



Weaving Her Story Into History

Health and Wellness

Women have been instrumental in advocating for women's health and for taking the lead in helping to save the health of our planet – another form of “wellness”. In this month's column, we want to bring to your attention some of the early female physicians who advocated for treatment options and medical training for women, as well as the woman who developed the first water quality standards in the U.S. and the woman who advocated for the preservation of the Everglades. As part of our expansive view of health and wellness, we also note the woman who alerted us to the dangers of pesticides and laid the foundation for the resurgence of the environmental movement of the last quarter of the 20th century. Come join us on our journey through time.



In 1849, **Elizabeth Blackwell** is the first U.S. woman to receive an M.D. degree when she graduates from Geneva College in New York. This was no small feat! She had been rejected by every school in Philadelphia and New York as well as Harvard, Yale, and Bowdoin College. There were other early women who practiced medicine, but chose not to push for a formal degree, as they were so ostracized in their efforts.

Blackwell supported medical education for women and helped many other women's careers. By establishing the New York Infirmary for Women and Children in 1857, she offered a practical solution to one of the problems facing women who were rejected from

internships elsewhere but determined to expand their skills as physicians. The medical college associated with the Infirmary, established in 1867, provided training and experience for women doctors as well as medical care for the poor. Blackwell also published several important books on the issue of women in medicine, including *Medicine as a Profession For Women* in 1860 and *Address on the Medical Education of Women* in 1864.

Actually, **Dr. Marie Zakrzewska**, along with Dr. Blackwell's sister, Dr. Emily Blackwell had helped Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell establish the New York Infirmary for Women and Children. In 1862, it was Zakrzewska's idea to expand the opportunities for women physicians who were excluded from clinical training opportunities at male-run hospitals, by establishing the first hospital in Boston—and the second hospital in America to be run by women: the New England Hospital for Women and Children. The hospital became a primary training hospital for several generations of women physicians, and nurses as well. The hospital flourished under her direction, providing clinical experience for women physicians.



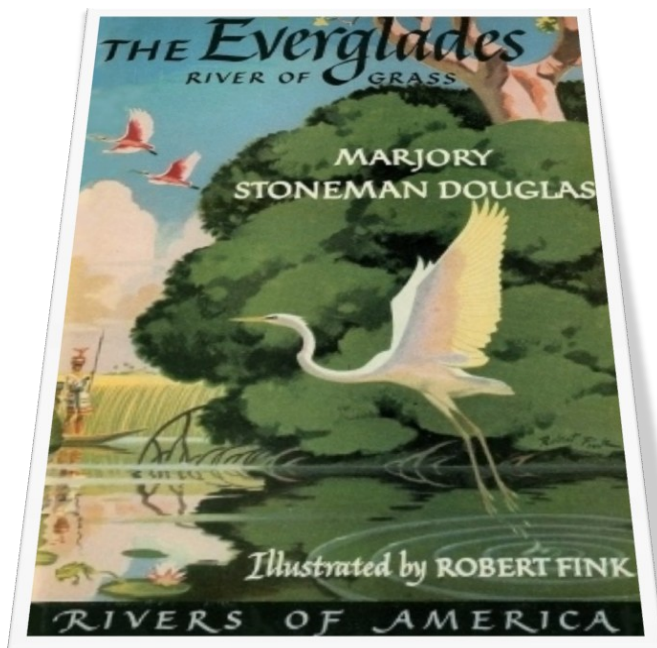
Dr. Zakrzewska knew that the opportunity to work with large numbers of patients was vital if women physicians were to achieve the same levels of training, comfort with the range of issues and problems presented and the standards of practice as male physicians. The New England Hospital for Women and Children grew rapidly, though budgets were always tight, and the hospital had to hold yearly fund-raising fairs. By the 1940s, it occupied a large campus in south Boston, continuing to serve poorer populations and to train physicians and nurses. It continues in operation today as the Dimock Community Health Center.

There is no question that medical treatment was and is important when people became

sick. It is also important to keep people from getting sick. When we think about health and wellness, part of our effort to remain healthy is to participate in preventative efforts. An early woman who understood that issue clearly and who did just that was chemist **Ellen Swallow Richards**. Richards analyzed more than 100,000 samples of the State of Massachusetts' water and sewage. As a result, she and a colleague produced the world's first water purity tables and the first state water quality standards in the U.S. Richards is considered the foremost female industrial and environmental chemist in the 1800s. Access to clean water is a major advance in health concerns.

