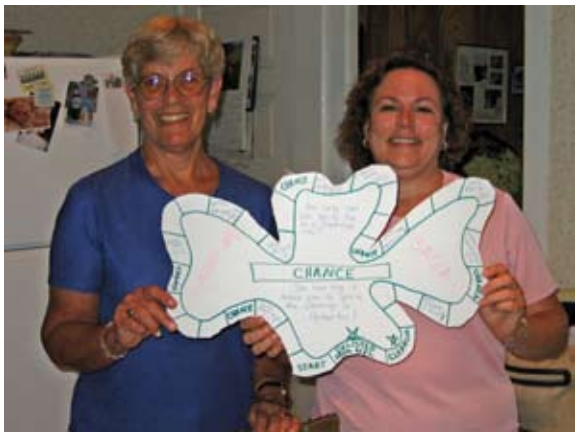
LOUISE CALVIN AND ELLEN COLANGELO

Community Members—

Palmerton Zinc Pile Superfund Site



Interview Date: September 12, 2005
Location: Palmerton Borough, PA

EPA Interviewer: It is September 12, 2005. We're about to commence interviewing Louise Calvin and Ellen Colangelo, President and Vice President of the Palmerton Citizens for a Clean Environment, here in the home of Louise Calvin in Palmerton Borough, Pennsylvania. Thank you both very much for participating in this oral history project.

Calvin: I think we're both real honored to be asked. Absolutely.

EPA Interviewer: It's an honor for us to be here. Just so that we can kind of get things rolling, if you could please…well, we'll do two things. I'm going to alternate my questioning to each of you. I'll ask one of you and then the other can chime in afterwards. Then I'll ask another question. That way hopefully we can make sure that both your voices are captured without there being overlap. I'll ask you please to first start with stating your name and your affiliation with the Superfund program.

Calvin: My name is Louise Calvin, and I'm the President of the Palmerton Citizens for a Clean Environment [PCCE]. We were formed in 1990 and the recipient of the Technical Assistance Grant [TAG] since 1991.

Colangelo: I'm Ellen Colangelo. I'm Vice President of Palmerton Citizens for a Clean Environment, and I'm the Superfund Chairperson. I take care of the grant money.

EPA Interviewer: I have a couple of questions for you then. Could—just to give us some context—could you please give us a little background about the Palmerton community as you see it and the Superfund site problem that's here.

Calvin: That was such an easy question [*laughing*] and it needs such a broad answer. Where to start?

EPA Interviewer: We'll have more specific questions as we go on, but just to give your listeners a brief overview.

Calvin: Palmerton has been a zinc smelter since 1898, and into the '70s, we started seeing some real problems with the environment here. We could see visibly that the mountain was dying. We knew how dusted and dirtied our homes and our yards were becoming, and then of course Palmerton's named to the Superfund [National Priorities List] in 1982. By 1990,

when none of the agencies seemed to be coming in and making any involvement as to try to resolve the problem, our group was formed, and it was a very hard thing to do. This was a company town. Most everybody who lived here worked here or had people who worked here or had relatives who were on pensions from here. When I read Al Gore's book *Earth in the Balance* and he talked about the dysfunctional community—when I read that chapter, I thought, he's describing Palmerton. This was a paternalistic community where—here was the father that was feeding you and he had the right to beat you up every night if he wanted to. So to speak against the industry here was very hard. I think it was one of the hardest things for us to come to do—to be comfortable in speaking publicly.

For a number of years, it was really like a war zone here. We were shunned, we had death threats, we were raked across the coals in the local newspapers, and that wasn't easy. But we've stood firm, and at this point 400 homes and yards have gone through a cleanup, and we've seen some real progress here. On the other hand, just a month ago, we had the Pennsylvania Department of Health here to do free blood-lead testing for children, pregnant women, and women considering pregnancy, because lead is what drove the cleanup here and is our main contaminant. In the two weeks before the Department of Health was here, we covered the whole town with our newsletters— door to door with 2,200 newsletters—so everybody knew the schedule. The Department of Health came from 2:00 in the afternoon to 7:00 in the evening to accommodate working people. Again, we've had 400 homes that were cleaned up. They ended up testing three children and one pregnant woman. That is really discouraging. We sent them a letter afterwards saying you really shot the whole program in the foot. They sent out flyers to everybody in the community, and one of their recommendations for Palmerton was that no further action was needed. So health-wise, we do think that that is one of the things that should become part of Superfund program. Really, within three years after being listed as a Superfund site, a health study should be required. We waited nine years, and the longer things wait, the more the community thinks, "Well, it can't be real bad or something would be happening by now." It really helps to turn off the people from participating.

