



BELLEVUE, PA

ANGELA GARCIA

CONCERNS



ODORS



HEALTH



EFFECTS ON CHILDREN



STANDARD OF LIVING

HEALTH EFFECTS



ASTHMA

We've lived in the North Boroughs for about sixteen years, thirteen of them in Bellevue, just a few miles north of Pittsburgh. We chose to live in Bellevue because it has great public transportation, easy access to downtown, and is a walkable community. It also feels like a small town with its main street and many long-time, multi-generational families.

We couldn't see the Shenango coke plant but we could smell it. **For years I thought I was smelling sewage treatment, but I found out that it was actually sulfur discharges from the plant.** It could smell like rotten eggs on any given day, or a landfill on others. I could also see the smoke. "That's just steam," I was told, and I thought, "that looks like a lot of steam." Any time we traveled up Ohio River Boulevard we could see the scariness coming out of the stacks. It definitely looked like old industrial Pittsburgh, and it was intimidating to think that we lived so close. It was only through my work with environmental groups that I started to learn about Shenango and its pollution.

I tried to talk to other parents, particularly parents of children with asthma. I think they didn't really want

to know or talk about it. **You see it every day, and you are sort of powerless to change anything. You can't just pack up and move, so it became just one more thing to worry about.** A lot of the parents of younger kids didn't want to feel that sense of responsibility. They moved here for a good lifestyle, for a walkable community, only to find out that they moved near a factory that emits all kinds of pollutants. It was not an easy conversation to have. I was more successful with people who didn't have children.

I firmly believe the pollution affected my son. One hot summer day shortly after he was born, he woke up and had difficulty breathing. I was terrified with no idea what to do. I did everything I could to have a healthy pregnancy so that he could come into

this world strong and as unpolluted as possible. Years later I discovered that his bedroom window was downwind from the factory. We would keep the window open so he could get fresh air and see the tree we had planted for him. He has had asthma ever since. It was very aggravating when I found out that I moved close to one of the region's biggest polluters. You feel powerless and angry. This is going to affect my children's health for the rest of their lives, and there is nothing I could immediately do to stop it.

I learned about ACCAN and began attending their meetings. I signed petitions and communicated with legislators. I went to meetings with the health department and talked to them directly about air quality issues, sharing my story at one of the first community meetings. There wasn't a lot of dialogue at that point. I felt they were just giving us time to vent. It was frustrating. I think the dialogue started a few meetings after that, and I was encouraged that it continued.

I'm proud of the people in our community who came together around this cause. They represented different generations, faith-based groups, small businesses, and community organizations. I remember walking into the Bellevue Barber Shop and seeing local faith leaders that I hadn't imagined would be involved in this issue. **I stood side by side with business owners, young moms, and retirees. I'm very proud that the group grew and continues to push for improved air quality.**

I heard about Shenango's closing on the radio. I read emails from community groups that confirmed it was true. After years of community activism, the plant was going to shut down. It was definitely a relief. I'm not going to miss the smell of sulfur when I open my windows.

Some people were surprised when the closure was announced. Many people breathed a sigh of relief. Since then, there hasn't been the same urgency to

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talk about our community's air. People don't remark on the improvement, but I think they notice it.

This is a city of innovation; a more environmentally friendly development on the Shenango site must be possible. I think a solar array or wind farm would be fantastic. We have green energy being manufactured locally. What an opportunity to showcase it in a visible location on the Ohio River.

Pittsburgh's air quality is not a problem of days gone by. It may not be visible, but it definitely is still a problem. We are failing when benchmarked against other cities. When I tell people that my father grew up in the Steel Valley and now has tremendous breathing problems, they aren't surprised. But they don't make the connection when I say my son has asthma and we live near Shenango. **It's not the same visibly dirty Pittsburgh, with dirty skies. Our city does look better and is more attractive in many ways, but air quality still impacts all of us.** It's a regional problem. We need multiple layers of the community—citizens, legislators, regulators, corporations—to work together. Just because we can't see it doesn't mean it's not happening.

I don't think one site closing is going to improve our air enough. There's another site on the other side of the city. As long as that and other sites are causing pollution, we still have a problem. Until these sites are in compliance with regulations, corporate America isn't being held responsible for what they're supposed to do.

Until we have one of the top air quality levels in the country, we still have a lot of work to do. One victory is the beginning. We need to keep the momentum going.