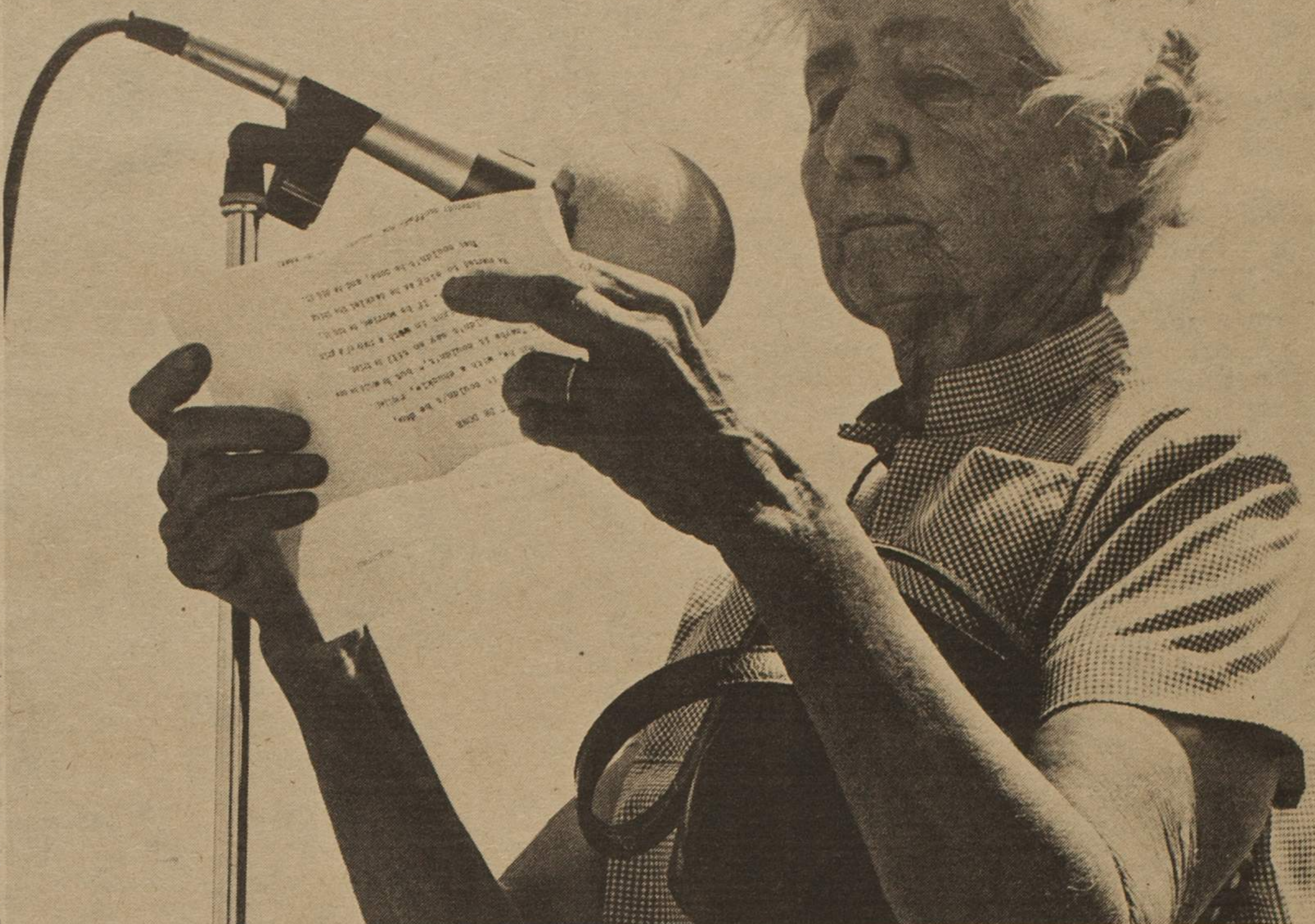


"I think this nuclear thing is just like the Vietnam War.... If it had not been for the people that war would never have ended. I think that when people find out that these plants are going to give them cancer...when they find out for sure...they'll turn against it"

Edith Lange, Burlington, Kansas

photo by C. Crider



Fights Nuclear Plant

Gardener Enjoys Life on Small Scale

by Sheree Welch

The demonstrators sweltered under the powerful Kansas sun. As another musician stepped down from the stage, an aging but clear voiced woman began reading a poem of courage and perseverance. The crowd looked to see Edith Lange, a 76-year-old Burlington resident. She stood straight and slim--the only sign of her age was white hair.