EPA Interviewer: Ellen, did you want to add to that briefly? I will be asking more specific questions to capture more details about the nice summary that you just provided.

Colangelo: No, she has more experience in telling the story than I do. There's nothing that I can add.

EPA Interviewer: Hopefully as we go on, you'll have something that you want to share. You've already said it, but I'll ask you more explicitly again. When did you first actually become aware of a Superfund-type of problem in this community? How did you become aware of it?

Calvin: I don't think I even personally knew what Superfund was until the very late '80s, and rather than historic Superfund getting my attention was when I came to found out in 1988 that what they were doing here with current operation was recycling hazardous waste products.

EPA Interviewer: Like the arc furnace dust?

Calvin: Right, that's what really got my initial attention. I think some people of influence in the community so were denigrating EPA over the Superfund issue that there wasn't much public exposure. They were really trying to get EPA outta town. There wasn't a whole lot of public exposure up until then.

EPA Interviewer: I understand that there was a storage permitting process that was in place being done by the state, and that's how you first found out about electric arc dust furnace.

Calvin: Yes, they had to publish in the local newspaper that they'd needed this permit, and then a couple of the girls and I… We all didn't even know each other at that point and it wasn't a group yet…

EPA Interviewer: Why did that pique your attention?

Calvin: Because I didn't know it, and I thought the whole community should know it. Kate and I had done flyers and went out doing stuff door to door. We didn't know who Tess was; the group hadn't formed yet. Two of us just took it upon ourselves. It's interesting in those early years, even when we started doing newsletters for PCCE—we would do that at night, when nobody was hardly around. [*Laughing*] We didn't do that in the light of day, the way we do it now. So we've come a long way.

EPA Interviewer: You've learned quite a bit about environmental issue management, I guess. Part of my next question was going to be if you had experience previously in environmental issues or in environmental activism?

Calvin: Nothing. None of us. Nobody with any science background. I'm in insurance, Ellen is in real estate. Tess Roberts, who is really the brains and knows all the studies that have been done, is a German teacher. One of our other officers works for H&R Block. Just a group of moms and women who weren't only concerned about the environment—I think that we so saw the injustice of what was happening here.

EPA Interviewer: What is it that actually motivated the formation of the group?

Calvin: Well, Ellen can really answer that better. From 1990 to 1994, I was on Borough Council and so didn't join the group until I was no longer on Borough Council. Ellen was one of the initial founding people, and Ellen had moved here from another area, so I think had more courage as far as standing up to somebody than the people who were home grown.

EPA Interviewer: So neither one of you are really old-timers?

Calvin: No, but even though I hadn't lived here until 1969, I still went to school here and had worked here all those years. People still knew me.

EPA Interviewer: Ellen, what was it that took a bunch of women and turned you into an organization?

Colangelo: I guess for me it was… We had just bought our house. We settled and moved in November of '89. My children were babies and here comes this flyer on my front porch talking

about this storage permit. We had thought that the zinc company was closed. We thought that there was nothing going on there. I don't even remember what the flyer said, but I said, "OK," and I was up at that high school.

Calvin: At that first meeting that the EPA had, there were several hundred people.

Colangelo: Yes, there was. I think that after that, we got a flyer about PCCE. I don't think that I was approached at that meeting, but I think after that, we got a… Well actually, there was no name. It was just an invitation to come to an environmental meeting about the environmental situation, the Part B permit, etc. I wish somebody would have that literature lying around. But I don't even remember what it said. I don't even remember where we first met, whether it was at Sandy's house or where. Sandy had that publication, what was that called? *The Polluter's Handbook*. They're talking about that and they're talking about this. There were a lot of people that were involved then that aren't now.

EPA Interviewer: I was going to ask, "How large a group attended those initial gatherings?"

Calvin: Many more. I think there was much more interest until the flyers that Horsehead sent out in 1994, when of course they and their supporters were really trying to put the blame on residents' home paint. [The flyer] reminded everyone that they had the right to sue you as a PRP [potentially responsible party]. People went running for cover and weren't willing to stick their necks out. I, on the other hand, kept saying to the girls, "Trust me. We're going to counter-sue, and we will all retire early. This is just trying to scare us off. They're not really going to be stupid enough to sue us."

EPA Interviewer: And that never came to pass?

Calvin: No, no.

Colangelo: Well, I did sue them.

Calvin: Yes, you did. There was a group who separately sued them.

EPA Interviewer: Would you mind telling us about it?

