

Rachel Carson, Environmentalist

Rachel Carson ran home from school. “Mom! Mom!”

Mom stood on the front porch. “What’s wrong, Rachel?”

“They’re digging up the meadow. There are trucks and men all over.” Rachel paused to catch her breath. “Our beautiful meadow. It’s being destroyed.”

Mom gave Rachel a hug. “Yes, honey. It’s called progress. They’re building a glue factory and two coal-fired power plants. Unfortunately, often with progress comes the destruction of nature.”

Rachel tightened her lips and set her jaw. “This isn’t right.”

After several years, Rachel and her family witnessed a severe change in the landscape of their home in Pennsylvania. The population grew, and the town got dirtier and polluted as it became more industrial.

“I’m going to be a writer,” Rachel told her good friend Olga. “And, I’m going to write about my love of nature. I want to show how industrialization and progress can cause damage and changes to animals, birds, and plants.”

When Rachel went to college, she majored in English. But because of her love of nature, she soon switched to biology. She became a marine biologist and later worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In 1945, Rachel first became aware of the possible dangers of pesticides. Pesticides, like DDT, are chemicals that kill pests that might hurt plants and crops. Years later, her friend Olga witnessed this danger firsthand. “It was horrible,” she told Rachel. “After the aerial spraying of DDT, seven songbirds died in one place. Then for days after, we’d find more birds dead.”

“I know,” said Rachel. “I’ve been doing research. DDT kills birds and insects. True, it kills harmful insects, but it also kills the good insects we need for pollination and other purposes. It stays in the environment. When birds eat the poisoned insects, they get sick. If the bird doesn’t die, the poison can harm its offspring.”

Olga waved her arms wildly. “We have to do something about this.”

Rachel went to her desk and grabbed a handful of papers. She handed them to Olga. “I am. I’m writing a book from all the research I’ve gathered. It will be called *Silent Spring*. I’ll show how pesticides and other harmful chemicals can hurt nature.”

Olga burrowed her brows. “You know the chemical manufacturers will fight you. If the government believes pesticides are harmful, they’ll begin an investigation and possibly outlaw them. The

manufacturers will lose money.”

Rachel lowered her eyes. “I know, but it’s a battle worth fighting. We have to protect the environment.”

Questions

1. What happened early in Rachel's life to make her aware of the problems of industrialization?
2. Why was DDT bad if it killed harmful insects?
3. How did Rachel find out about the dangers of pesticides?
4. Who did Olga say would not like Rachel's book? Why would they not like it?