

Email Interview By Tom Kurt

Why do you think Rachel Carson was a leader?

Rachel Carson was a leader, because she had the university education, experience and scientist friends to review chapters, the courage to speak out, had an existing readership audience from writing previous books such as *The Sea Around Us* in 1951 which won a National Book Club award and because the time was ripe for an articulate writer to step forth on this issue.

What do you think was the biggest impact of *Silent Spring* and Rachel Carson?

Of course, *Silent Spring* primarily first educated the general public about potential health risks associated with pesticide exposures. And, also *Silent Spring* stimulated the implementation of academic research to further investigate and substantiate those risks.

The immediate greatest impact of *Silent Spring*'s publication in 1962 was the passage of the Clean Air Act in 1970 which founded the EPA, which later expanded with further legislation such as SARA (Superfund). In addition 1970 saw the passage of the Williams-Steiger Occupational Safety & Health Act which founded the twin agencies, OSHA or the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in the Department of Labor for inspection and enforcement of regulations and NIOSH or the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health in the CDC for research and recommendations for OSHA standards.

How has *Silent Spring* changed our society today?

There is an immense involvement of public awareness of environmental exposures and what health risks may flow from such exposures. And, this has stimulated academic research to scientifically determine risks and government regulations to protect public health

Why do you think *Silent Spring* was so controversial to the public? (Not the pesticide industry)

Prior to *Silent Spring*, the American public had experienced the eradication of malaria on Pacific islands at the end of World War II that protected the health of American troops and the abatement of mosquitos in the US by

nighttime spraying programs, as well as marked decreases of malaria in Africa by DDT spraying and residual DDT on surfaces which kept mosquitos from breeding. Other mosquito born diseases such as dengue and viral encephalitis such as St Louis encephalitis were held in abatement. The other organochlorine pesticides, such as Chlordane were preventing termite damage and destruction of homes, and their use was often required by government regulation. DBCP (dibromochloropropane) was shown to markedly decrease worm infestation of bananas and other tropical plants, but was later found to decrease sperm counts and cause infertility in men. So, the impression of public health protection from pesticides was challenged, necessitating rethinking how health risks could be controlled. This phenomenon was similar to the current skepticism about global warming that is gradually fading.