Edith is one of Burlington's citizens who is openly distressed by the nuclear power plant under construction two miles away.

Edith and her husband, Max, have lived in Burlington for 19 years in an old farmhouse.

She visited with interviewers in her living room--perched on a piano bench with her young visitors grouped around her.

Her eyes sparkled as she told about her life. She loves it here even with the nuclear power plant rising so near.

Edith first felt that her idyllic lifestyle was threatened several years ago when the Nuclear Regulatory Commission held their hearings on the Wolf Creek plant in Burlington.

She began reading articles on radiation and solar energy. Along with a few others, she began speaking out against the big money interests behind the nuclear plant. They began the monumental task of awakening citizens to the dangers of nuclear power.

"I took quite a few leaflets out from door to door a few years ago, and they were all very polite people, but hardly anybody would commit themselves. A few said they were concerned, but just a few. Most just said 'thank you, we'll read it' . . ."

"People won't talk about it. If you bring up the subject they usually change it. People just don't want to be involved . . . because well . . . one woman told me 'I work for the government and I might lose my job, so I don't get involved in anything controversial'."

Edith compares this battle with the peace movement against the Viet Nam War. "For years people wouldn't turn against the war, but little by little, the people

found out about the terrible things we were doing over there. If it had not been for the people that war would never have ended. I think that when people find out that these plants are going to give them cancer--when they find out for sure--they'll turn against it."

The Langes have a lot at stake here in Burlington. They have invested nearly 20 years of toil and care into their three-lot organic garden. They are able to grow nearly everything they eat.

"This garden is our life. Look at that soil," she says, "Compost, manure, and bone meal are all we ever put into it. See how dark it looks and how rich it smells. I feel one gets a special kind of energy from working close to the soil."

Diversity in planting is Edith's defence against insects. The tomatoes are interspersed with cabbages. A grape vine creeps over a shed door. Feathery asparagus wave near the bottom of elderberry vines. A row of strawberries surrounds the corn and bean patch. She also plants marigolds in the center of her lima bean tepees to keep the bugs away from the beans.

This is where Edith feels at home, close to nature. "Look at the great open sky. You know, when I was in college, I used to want to go to Europe. I thought it must be so pretty there," Edith smiles, "Now I look up and I say you could go to Europe; you could go to California and it would be the same sky over your head."

This closeness to nature is exemplified also in the Langes' commitment to vegetarianism. They believe it is a more healthy approach to diet and are also concerned with the moral implications of eating meat.

"I've always felt sort of guilty about killing animals," Edith says, "They've got cattle docks near here, and I used to hear those poor old things crying and they'd prod them with those cattle rods. For years now I've not felt comfortable eating meat."

While the Langes base their day-to-day existence on working closely with the physical world, they keep their minds honed with different intellectual pursuits.

Max is a follower of ontology

which Edith describes as a philosophy which says that everything is an illusion.

"This piano bench right here may seem solid but it is not. Our bodies are not really solid. The only thing that is real is the soul."

Edith is learning to play the piano through a correspondence course. "Even if you can't play very well, music lifts the heart. I don't know what I'd without it."

According to Edith, the simple pursuits make life happy. "You know, they have ads on t.v. all the time--what technology can do for you. Well, it can't make people healthy and happy."

An example of this in her own life took place when she was teaching high school English in Ohio. The school moved from a cosy old building to a big new one. "It was just like a marble palace. You had to walk a mile to get to the principal's office and another mile to get to the bathroom and you couldn't find your old cronies anywhere. They were all lost. So I took an early retirement."

"In that new building you couldn't open the windows--there was always that hum--summer and winter--it was nerve-racking. I just don't enjoy life on a large scale. Have you ever read that Schumaker book, *Small Is Beautiful*? Well I think he is right. That's the way we had lived until they started up that plant."

"I get that feeling--it's the whole of life that's important, and I'm glad I'm still alive. You know it's a wonderful thing to be alive, even if you got a nuclear plant just two miles from your house," Edith's face glows, "You can see those towers right from our place--right from our garden--you can see them going up. I just have a feeling. I don't think they'll ever start it."

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