

Reflections on Earth Day April 21, 2012 : 9:57 AM

In 1994, I was asked by Rachel Carson's publisher to write the introduction for the 30th anniversary edition of *Silent Spring*. It was, of course, a privilege and honor. Here is part of what I wrote:

"Writing about *Silent Spring* is a humbling experience for an elected official, because Rachel Carson's landmark book offers undeniable proof that the power of an idea can be far greater than the power of politicians. In 1962, when *Silent Spring* was first published, "environment" was not even an entry in the vocabulary of public policy. In a few cities especially Los Angeles, smog had become a cause of concern, albeit more because of its appearance than because of its threat to public health. Conservation—the precursor of environmentalism — had been mentioned during the 1960 Democratic and Republican conventions, but only in passing and almost entirely in the context of national parks and natural resources. And except for a few scattered entries in largely inaccessible scientific journals, there was virtually no public dialogue about the growing, invisibly dangers of DDT and other pesticides and chemicals. *Silent Spring* came as a cry in the wilderness, a deeply felt, thoroughly researched, and brilliantly written argument that changed the course of history. Without this book, the environmental movement might have been longdelayed or never have developed at all."

On this Earth Day, which comes nearly fifty years since the first printing of *Silent Spring*, Carson's work continues to stand as a testament to the power of conscience, insight and our collective ability to make the world a better place. Carson's conclusions inspired a generation to realize that human beings do not live in isolation, but as part of something much bigger. As she so eloquently stated in her masterwork, "in nature nothing exists alone."

Nothing demonstrates the complexity of the natural world—and our ability to disturb it—like the climate crisis. Every day, we pump 90 million tons of global warming pollution into the atmosphere as if it were an open sewer. Already, we are experiencing many of the impacts scientists predicted decades ago—higher temperatures, more extreme weather, the emergence and re-emergence of infectious diseases, and rising sea levels. Scientists have warned us of the disturbing future we are creating for ourselves and our children and grandchildren. At stake is the survival of our civilization as we know it and the type of world we are going to leave as a legacy for those who follow us.

It is at times like these that people must come together, mobilize, and demand the change we need. This is a moral moment, a fork in the road. It is not ultimately about any scientific discussion or political dialogue but about who we are as human beings. It is about our capacity to transcend our own limitations and rise to this occasion. We have done so before. I have seen young people and their parents come together to create great change. In the 1960's, the Civil Rights movement, led by young people but joined by people of all ages and backgrounds, helped to overturn the legal oppression of African Americans and helped create a more just society.

And, it was young people and social activists who helped to end apartheid in South Africa by supporting the divestment movement in the United States and around the world, which ultimately pressured the government to end legalized racism.

So on this Earth Day, I urge you to reflect on *Silent Spring* and to open your heart to Rachel Carson's message. Allow it to inspire you to act. Feel the preciousness of our connection to our children and the solemnity of our obligation to safeguard their future and to protect the Earth we are bequeathing to them.