



BEN AVON, PA

FRANK MEACCI

CONCERNS



ODORS



SOOT



PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS



QUALITY OF LIFE

HEALTH EFFECTS



CANCER



ASTHMA



ARTHRITIS

I moved to Ben Avon shortly after I got married and have resided in the community for approximately 55 years. We were looking for a place to rent and my wife's friends had a place in Ben Avon available. We rented for nine years before building the house we live in now.

We live on Walnut Road, which is named after all the black walnut trees that it used to have. There aren't many left in existence but I salvaged one that's in my front yard. This is a really tight-knit community, it's a small community and people do know each other. It's very nice in that respect.

But the most disturbing thing about the community is what comes across the Ohio River from the Shenango Coke Works. It's one of those things that I didn't realize until later on. **Many times you would see the cloud of smoke and then the particles on the deck, the roof, and just about everything. And then there was the smell.** I describe it as a creosote smell and, with having been in a little bit of chemistry, the rotten egg smell of hydrogen sulfide. And it's just something that we lived with.

Shenango is an old company. I remember going down to Neville Island in 1954 or 1955 to look for summer jobs and they were active then. I even applied there. I thought I would definitely get a job there. But they never hired me and honestly they did me a favor.

As it continued, we became more aware of the environment and some of the physical health issues, particularly that my wife has. We had lived here maybe fifteen years when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Luckily she had it removed and hasn't had any problems since. But in the meantime she began to have problems with asthma and breathing as well as really bad arthritis. It became evident that this is a real health problem to us.

But even now the awareness is there but you don't hear many folks talking about it. **There is this attitude that I think is an expression of hopelessness and helplessness. People think that there's nothing you can do.** I have a PhD in psychology and am a licensed psychologist and I have been gathering information and data on the psychological effects of pollution on people. Here we live with industry, we live with the steel mills, the coal, we live with it all and we just have to suffer and be affected by it.

Before moving here I was pretty used to breathing what I call fresh air. I lived out in the country and the air was much better there, especially when the coal industry subsided. And then coming here I noticed the change, especially on cloudy days when everything is suppressed or there is an inversion. The big problem now is the nano particles. They are so small that you can't see them in the air. But you can smell them. Last summer, we had our windows open, and it was so bad that it woke us up out of a deep sleep. We had to close the window.

I first learned that the Shenango Coke Plant was closing when I received a call from a fellow ACCAN member. Initially, I felt that the air quality could improve in the borough. And it has! There is less of a smell in the air. **I used to have to keep all of my windows closed because the smell from Shenango would wake me up, but now I am free to get fresh air.** It's a little too soon to see all the differences, but so far it has been very positive.

I've been involved with Allegheny County Clean Air Now for about five years. In the beginning, it was just a few people that wanted to fight for air quality justice. Once we got more people, we became a group that had a lot of information. We organized this information in such a way that people had to take notice of us. **We would go to Shenango and discuss how things could get better, but eventually it became useless. They never listened to us. All they cared about was making more**

I've lived in this community for fifty-five years now, and I'm not planning on going anywhere. For now, my hope is that more people will get on board and join the fight for clean air. Then, maybe someday, the feeling of hopelessness can change.

“

Now that the plant has closed, I think people believe that the work is done. However, it is only just beginning. **We need people who not only talk the talk, but people that actually take action. This is the only way we can get anything done.**

money, and environmental problems were secondary in their minds. Sadly, that's the way most businesses run today.

I personally think that Shenango closed for a lot of reasons. One big point was that they lost their client for coke. I think this has a lot to do with the fact that Shenango has not gone green like most major companies have. To not use solar, water, or wind energy is like being a dinosaur in today's world. These energy sources are not only environmentally friendly, but continuous as well. I think they could have stayed in business if they proved to the community that they were going green, but they didn't do that. And for that reason, community activists had to take them down.

Now that the plant has closed, I think people believe that the work is done. However, it is only just beginning. We need people who not only talk the talk, but people that actually take action. This is the only way we can get anything done. For instance, Neville Chemical is a threat to the environment now. That plant produces toxins that could cause serious health effects. The air quality is better now, but the problems are definitely not solved. We need to make sure that people are not becoming ill because of the environment.