



AVALON, PA

JANET STRAHOSKY

CONCERNS



NOISE



ODORS



SOOT



QUALITY OF LIFE

HEALTH EFFECTS



HEADACHES



ASTHMA

I have lived in Avalon for 36 years. Avalon is six miles from downtown Pittsburgh on 65 North along the Ohio River. We were moving to Pittsburgh and chose to live here to be close to our friends.

Avalon is a blue collar, working class neighborhood. It was a great place to raise a family and our neighbors are wonderful. We are all friendly and watched out for each other and all the kids. It reminded me of the town where I grew up.

When my children were young and the windows were open at night we could hear the doors of the coke ovens at Shenango opening and closing. They gave off this horrendous screech and my kids would come running into our bedroom crying about the awful sound. I would tell them the circus elephants lived on Neville Island when they weren't on the road. That seemed to satisfy them so they could at least go to sleep. But because the doors always needed to be repaired or oiled or fixed, I knew they were not sealing properly and something had to be coming from them.

When Shenango was operating the odors were awful with that sulfurous rotten egg smell. If it wasn't the smell of the sulfur, it was the smell of hot metal—the coal—the coke. And it just permeated everything. I could see the soot that was on my windowsills, porch railings, and furniture. When I would wash my railings down, I would have to throw the rag away. It was that dirty. Every time I turned around I had to do it again. And if I had company, I would rush, with rag in hand, to all of the windowsills and wipe them down.

I could not stay outside for more than an hour before a headache would start, sometimes it would only take minutes. **My daughter has had asthma from the time she was two. With no history of asthma in my family, it had to be contributed by what we were breathing living in Avalon.** I felt terrible that I was exposing my family to this. And

I thought this isn't right, this isn't the way I want to live. I knew the air was not clean. This is not what I'm promised in Pennsylvania's environmental policies. This is not how I thought I would be living.

I got involved in the clean air movement by starting with our local government and moving up from there. It was 1991 or '92 and it wasn't about Shenango because I thought it was always there and would never leave. I read an article in the newspaper about a cement kiln on Neville Island that was planning to burn hazardous waste as fuel and thought no, this cannot happen on top of all the other pollution coming from the Island; someone has to stop this madness. I made many phone calls to township and borough offices asking if any of their residents were concerned about this and found others who were also alarmed. We gathered our small band together and did what we had to do to make the changes to stop it. We worked through our local governments, had resolutions passed, got thousands of names on petitions, spoke at public meetings, walked every neighborhood for signatures and handed out fliers for meetings. It took a lot of time for us to get something established. I am happy to say that we were successful and the company that owned the cement kiln closed, filed for bankruptcy and went out of business. **It was a long and arduous process and it took three years of my life that I gave up when my children were young and my family needed me, but we all felt this was something that we were doing for them and their future.**

I actually learned of Shenango's closing from the newspaper. I couldn't believe it, it seemed that monstrosity was there forever. I was so happy it was finally shutting down but I really did not believe it until I was driving home one day and turned onto

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South Ohio Street. I could see Kennedy Township, green trees, no smoke, clear as a bell. I thought 'Oh my God, it's happened.' It was like a new day dawned.

The air is cleaner now. You don't get that awful odor that catches in your throat. You can breathe easier, you can feel the difference. I can spend time outside. I don't have to wipe down the railings as often. Not seeing the smoke and emissions coming from the coke ovens is just one of the best feelings I remember about living in Avalon.

Although Shenango has shut down, problems still exist. There are a lot of factories in Allegheny County that still emit pollution. Our jobs are never done as engaged citizens. We must keep monitoring our air and water quality. We need much more transparency in reporting. Since the federal regulations require self-reporting, I don't trust them. Been there, done that – we know how they play the game.

I would love to see some type of clean recycling done or solar panels produced at the site. I want to see that part of the island give back in a clean way to offset everything that has happened there in the past years. The Island's history has been tainted by the companies who did their dirty business there. I want to see it become green again.

We have one world to take care of and must make the most of it and that doesn't mean taking the most from it. We can only live on this earth that gives us everything we need to exist as humans. We must protect this land; we can't just keep taking from it and degrading it. We have to appreciate, enjoy and renew it.