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# “We’ve been totally ignored. Overlooked”

The story of Bernice Gutierrez.

By Joshua Wheeler (Text) and [Reto Sterchi](#) (Photo), 16.10.2021



Bernice Gutierrez.

Bernice was only 8 days old when the bomb went off less than 40 miles west from her home in Carrizozo. “I never heard a thing about the test,” she says. “I knew the bomb had been tested there but my family did not talk about it.”

Her mother and brother were diagnosed with thyroid cancer in the 1990s. Her endocrinologist asked if her family had ever been exposed to radiation. Exposure to fallout from nuclear weapons is a proven risk factor for thyroid cancer, and a common diagnosis after such exposure. Bernice's daughter also eventually developed thyroid cancer. On the advice of her doctor, Bernice had her thyroid gland removed in 2012.

Bernice set about researching her family's sickness from exposure to fallout. Her mother was one of 11 children, all born or raised in Carrizozo, 40-miles from Trinity. Each of those 11 siblings who had children have had at least one child diagnosed with cancer or brain tumors. In all, 20 members of her family from the area had different cancers with 6 dying from them. 12 family members have had non-cancerous radiation related sickness like thyroid disease. She says the research is time consuming and traumatic. "It's almost like a full-time job fighting this battle. We've been totally ignored. Overlooked."