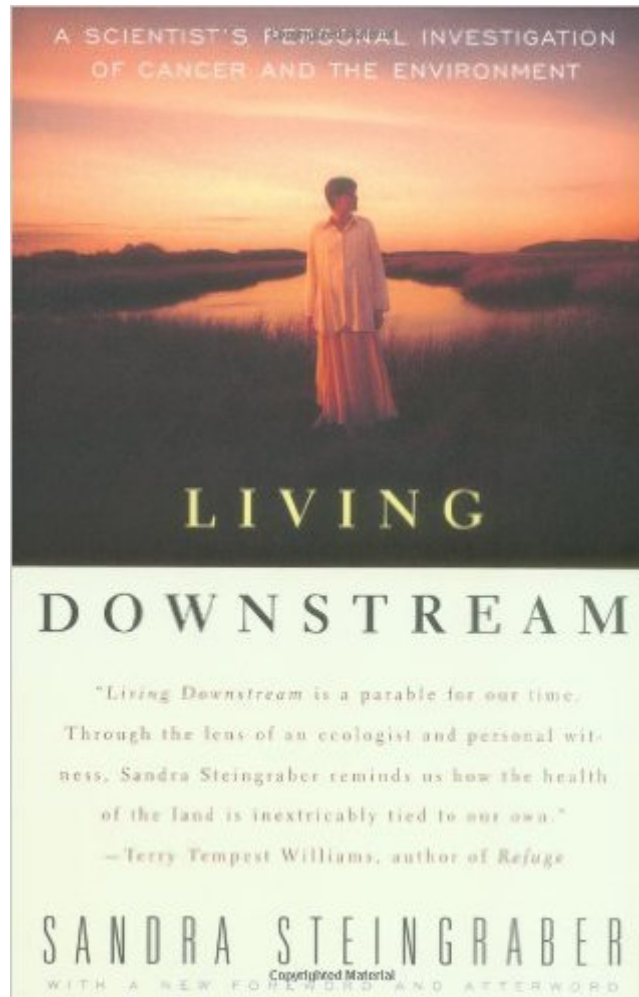


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# Living Downstream: A Scientist's Personal Investigation Of Cancer And The Environment



## Synopsis

With this eloquent and impassioned book, biologist and poet Sandra Steingraber shoulders the legacy of Rachel Carson, producing a work about people and land, cancer and the environment, that is as accessible and invaluable as *Silent Spring*--and potentially as historic. In her early twenties, Steingraber was afflicted with cancer, a disease that has afflicted other members of her adoptive family. Writing from the twin perspectives of a survivor and a concerned scientist, she traces the high incidence of cancer and the terrifying concentrations of environmental toxins in her native rural Illinois. She goes on to show similar correlation in other communities, such as Boston and Long Island, and throughout the United States, where cancer rates have risen alarmingly since mid-century. At once a deeply moving personal document and a groundbreaking work of scientific detection, *Living Downstream* will be a touchstone for generations, reminding us of the intimate connection between the health of our bodies and the integrity of our air, land, and water. "By skillfully weaving a strong personal drama with thorough scientific research, Steingraber tells a compelling story.... Well worth reading."--Washington Post

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book will be remembered not only for its eloquence and poetry, for its accuracy and precision, but also for the silence with which it was received in 1997. Along with Joni Seager's "Earth Follies" and Terry Tempest Williams' "Refuge", "Living Downstream" paints a picture of our behavior toward our planet as nothing less than genocidal. For those who believe Rachel Carson was right, this book

is a must-read update and a reminder that faith is not enough. We must live as if we believe the consequences of toxic pollution to be predictable and avoidable.

It is rare to find a book on a scientific subject that is both accurate and precise in its science and beautifully written. It is no surprise to find that Sandra Steingraber, author of such a book, is both a Ph.D. biologist and a published poet. "Living Downstream" is a superb blend of rigorous analysis and poignant memoir. Steingraber documents the increasing evidence of a strong link between rising cancer rates and environmental contamination. At the same time she tells her own story--that of a woman who suffered and survived cancer while only in her 20's. This book has justly been compared to Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" and may, if read widely enough, have the same worldwide impact that Carson's book had forty years ago.

This book is chock-full of important scientific information about the connections between cancer and the environment, yet it is very easy to read. I couldn't put it down. You will be shocked by the evidence she puts forth. All her information is well-documented.

With her heart and science Ms. Steingraber gives us the history of how products (including agricultural ones) made of natural chemicals increasingly have been remade with synthetic chemicals since the last two world wars. Restrictions on newly created dangerous chemicals were not considered for fear of causing another post war depression after 1945. Some of the synthetic chemicals find their ways into our cells by being similar enough to natural hormones, yet alien enough, that our bodies' defense mechanisms are fooled, sometimes becoming cannibalized to turn malignantly against us. She gracefully does not point the finger at individuals, and usually not at specific companies, but gives us a scientifically based (with nearly 300 references) ecological picture of what's going on to needlessly make some people sick and die. There are approximately 7,500 synthetic chemicals in use. Only a small fraction of them have been tested for health risks. Usually these risks are calculated only after exceedingly high percentages of us die. Some chemicals like Benzene (an additive to gasoline) despite being known carcinogens, are still allowed to be used. Instead of using us as guinea pigs, Steingraber explains, the "precautionary principle" should be adopted. This means new chemicals should be tested for what harm they may cause. They should not be used when they are indicated to be harmful. Absolute proof, usually a body count is not necessary. "Reverse onus," is a similar principle, meaning chemicals should be demonstrated to be safe. For dangerous chemicals that seem indispensable, "least toxic

alternatives" should be developed. For example, there are already alternatives to using chlorine for eliminating pathogens in our drinking water. Chlorine does not have to be used. Ms. Steingraber grew up fast after innocently HAVING BEEN GIVEN CANCER at a young age. Perhaps that's why she cherishes children, who are more susceptible to carcinogens than adults. Our Govt. only sets standards for carcinogens based on adults' more sluggish metabolisms -- that is, when "economics" doesn't override human health. Also, fetuses and young children should not be blamed for their unhealthy lifestyles when they succumb to nasty chemically induced afflictions. Walking along the toxic yet beautiful Illinois River with her sister's children, Ms Steingraber points out the absurdity of the EPA writing reports about keeping children away from that river. Rivers are like The Wind in the Willows to children, even when the wind is poisoned, and willows, most ducks or talking toads don't live there anymore. Instead of letting us continue to ignore these problems she offers this advice, "Maybe we adults need only demonstrate an attitude of passionate attention about where we live."

As a scientist, I must say that this book is extraordinary. You'll realize from this well researched and analyzed text that given the trends in environmental contamination, we are all highly vulnerable to toxicity related cancer. What is more terrifying is that there is not a responsible/objective/non-political entity that has enough power to change this trend near-term (10-15 yrs). After having read the book, I feel obligated to do something (its my nature). In hindsight, I wish that I had never read the book - ignorance may be bliss.

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