

Book Review: Silent Spring

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Today we struggle in our communities with many decisions that can affect our children, family, and friends. Decisions like where we should send our kids to school, who should watch them as babies, how our fire and police departments are supporting our community, are just some of the issues that we deal with. In the past couple of years we have been confronted with a silent killer that has wreaked havoc in our communities. This killer is known as EEE, or Eastern equine encephalitis. The challenge we are faced with is how to deal with this lurking killer. Specifically, how do we eradicate the mosquitoes that carry this disease, without compromising our cities and towns environment? Today we are faced with many of the same questions that our communities had dealt with in the 1950's when DDT was being used as a way to control insects and the diseases they carry. The difference between now and then is the fact that as communities we are more informed about the use of pesticides and the application of them.

This knowledge was given to us through the work of Rachel Carson who wrote the book *Silent Spring* in 1962. This book helped to open the eyes of many people, even President Kennedy, about the dangers of using chemicals in our environment to control insects in our gardens, fields, and towns. The release of this book resulted in a number of commissions being formed by the government to confirm her assertions, which ended in stopping the spraying of DDT.

Carson's book she starts by painting a picture about a town that is 'perfect'. She writes, "There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings" (Carson, 1962, p. 1). She then goes on to write, "Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died.

Everywhere there was a shadow of death” (ibid, p. 2). Rachel Carson explains that the problems we are experiencing is the polluting of our surface water and underground ‘seas’ and estuaries. She also speaks about earth’s green mantle. “Water, soil, and earth’s green mantle of plants make up the world that supports life of the earth. Although modern man seldom remembers the fact, he could not exist without the plants that harness the sun’s energy and manufacture the basic foodstuffs he depends on for life” (ibid, 63). She closes the book with two powerful chapters. The first is chapter 15, *Nature Fights Back*, which highlights that “nature is not so easily molded and that the insects are finding ways to circumvent our chemical attacks on them” (ibid, p 245). The second chapter, chapter 17, *The Other Road*, places the decision at our feet. “We stand now where two roads diverge” (ibid, p. 277).

This book was more than just a book. It also helped to galvanize the environmental movement to push for changes. Even today people are more inclined to say no to spraying in their communities because of the work that Rachel Carson did in the 1950’s and early 60’s. This book inspired me to be more cognizant of what is happening with spraying in our community. Hopefully, before the infected mosquito population overtakes our community we will come to our senses and not spray DEET into our ecosystem. I would recommend this book for people to read who are in communities where spraying is being considered.

### References

Carson, R. (1962). *Silent Spring*. New York, NY: Houghton-Mifflin Company.