the National Wildlife Federation's " Conservationist of the Year". But perhaps the greatest award was the response her readers gave her. Their admiration, adulation and their applause made her into an icon, a status she richly deserved. Her ideas of environmental concerns became really famous and common after her death. She was never against technology and development; it was only indiscriminate and reckless progress that irked her.

She campaigned for controlled and calculated use of pesticides through her book " Silent Spring" Rachel Carson was responsible for environmental concern becoming the household term that it is now. Her revolutionary ideas set the trail for others to follow. Now the whole world has woken up to the

harmful effects of pesticides to food chains. At that time, however she had been saddled with negative comments and personal humiliation. Her personal life was also littered with losses throughout.

A spinster till death, she had to suffer a lot of speculation over her long and intimate friendship with Dorothy Freeman. A lot can be learnt from her life which was a roller coaster ride with many twists and turns. A rich and true tribute to her persona will be our waking up to the damage being done to our fragile eco- system and our efforts to rectify that. WORKS CITED “ Breaking Nature’s Silence: Pennsylvania’s Rachel Carson” Lisa Budwig “ Rachel Carson Dies of Cancer: ‘ Silent Spring’ author was 56” Obituary, The New York Times. .