Richards also pioneered in the field of home economics. She was the first woman admitted to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (although as a special student "The Swallow Experiment") and its first female instructor, the first woman in America accepted to any school of science and technology, and the first American woman to earn a degree in chemistry. Through her efforts, the Women's Laboratory at MIT was established in 1876, and in 1879 she was recognized as an assistant instructor—without pay—for teaching the curriculum in chemical analysis, industrial chemistry, mineralogy, and applied biology. She is credited as a pioneer in the field of sanitary engineering and the founder of the field of ecology.

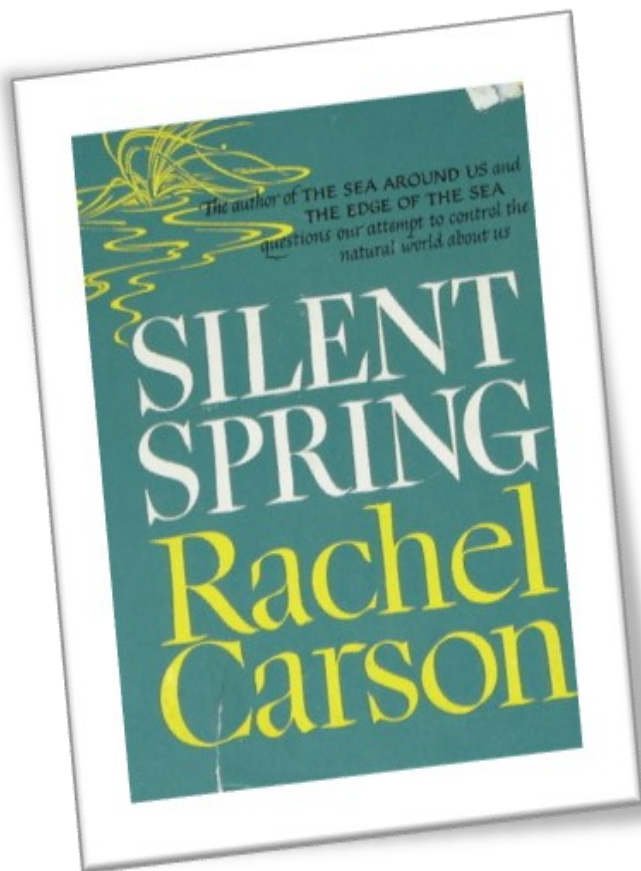
There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the earth; remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them.



These opening words from **Marjory Stoneman Douglas**' immortal book *Everglades: River of Grass* not only crystallize the uniqueness of the Everglades, they demonstrate the passion and life work of the woman. Her book was published in 1947, the same year that Everglades National Park was established, and it has become the definitive description of the natural treasure she fought so hard to protect. To add a voting constituency to her efforts, in 1970 she formed the 'Friends of the Everglades', and until shortly before her death remained active at the head of the organization. Marjory Stoneman Douglas modeled leadership

through activism. Her stewardship has enabled the generations who follow her to enjoy the unique beauty of that special place. She strongly advocated for the

wellness of our planet. We know as well that the enjoyment of these special places in our country does contribute to our personal health and well being.



Another woman who is remembered as a very strong advocate for our planet's physical condition, health and wellness is biologist **Rachel Carson**. In 1962, Carson's book *Silent Spring* was published. This book, an exposé on the dangers of the pesticide DDT, is credited with launching environmental awareness, leading to the first Earth Day in 1970 and to the entire environmental movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

For many years, women have worked to improve their own health, the health of others around them, and the health of our planet. Raise your water glass high and salute the women we have identified. Contribute to your own health and to that of our planet as you make your own healthy choices; we have much for which we are thankful for and for which we are proud!

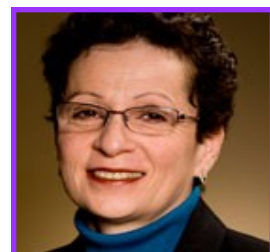
Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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