



BELLEVUE, PA

# TANYA BIELSKI-BRAHAM

## CONCERNS



ODORS



HEALTH



QUALITY  
OF LIFE



VIOLATIONS

## HEALTH EFFECTS



ASTHMA

I have lived in Bellevue for seven years now. When we were moving here we looked at a ton of houses. It was just a matter of the right price at the right time, the right house. It just happened to be a cute little house here in Bellevue. I love looking at my neighbor's garden. He's got a beautiful perennial garden, so every week it's a different flower. I love seeing that. I love seeing all the dogs in the community. I love that our dog, Lucy, enjoyed the first backyard that she ever had.

I can only speak personally about what the community was like when Shenango was operating. **I had run two marathons, and I couldn't get up and down the stairs without my inhaler here,** and I would have a few asthma attacks a week. I didn't know why, until my husband learned about the plant and the air quality in our neighborhood, and then went to a town meeting. It wasn't until I was at the meeting with other members of the community that it became pretty obvious that there was something wrong with the air quality.

It's very upsetting to know that this plant was operating with so many violations, and nobody seemed to do anything about it. I remember at one

point, a representative from the health department complained about how he had been asked to put letter grades on every restaurant, like they have in every major city. He talked about how much of a burden it was for him. **I was thinking in my head, "You are the health department. Just do your job! You are our advocate for our health."** It was very discouraging to know that he felt like his hands were tied with the air quality, much like he felt like his hands were tied when dealing with the restaurant industry in Pittsburgh.

We also attended a city council meeting where we really tried to have them change some procedures at the plant. We told them that we thought the air

quality wasn't good, and it was the first time that the city council had even claimed to really hear that it was an issue. That was very eye-opening that the elected officials in Bellevue seemed to really not care, or for the most part were really not aware of the issue that this plant across the river was to this community.

When I got an email saying that the Shenango Coke Plant was closing down I immediately sent a text to my husband. He believed I was punking him. He thought I was making it up, a joke, it was that unbelievable. It was stunning to know it was going to be shut down. I didn't actually think it would happen. They closed down when we were out on vacation. So, we never actually got to see the lights go out, so to speak.

**It's a really funny thing because now that the plant is closed it's more what you don't notice. Before, you noticed the air. Now you don't notice the air.** You shouldn't notice the air. Water shouldn't have a taste, air shouldn't have a smell. It's really the absence of anything that you notice. You just walk outside and it smells like outside, which is a tremendous difference from when the wind would shift and you would smell it. There was also a haze before. That seems to have dissipated as well.

I'm also definitely using my inhaler less. You just don't notice the stress on your lungs running up and down the stairs when the windows are open. When you have asthma, you always expect that you'll have an asthma attack because of exercise or humidity or allergies. You don't expect to have it in your house because of a plant down the street. That's now been removed from the equation. I think my lungs feel better.

But the air problems won't be solved if that site becomes a refuge for anything else. Pittsburgh is a funny place in terms of its topography. The air quality is always going to suffer more because of the hills and mountains and the ravines, which makes it even more important to have clean energy

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here so we're not polluting anything. If it's particularly humid and the wind current's not moving, the stuff is just going to sit here. I do believe it would be nice if it became a green energy facility. It would bring in some new, good quality jobs for the community. It would be an example, to not only Pittsburgh but to the country, on what green businesses can do for the environment, and for the community.

I think people need to be aware of what happened here, and the before and the after, if we can get the word out to other communities that have similar coke works plants. Maybe it would help them with their cause. I think we have a case study here where we can hopefully show, even on a national level, a before and after of what the quality of life can be like after one of these plants closes.

We have to keep talking about clean air and clean water. Our bodies are made up of air and water, I mean who are we kidding? We sort of get lost sometimes in business and our schedules, but the bottom line: our basic needs are pretty simple. You can't take away clean air and clean water from people and think it's not going to have an impact. We have a responsibility to the people and the community to leave the world in better shape than when it was handed to us.

**Maybe the generations before us didn't have the know-how or the knowledge to realize how they were damaging it. But we do, so we can make some changes.**