



AVALON, PA

# CLINT HOOVER

## CONCERNS



ODORS



LIGHT  
POLLUTION



STANDARD  
OF LIVING

I've been a resident of Avalon for the past five years. Avalon is nestled between Bellevue on the one end and Ben Avon on the other. It's in that long corridor near the Ohio River. It's very close to Neville Island, the end of Neville Island where the Shenango plant is. I can see the smokestacks from my porch.

My wife Gretchen brought me to Avalon from Minneapolis, Minnesota. She got this great job offer seven years ago and I came out later when we bought a house. Avalon is just a nice community. It was really the choice of a house we liked. It was the best of the ones we had looked at. We really hadn't done as much research as we should have in terms of the community, because we had no idea about Shenango when we moved in.

Through our first summer we started to notice issues, mostly the smell. Then I began to notice at night the glow in the background. That's when I started to do some research about the area and I found out about the Shenango plant.

When Shenango was operating, the big thing was the smell. It was quite a stench. They came in a

number of different flavors, kind of a burnt rubber smell or sometimes a lot more of a rotten smell. It was extremely noticeable. You'd walk out of your door in the morning and it would hit you. On days it was bad, it was really, really bad. I did also have the issue with the flame. **It kind of felt like you were next to Mount Doom in Lord of the Rings. But I could live with that. I could not live with the smell.** You have to understand it was the "bunker mentality" that we started to have living in Avalon, where you keep the windows closed. "It's a nice day. It smells. Oh well, close the windows."

The first thing I did was find the Breathe Collaborative. They got me in touch with the group here, which at the time was called Neville Island Good Neighbor Committee. We ended up part of a group

that would go to monthly meetings at Shenango. We did that for two years, talking to the people in the plant and stuff like that. We finally quit when I said, "This is just B.S. What they're doing is just using us as P.R. to basically say 'Oh look we're working with the community.'" They were just having these dinners and there was absolutely nothing being done. When we quit, we did a lot of publicity about it. I walked up and gave them the letter of resignation with TV cameras and the press. I think that was a good step in the right direction in actually creating the group and getting that publicity.

In Minnesota there was this feeling, with the people and the elected officials, of environmental responsibility. Not being a native Pittsburgher, there is a different culture here. Pollution is just an accepted part of living here that I found a little disturbing. There's more of a concern about the environmental factors versus economic growth and jobs in Minnesota. For example, at Shenango there's 140 people working there compared to thousands of people living in the area. That's just, to me, a no-brainer but in this area it wasn't. I see that as one of the real big battles here. The culture has to change to really get things to happen.

I learned about Shenango closing when somebody from the group emailed about it. So that was very exciting. My first thought was "Yay! Merry Christmas!" I just couldn't believe it. I thought, "Ok what's the hook here?" It was a big relief. We would worry in the past about having barbeques. We have a really nice back porch and if you invite people over and it stinks, it ruins the whole scenario. On a day-to-day basis you couldn't keep the window open if it was a bad smell day. All that changed. In the spring we were able to spray down the sides of

“

**Pollution is just an accepted part of living here that I found a little disturbing.** There's more of a concern about the environmental factors versus economic growth and jobs in Minnesota.

our house, which were completely soot encrusted. We used to do it regularly but then the soot would come back. It was just thick on the windowsills and on the siding of the house. Now it's easy to clean up. The house looks better. You feel better, too.

I don't feel like we need to move. I would watch the housing market in Avalon and I would see a house on the market forever. There's no way I can objectively know how much the plant and the air problem had to do with that but it did worry me. I'm hoping that this could be a beginning of reinvigorating the community. I'm hoping for that.

Certainly the air is much improved but I know that this area is not good with pollution. It's rated as one of the worst in the nation. There's a big point about Pittsburgh being "the most liveable city." My friends will call me up after reading an article about some journalist flying into Pittsburgh and hanging out downtown and being excited about what's going on down there. **The thing is, the city and the powers that be have to make good on that promise that this is one of the most liveable cities in the world and it's not as long as the air quality isn't there.**

**Certainly the last thing we want would be for somebody to come and try to rebuild a plant. What the group is talking about in the sense of a solar plant, that sounds really appropriate to me. That would be a wonderful situation and it would really show that Pittsburgh is really trying to move into the 21st century with energy. So I hope that happens.**