



AVALON, PA

LEAH ANDRASCIK

CONCERNS



ODORS



EFFECT ON
CHILDREN



SOOT



STANDARD
OF LIVING

HEALTH EFFECTS



PREMATURE
BIRTH



BURNING
LUNGS

I've lived in Avalon, Pennsylvania, slightly north of Pittsburgh for eleven years. We chose to live here because it has public transportation and is close to downtown. My husband and I were both in school when we moved. The home was a good price, and we like the walkable community.

When Shenango was operating there was always soot on our porch. There would be days where the odors were really bad and you would see smoke and haze in the sky. We actually used to make a joke of it and say, "Oh it stinks again, the mill must be letting out." At the time we didn't really put much thought into it. Then I read an article in the Post-Gazette about the health issues. It talked about the violations Shenango had and a Health Department meeting for residents. I attended the meeting and that was how we learned that it was much worse than "it smells bad" or "there's stuff in the air." It made me worried. It made me angry.

Even before that, when I was pregnant, I was in a coffee shop in Bellevue and overheard two guys talking about air concerns. I turned around and said

"we can't even hang clothes on the line because when you do they become full of all this fine black dust." They gave me the name of someone and I got on their email list. After my son was born prematurely and I began to learn more about the health effects, I contacted her to ask what I could do to help from home.

I started to read more about what the chemicals do, that benzene and coke oven gas are known carcinogens. It became very worrisome. **There was always the question in the back of my mind of, "Would my son had been premature if we had lived somewhere else?"** It has impacted our activities, any outdoor exercises for example. You would go outside and it was hazy and smelled. You don't want your kids playing outside in that.

My grandfather worked in a steel mill on Neville Island and had a lot of health issues with his heart and lungs, so he wasn't really able to enjoy his retirement. It's hard to say what caused my grandfather's health issues, but I would imagine it was Particulate matter (PM2.5) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). He spent his whole career at the mill and I don't know what sort of safety equipment or filtration masks they had back then.

I worried about the workers at Shenango who were right on top of it, breathing in toxic emissions. When you have a company that profits in the billions, it's egregious for them not to protect their workers. That's why we just wanted them to follow the laws, because you don't want to put people out of work. But at the same time it's at what cost? I can't put my children at risk in exchange for a job. What wins out, health or jobs? It's unfortunate that we don't have more clean industries that are not putting people at risk, and can provide a family-sustaining income.

I thought hearing news of Shenango closing would make me ecstatic. But it was two weeks before Christmas, so for the community it felt like an early Christmas gift, but I think all of us had in the back of our minds that people are losing work. I had always thought that this battle was going to take many years and that there would be time for us to bring on some of the workers and union as allies. I thought we would have time to advocate for a just transition into clean energy and job retraining and we didn't get that chance.

It's like a night and day difference. The kids spent the entire summer playing outside. We are able to walk around the neighborhood without being concerned that it would start stinking halfway through our trip. **You can see the difference. It doesn't get as hazy as it used to. There aren't big puffs of smoke or steam coming out of the place that on hot humid days would just hang in the valley.** And the odors, we don't smell anything like we would smell when they were operating.

Now that the plant is closed I would like to see it replaced with something that is non-polluting. The solar array would be neat—it could be the first one in Pittsburgh. And because DTE Energy has already done that in other places, that may be a possibility. Hopefully.

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When you walk up the hill your lungs don't burn. Before the plant was closed we were thinking about moving, but we have no plans to move now.

I don't think that air pollution problems are solved here. In the rural areas there is a lot of fracking. There are other coal-fired power plants and coke plants. The largest coke plant in the United States, Clairton, is not too far from here, so I'm sure they're dealing with worse than we were. On Neville Island there are other facilities that need permits to operate, so just because you can't smell it, there are probably still emissions to be concerned about.

We need to continue addressing air pollution because there are other sources out there and a lot of people are affected health-wise. We need elected officials who recognize a problem and are willing to listen to their constituents rather than corporations. Public awareness is important. Some longtime residents in Pittsburgh say, "It's not dark at noon and I don't have to change my shirt when I get home, so the air is clean." **But many of the pollutants, even though you can't see them, have a bigger impact on your body than originally thought because it gets into your bloodstream.** I don't think many people are aware of these impacts.