



BELLEVUE, PA

GERRI WODARCZYK

CONCERNS



HEALTH



STANDARD
OF LIVING

HEALTH EFFECTS



PNEUMONIA



LUNG
DISEASE

I've been a resident in Bellevue for several times, now for 6 years, then I was away for 3 years, then I was here for 4 years before that. Before that I lived along Bellevue Road which isn't that far away either. So I spent quite a few years in this area. I work Downtown so it's a very easy place to get to.

I'm a Sister and we have a convent here. I chose to live here because it was one of the options for a living situation. We like this area. It's a walkable area, there are churches and grocery stores. There's a lot of different people and so it just has a wide breadth of experience living here. In this area particularly, it seems that the people care about their property and their families, living their own lives but also relating to one another. Which I like, I like that.

I actually learned about Shenango from a neighbor. I was really kind of impervious to the living situation and to the Shenango coke plant. But I had heard the children in high school, practically 50% of the kids were affected with lung problems. That alarmed me. Then I did some of my own research and I checked online to see some of the history

and I realized this concern was a neighborhood concern for a long time. I really just was not aware of that. The first two years I lived here I did a lot of traveling, so I wasn't even in the area.

Then I became more aware of the other concerns people were saying about the smells, the dust, the pollution in the area, about the air. That's how I really got more informed. **I just took for granted that every place had that kind of pollution until I became aware of other people's concerns. And I did become alarmed, especially when I heard about the children having lung problems,** and made a connection with my problems and talked to a doctor about it as well.

I had been diagnosed with pneumonia probably 4 years ago and they had done an X-Ray. There was

no evidence of a lung problem besides treatable pneumonia. But then in January of 2015, I went to the doctor for some reason. He ordered a chest X-Ray and they found scarring on the lungs. I was really concerned because I didn't know how that happened. I had a very bad cough, and I remember my primary-care doctor sent me immediately to a pulmonologist. And the pulmonologist said 'Well, there's no remedy for this condition except a lung transplant and you're too old.' This was the first time I was meeting this doctor and I was really shocked by that.

We did mold testing at our house, since the house we live in is pretty old we thought maybe we had some kind of environmental something in the house that was the problem. And they took the test and found no black mold in the house. The gentleman who did the test did an outside test and an inside test. He said that the exact same air that's outside is inside. So I knew then that if there was any pollution outside the house, it was also inside the house.

I talked to my doctor about whether or not this plant could have some effect on this lung disease, because I had been away from Pittsburgh for a few years and didn't have a problem. He said it would have to be determined by more testing, but it could be possible, but there are other factors that were part of the lung problem. So he did more testing. I did have a bronchoscope which ruled out cancer which was good. **My doctor has noticed a slight improvement in my condition since January 2016. I was on no medication to assist in the healing of the lungs so I don't know if we can say it was cause and effect.** There are other factors that do determine that in some ways, but there must be some relationship because something has improved since that plant closed.

Now that Shenango is closed I've spent some time dreaming what could happen next in that place. I thought, wouldn't it be wonderful if that site became it's opposite, a source of environmental life in some way, and to help people to save the environment? To get better air would be helpful in terms of creating a healthier environment for people.

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I have to tell you very truthfully I had mixed feelings when the plant closed. At once I was relieved because I knew that the people in this area were very concerned about the health problems the exhaust from the company was causing. At that community meeting I went to, I had heard that there had been some efforts to change things, but that wasn't sufficient enough. I guess another part of me asked 'How many people are going to lose jobs because of this? And where are they going to find work for themselves and provide for their families?' Though that was a concern I had, the fact that it's safer for the environment, that's a good thing. But I hope that the people did get other jobs.

I think as human beings we want to do what's seems the best for us and what's probably the best work where I can earn a living to provide for my family and for myself. We live in a society that wants to make money and be efficient. **But to take that extra step to promote and to provide opportunities that can save the environment and save air quality and provide for the future of the planet, not necessarily the future of one's own needs, I think that is important for us to think of as well.**