



AVALON, PA

GRETCHEN ANDERSON

CONCERNS



ODORS



SOOT



HEALTH



STANDARD OF LIVING

HEALTH EFFECTS



ALLERGIES



BURNING LUNGS



COUGH



CONGESTION



BURNING EYES

I have been living in Avalon for five years. Before that I was in Bellevue for two. We moved here because I accepted a job at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and we were looking for a place to live. At the time we thought my husband was going to be going back to Minneapolis more often than he did. The neighborhood is a very comfortable area. The people are nice. I enjoy that the houses are not really big. It's just a comfortable neighborhood.

But when Shenango was open it was filthy. There was always smoke coming out of the stacks. It'd be a beautiful, clear sky and there'd be these billows of either white or black smoke. I'm a conservator, I spend a lot of time cleaning ancient specimens. I knew when I came here I would be removing industrial soot from objects in the museum. I did not anticipate the amount that I had to remove from my house. I took to leaving a section of windowsills dirty and they were actually black within three months. The amount of soot that would accumulate in a very short period of time was disgusting.

And the smell was beyond offensive. You'd step out in the morning and by the time I got to the car, I had my phone out calling the Health Department. **Many times on my way home, I'd hit a certain spot and it would come through the car even though the car windows were closed.** I like to sleep with my windows open and I stopped doing that because I'd be awoken by really bad smells at two or three in the morning. And then I couldn't get back to sleep and wouldn't be ready to go to work the next morning. They were so overwhelming. Shenango prevented me from doing a lot. We're just starting to garden now because I didn't want to work in the yard. I didn't want to have people

over because the house is fairly small and if we had more than one couple, there really wasn't enough room. You wanted to be outside if the weather was good, and we just stopped doing that. I just had no desire to go bicycling, or to exercise outside. So yeah, it limited what we did and what I wanted to do outside.

Back in the mid-80s, I was working at a museum in LA, and I lived at the top of the hill and walked two blocks down to catch my bus. My lungs burned walking downhill. I had days that were similar to that here. The first time that I really noticed the smell, I was shocked. Then it started happening time and time again, where I would step out in the morning and after the first breath I took I'd start hacking and coughing. **I have allergies, I thought at first that may be what it was. But that doesn't happen during the winter with allergies.** Sometimes my lungs hurt almost as bad as they did in LA when there were temperature inversions.

Until this past year, the longer I lived here the worse my cough became. I'm hoping that it isn't a long-term thing. But the immediate effect was a lot more phlegm, sinus stuff, burning eyes, and congestion. I did go to my doctor a number of times and got X-rayed once and I'm ok. But still, the concern was there. Pittsburgh is cleaner than it used to be, but it's got a long way to go.

We were seriously thinking about how we could move. I am not going to be leaving my job for quite awhile and we didn't want to buy another house to leave in six or seven years, but neither of us were happy about us living where we were living. We loved the house, but the pollution was really getting to us and we were actually going to be talking about what that process was when we went home for the Christmas holiday. We didn't have to talk about it. They shut down. They actually shut the majority of the plant down. It was wonderful. We were very happy.

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I have noticed changes in my health since the plant shut down. I don't cough as much. I think my sinuses are clearer. I feel a lot better. I have more energy. I think I've had one day where I stepped out and actually smelled air pollution since that time. I can now be outside as long as I want. We actually use our garden. I've noticed dusting one particular white windowsill that there is significantly less black particulates now. If I let it go for three months, yes it's dusty, but it's not black anymore. So this is quite significant. I don't have black soot on my car. I have a white car so it's easy to tell.

I think the acute situation in this area is better, but we still have problems because of the heavy traffic and because of the pollution that comes wafting up the Ohio River. **Air pollution and water pollution are not localized. It's part of the air, it gets blown around. We still have too many heavy polluters.** The coke oven gas situation in this area is still affecting the overall region. It is a holistic thing. So you can fix or improve a small area, but you still have the overall pollution issues that are coming about. The particulates are part of the problem with global warming as well. And so it is all part of a huge system that functions around the world and we need to do better.

We need to do better as a community, we need to do better as a state, as a nation. We just need to do better.