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June 8, 1995

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(Linda, Cont. IL, Chicago, Boston, Feature writers)
Science, book review,
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Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine Profiles:

**Sandra Steingraber--Poet, Biologist, Cancer Survivor;
Boston-Area Writer Working on Follow-Up to
Rachel Carson's Landmark Ecology Book, *Silent Spring***

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Sandra Steingraber has survived bladder cancer, served 10 days in jail over a campus political protest, and published a collection of poetry. Now she's working on what's likely to be a controversial book, probing environmental links to cancer, three decades after Rachel Carson's path breaker, "Silent Spring."

Steingraber's poetry collection, *Post-Diagnosis*, was published this spring by Firebrand Books of Ithaca, N.Y. Her book in progress on the dangers of pesticides to wildlife is tentatively titled *Trace Amounts*.

Steingraber, a native of Pekin, Ill., who lives in the Boston suburb of Somerville, Mass., studied biology and English before graduating *magna cum laude* from Illinois Wesleyan University in 1981. She earned a master's degree in English and creative writing at Illinois State University and a doctorate in biological sciences from the University of Michigan, where she became "politicized."

Steingraber's powerful message, combining science and poetry, is explored in the summer, 1995, edition of *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*. She is profiled in an article--"A Whole Person"--written by Stew Salowitz, the magazine's associate editor and director of IWU's News Services.

Since the summer of 1979, Steingraber has battled bladder cancer. She was hospitalized as an IWU junior--an experience that nudged her toward a dual career as a scientist and writer.

"I started writing poetry for the first time," Steingraber recalled, "as an encoded way of coming out about my cancer."

Steingraber is outspoken when it comes to campus-based military research and the lingering deadly affects of DDT, the pesticide Carson railed against in her 1962 best-seller. DDT was banned in the United States in 1972.

She was at Michigan at a time when many university scientists were

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working on new weapon systems--nuclear, chemical, and biological. "To watch this transformation," she said, "was frightening, and there were a number of us who felt having that kind of research designed to kill and maim people and sponsored by the Pentagon . . . was immoral. It was that protest that landed me in jail."

On the subject of DDT, which was introduced during World War II, Steingraber says it is the target of breast cancer studies.

"We all have molecules of DDT in our bodies," Steingraber said, "because it lasts in the soil and water for 30 to 50 years. Even though it was banned from use, it was not banned from manufacture--it's still being made and sent abroad where it is legal. often, when we import food, we got those DDT residues back. This is known as the circle of poison."

Steingraber points out that bananas and strawberries from Mexico and Central America are "just loaded with DDT. And it isn't old DDT--it's brand new DDT."

She also is campaigning against atrazine, the most commonly used herbicide in Illinois, which also has been linked to breast cancer and is undergoing a special review by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Steingraber is up beat about prospects for preserving the environment despite the congressional pendulum shift against government regulation.

"I feel optimistic," she said, "that people are listening to an ecological message with greater interest than ever. All the signs indicate people want better environmental protection and there's a growing interest about women's health and its relationship to the environmental. People never used to talk about cancer at all and now they do, asking good questions and asking the very basic question about how human health and the health of the earth are related."

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,800 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. In recent years, the university's endowment has grown to more than \$92 million; a \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$24 million science building will open in 1995. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to

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a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 164 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *U.S. News* ranks IWU the second most efficient national liberal arts college--a key gauge of the campus' quality academic program and relatively reasonable cost. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition. IWU's 1994 freshman class scored an average 27.9 on the ACT exam, compared to the national average of 20.7.

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Editor's Note: A copy of--"Whole Person--Sandra Steingraber combines science and poetry to spread her powerful message"--is attached to this news release. Permission to reprint the article is granted.