

# DAY 26: GREENER ECO HERO



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## MY HERO: RACHEL CARSON



Rachel Carson was a writer, scientist, and ecologist born in Springdale, Pennsylvania. She grew up as a child with a mother who had always expressed her love for nature. Carson grew to follow her mother's footsteps and conveyed her own fondness first in writing, then soon as a student of marine biology. As a young adult, Carson won a scholarship to Pennsylvania College for Women. After graduation, she studied at John Hopkins University and received her master's degree in zoology in 1932 before dropping out to support her family. During the Depression Era, she wrote radio scripts for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries and there she started her writing career. Carson

wrote pamphlets all about conservation of the environment and its resources. In 1952, she publishes prize-winning books on the study of the ocean, which made her name as a naturalist and science writer. This included *The Sea Around Us*, and *The Edge of The Sea*, both of which won national awards and were international bestsellers. Carson went into the field of science after finding great interest in it. At this place in time, women were thought to not be intellectually fit for sciences or have the stamina to be successful in the field. In her book of 4 years in the making, *Silent Spring*, she discusses the major concerns of humans tampering with pesticides after World War II had occurred. It contains studies of effects of synthetic pesticides. She also described how these awful chemicals altered processes of plants and animals and contaminated the earth and water. Her book referenced how no birds would sing during the spring in the future years due to being wiped out from such pesticides. *Silent Spring* resulted in a presidential commission that endorsed her findings and helped shape the environment. Carson's work set off outrage towards herself and a debate on the use of chemical pesticides in agriculture. She was attacked by the chemical industry as an alarmist but continued to speak out anyways. She courageously stated that all people were part of nature and reminded everyone that it was fragile. "Now, I truly believe, that we in this generation, must come to terms with nature, and I think we're challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves." Soon, Carson discovered she had breast cancer and that it later metastasized. However, she did not take this as a sign to stop campaigning and writing. Her illness only made her more determined to succeed. Her tone towards nature leaned toward the apocalyptic viewpoints of causes of pesticides. "No one had ever thought that humans could create something that could create harm all over the globe and come back and get in our bodies," stated Carl Safiya, an oceanographer who had personally published her own books on human effects on ocean life. Carson did not tell almost anyone about her illness and put on a brave face for the public to see. She wore a wig to cover her loss of hair, survived a mastectomy, and had so many fractures in her pelvis, people wondered how she survived walking to and from the wooden panel before the Congressional panel. She later died in 1964. This just showed how strong and determined Carson was for her causes and for the well being of the earth.

From Rachel Carson's experience, the thing that most resonated with me was her love for nature that put the world before her needs. She did not want to show weakness such as her cancer so she could resume spreading her messages without interference. This is something I truly respect. If I were to meet Carson today, I would discuss how she became so loving for the environment in the first place, and how she continued to do this even after getting dangerous cancer.

I would ask her:

Do you believe compared to your time, the world has become better informed with pesticide uses and harms?

How did you stay so strong during such a hard time in your life of receiving notice of breast cancer?

How were you treated as a woman scientist in a time of mostly men in your field?