

Earth Day
Unitarian Coastal Fellowship Zoom Worship
April 25, 2021

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Earth Day. In the summer of 1938, biologist Rachel Carson first visited Beaufort, and fell in love with the sand dunes of the outer banks, and with the mysterious relationship between shore and sea. In celebration of this Earth Day week, Sally Davis and Rev. Sally will share some of Rachel Carson's wisdom and poetry.

Message Part I: Sally Davis

As we celebrate Earth Day, it is a good time to remember how Carrot Island and Bird Shoals were saved from developers in 1977 by the quick action of concerned local citizens. The result is the Rachel Carson Coastal Estuarine Reserve, part of the NC Dept of Natural Resources.

I have a vague memory of my great aunt Iva Davis Holland being engaged in work to “save” Carrot Island. At that time she was the matriarch of our family and a very focused person. Anyone who knew her could tell you that you didn't want to get in her way when she was on a mission!

In recent weeks I have researched what she meant by “saving” Carrot Island. Information came from archived Carteret County News-Times articles and materials shared by Paula Gillikin, current site manager of the Rachel Carson Estuary.

Prior to 1976 most residents of Carteret County had assumed that Carrot Island was public property, because it was created from Taylor's Creek dredging spoils. Carrot Island runs parallel to Beaufort's Front Street, with Taylor's Creek separating the town from Carrot Island. Taylor's Creek was a deep- water passageway, as huge menhaden boats used it on their way to the

Inlet and the ocean. Menhaden fishing was still a major industry in Beaufort in the 1970s.

Local controversy was stirred when the Raleigh News & Observer printed advertisements that Carrot Island was to be auctioned on July 5, 1976, in 5 to 10-acre lots, each running from Taylor's Creek to the ocean. Local residents were caught off guard because they were unaware of the planned auction.

Ownership records show that Carrot Island had been torrenized in 1947 by Harvey Smith, owner of The Fishmeal Company. (As a side note, just this morning, I found out that Harvey Smith was married to one of my mother's people, Evelyn Marie Chadwick. The Chadwicks came to Carteret County from Gloucester, Massachusetts, in the 1730s and were whalers.)

Mr. Smith later sold Carrot Island to a British company, who in turn in April 1976, sold it to Robert Clodfelder, a High Point developer, for \$70,000.

In late June of 1976, stirred by news of the intended sale, local residents quickly formed the Beaufort Land Conservancy Council. They obtained an injunction to prevent the auction of the proposed lots. Jim King, long-time Beaufort resident, was the original director of the Council and my great aunt Iva Holland was the trustee. My cousin, Warren Davis, partner in a Beaufort law firm, represented the Council.

Duke University, because of its marine science research center, The Nature Conservancy, and the Beaufort Land Conservancy Council worked together with the goal of preventing the development of Carrot Island and Bird Shoals. The local Council was able to move more quickly because they

were an independent organization, without some of the red tape that government and university entities had to work through. The Council raised \$20,000 early to use as a down payment or an option. Initially, Clodfelter offered to sell the 178 acres for \$400,000. Negotiations continued for over a year with reportedly at least 25 offers rejected before an agreement was reached to sell to the Beaufort Land Conservancy Council on September 30, 1977, for \$250,000.

Local industries Atlantic Veneer, Beaufort Fisheries, and menhaden company Standard Products, and Duke University foundations made sizeable contributions and The Nature Conservancy acquired grants. Local residents contributed the rest of the money, with Council members even going door to door in Beaufort to solicit donations.

Rachel Carson visited here at least two times while she worked for the US Fish and Wildlife Services, once in 1938 and again later. One of her visits inspired Under the Sea Wind, and several years later, Edge of the Sea. Local citizens and scientists from Duke Marine Lab, led by Dr. Richard T. Barber, proposed naming the reserve for her.

Looking back, it seems to be a win-win. Mr. Clodfelter certainly made a decent return over a year and a half on his initial \$70,000 investment. Duke Marine scientists retained their outdoor laboratory. Front Street residents kept their unblemished view. And the rest of the world, especially those of us lucky enough to live in Carteret County, have access to a beautiful, well maintained nature preserve.

We owe this to a group of dedicated local residents, working with several other organizations!

A lesson for all of us, is that a concerted effort by a small, but determined, group of people can achieve great things.

Message part II: Rev. Sally

In 1938 the Fisheries Station in Beaufort was the largest fisheries research facility on the East Coast next to the one at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Taking a vacation from her responsibilities as a junior aquatic biologist with the United States Bureau of Fisheries, Rachel Carson and her mother and two sisters rented a cottage on one of the Outer Banks for ten days. Carson biographer Linda Lear writes:

“Timing her visit to Beaufort for the tides and the full moon, Rachel ... walked the beach at all hours, at high tides and low, watching the comings and goings of shorebirds, observing the smaller shore creatures, and collecting material. Sometimes she simply lay on her back, arms behind her head, watching and listening to the birds as they circled and dived overhead. ... Jotting down notes about the distinctive atmosphere of the shore at night when the smell and sound of the surf, the stillness of the ponds, the occasional call of a bird, and the scent of the pines behind her on the higher ground replaced the visual description of daylight, she gathered the images that would give her writing some of its most distinctive motifs. Rachel fell in love with the barren dunes of the outer banks that summer, and with the mysterious relationship between shore and sea.” [Lear, Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature. 1997. p. 94.]

