

## Refuge sponsors play about Rachel Carson

by Candace Ward

The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge will host the play, *A Sense of Wonder*, at Soldotna High School auditorium on Oct. 11 at 7 p.m. The play is based on the life of Rachel Carson, noted American writer and conservationist.

The refuge is sponsoring this inspirational play as a gift to the community, as part of our centennial celebration of the National Wildlife Refuge System. KDLL Public Radio and Soldotna High School are cosponsors. There is no admission charge.

Actress Kaiulani Lee performs *A Sense of Wonder* as a one-person drama. Due to the mature theme of the play, the performance is recommended for ages 13 and older.

In 2000, Ms. Lee performed the play in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Kodiak. From her experiences on that tour she fell in love with Alaska, and is excited about traveling and performing on the Kenai Peninsula this October. Ms. Lee has performed in movies, television, and on Broadway, where she won an BIE award.

This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of biologist Rachel Carson's ground-breaking book *Silent Spring*. Written in 1962, the book first warned the public about the long-term health hazards of pesticides to wildlife and people. The public outcry over pesticide abuse after the publication of *Silent Spring* made Rachel Carson one of the most controversial public figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Who was this very private person that reluctantly became so notorious?

Rachel Carson was born in 1907 and spent her childhood in rural Pennsylvania. Even as a child she felt a deep fascination with the sea. This interest led her to pursue a master's degree in zoology with an emphasis on marine wildlife.

She began her career with the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries as a science writer of radio scripts on marine topics. In her 15 years with the federal government, she became the chief editor of all publications for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In her free time, she wrote scientific articles for newspapers and magazines that were distinctive because they were written for a general rather than a

scientific audience. Over the course of two decades she wrote several award-winning books about the sea, including *Under the Sea Wind* (1941), *The Sea Around Us* (1952), and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955), and the children's books *Help Your Child to Wonder* (1956) and *Our Ever Changing Shore* (1957).

The success of *The Sea Around Us* allowed Carson to resign from her editor job and work full-time as a writer. Disturbed by the widespread and intensive use of chemical pesticides after World War II, Carson wrote *Silent Spring* about the dangers of misusing pesticides. Carson noted in a letter to a friend that writing *Silent Spring* "was simply something I believed in so deeply that there was no other course—I told you once that if I kept silent I could never again listen to a veery's song without overwhelming self-reproach."

Testifying before Congress in 1963, Rachel Carson called for new laws to protect human health and the environment, such as the outlawing of DDT. Congress subsequently passed much of this legislation, but not before she had died in 1964 after a long battle with cancer.

In national polls, Rachel Carson ranks as one of the top 100 writers, conservationists, and American women of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She acted as an eloquent witness for nature and continues to inspire new generations to protect the environment.

Please join us for a very special evening commemorating Rachel Carson's legacy. You will find both entertainment and inspiration in Kaiulani Lee's *A Sense of Wonder*.

More information on Rachel Carson's life is available in the biography *Rachel Carson—Witness for Nature* by Linda Lear and on the Web site <http://www.rachelcarson.org>.

Candace Ward works as a park ranger in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge's visitor service program. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters in Soldotna, call (907) 262-7021. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://kenai.fws.gov>.