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Rachel Carson was a biologist, with a master's degree in Zoology from Johns Hopkins University. And she was a writer. Part of her job at Fisheries was writing brochures and other literature for the public. Her essays were published in *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*. Her notes from the Beaufort visit flowed into her three sea books – Under the Sea Wind, The Sea Around Us, and The Edge of the Sea. Her writing combined what journalist Jared Lloyd called “enchanted literary prose with cutting edge marine biology of the day.”

[<https://www.coastalreview.org/2015/12/12194/>]

In the preface to The Edge of the Sea she writes,

“To understand the shore, it is not enough to catalogue its life. Understanding comes only when, standing on a beach, we can sense the long rhythms of earth and sea that sculptured its land forms and produced the rock and sand of which it is composed; when we can sense with the eye and ear of the mind the surge of life beating always at its shores – blindly, inexorable pressing for a foothold. To understand the life of the shore, it is not enough to pick up an empty shell and say ‘This is a murex,’ or ‘That is an angel wing.’ True understanding demands intuitive comprehension of the whole life of the creature that once inhabited this empty shell: how it survived amid surf and storms, what were its enemies, how it found food and reproduced its kind, what were its relations to the particular sea world in which it lived.” [The Edge of the Sea p. viii.]

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But Rachel Carson is best remembered for Silent Spring, her 1962 book about the spreading use of DDT and other synthetic chemicals to control insects, weeds and other “pests;” about how these chemicals move through the ecosystem from air to land to water; from insects to songbirds to human beings. Silent Spring unleashed a firestorm of fear, criticism, research, and reform. Because her powerful writing moved people to understanding, it galvanized chemical companies, cabinet members, and government agencies in fierce opposition to Carson herself, and medical researchers, scientists, and millions of ordinary citizens in fierce support of her argument that human action was causing harm that spread through the whole life of ecosystems – and of the whole, interconnected earth, present and future. Silent Spring is credited with inspiring grassroots environmental activism; the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency; and Earth Day, first observed as a teach-in in 1970.

In 51 years, the scope of Earth Day has spread from 20 million Americans on college campuses, focusing on pollution and environmental degradation to over 1 billion individuals mobilized in more than 190 countries, focused on climate and environmental justice, connecting the climate crisis to issues of pollution, poverty, police brutality, and the pandemic, all within a racial justice framework. [<https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2021/>].

As she embarked on the writing project that became Silent Spring, Rachel Carson wrote to her beloved Dorothy Freeman “Knowing what I do, there would be no future peace for me if I kept silent.” And on the day, four years

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later, that she submitted the manuscript for publication, she wrote to Dorothy again: “Suddenly the tension of four years was broken and I let the tears come. ... Last summer... I said I could never again listen happily to a thrush song if I had not done all I could. And last night the thoughts of all the birds and other creatures and all the loveliness that is in nature came to me with such a surge of deep happiness, that now I *had* done what I could — I had been able to complete it — now it had its own life.”

[<https://www.brainpickings.org/2020/05/27/thrush-song-paola-prestini-universe-in-verse/>; <https://www.brainpickings.org/2017/01/27/rachel-carson-silent-spring-dorothy-freeman/>]

That life is reflected in the activism of the Beaufort Land Conservancy Council and their partners in 1976 and 1977; it is embodied in the power of a concerted effort by a small, but determined group of people to “save” Carrot Island. In the Rachel Carson Estuarine Reserve, this living laboratory of the mysterious relationship between shore and sea, we are privileged to experience all the loveliness that is in nature. All the passion that was in Rachel Carson.

In 2019, composer Paola Prestini and writer Maria Popova together created *Thrush Song*, combining Rachel Carson’s words and original music. It is performed here by the Young People’s Chorus of New York City. Maria Popova describes this recording as “a poignant meta-testament to Carson’s legacy: the revelation of how intimately connected we are to one another and to the rest of nature through the intricate, complex, delicate web of biological and ecological relationships weaving the tapestry of being.”

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[<https://www.brainpickings.org/2020/05/27/thrush-song-paola-prestini-universe-in-verse/>].

May this meditation music stir in you the spirit of Rachel Carson: the efforts you would join with others to bring to life; the words that you would speak that there might be future peace.

Thrush Song

<https://vimeo.com/423004859>

Tom shares screen

Blessed be.