Colangelo: *Colangelo versus Horsehead Resource Development*. [*Laughing*] That's the name of the lawsuit.

EPA Interviewer: And what was the suit over?

Colangelo: Basically that they'd contaminated our individual properties. The attorney had people come up and look at our properties and make a determination as to how much it would cost to clean it up and that sort of thing. It never did get to class-action status, but there are depositions and all this. There were about 200 of us.

Calvin: Were there that many people?

Colangelo: I think there was.

Calvin: If I didn't know very much about that, because we really always treated that separately. That is what some people did individually, but we didn't do as a group. We never sat at meetings and said, "What's going on with your lawsuit?"

Colangelo: That was never part of the group. Even when we threatened to sue the Borough [Council] over the use of the slag as an anti-skid, that was not part of the group either.

EPA Interviewer: That was the IRM [Intermediate Remedial Measure]?

Colangelo: That was our evil twin. [*Laughing*] There were people in PCCE that were joining together to threaten them, but they backed off.

EPA Interviewer: Let me go back a bit to the PCCE. What was the initial role of that group? How did you see that role?

Colangelo: Well, Louise wasn't involved.

Calvin: No.

Colangelo: You were on the Borough Council.

Calvin: Right. Just from the whole mission of when you guys formed, everything really was to get Superfund federal cleanup.

Colangelo: First we had to incorporate and get the 501(c)(3) designation, and then we could apply for the TAG [Technical Assistance Grant]. Initially, Sandy Peters took care of managing the TAG, for lack of a better term. Back then…mostly it was to find out as much about what was going on as possible. The strategy was to ask questions in a way to insulate ourselves, because you can't come after us for asking questions. We weren't accusing. We weren't being accusatory. We were asking questions. How can you say we're wrong? How can you lay blame at us for anything if we're just asking questions? So that's what they did with the TAG money. [It was a] way to interpret the studies. It was pretty fast and furious back then. We're up to $250,000, something like that, $275. That's a lot of money that we've gone through interpreting the different things that have come down the pike—the pig study, and all that.

Calvin: How would a small group in a company town ever come up against an industry without that kind of financial support to get the data? There's not a prayer that we ever could have done anything.

Colangelo: And especially when the Task Force was formed. Part of their mission statement was that they were going to disseminate the information to the community, correct?

Calvin: Mmhmm.

Colangelo: They wanted to be the censors.

EPA Interviewer: I'll get to that in a little bit. Could you tell me what a TAG is?

Colangelo: Technical Assistance Grant.

EPA Interviewer: And what did that do for you?

Colangelo: It gave us the means to have our technical advisor, who was more learned than we were, review the studies or the plans and put them in laymen's terms, where we could understand it and disseminate the information to the community.

EPA Interviewer: I understand. Maybe it was before the TAG actually started that you had a letter chain, where folks shared information—one to another. Was that part of the whole self-education process?

Colangelo: No, our chain was a telephone chain. We would call each other just to get everybody on the same page as to what was going on. If we were writing letters, then, yeah, we would pass it one to the other, and it would be altered until it was in a form that we could all be happy with.

Calvin: That was an amazing thing. I remember one letter one night that I think took us almost three hours to write. It was an issue that some of us were way over here and some of the others were way over here. After three hours, we had a letter that suited everybody. That's awesome.

EPA Interviewer: That's very difficult to achieve.

Calvin: A whole big group of women! Here it is! We were so happy with it. It's amazing.

EPA Interviewer: What kinds of bonds were formed through participation in this group? You spoke of being strangers when you first got involved. How have the relationships evolved over time?

Calvin: I think very strong.

Colangelo: Mmhmm.

Calvin: I think very strong. I think we all look at each other as people we really admire, because we saw how few other people would stand up. We know that if we really needed somebody in a pinch, we'd go to each other because we'd know they'd be there and stand up, too.

EPA Interviewer: You mentioned earlier, asking questions would keep you safe. I read about some of the company teas that took place. Could you tell me a little about what those were like? What was a "tea?"

Colangelo: I have no idea.

Calvin: I know Tess attended one of Horsehead's sessions that was referred to as a "tea."

Colangelo: Tess? That was way before the group was formed though. Wasn't it at one of them where they said, "You need to stop asking questions and go home and bake cookies?"

Calvin: “Everything’s fine.” Yeah, there was something like that.

Colangelo: Yeah, some insulting… [*Laughing*]

EPA Interviewer: So did things get better when the group actually formed, in terms of your relationship with the community?

Calvin: Not at all. That’s when the war really started.

EPA Interviewer: What kind of war was that?

Colangelo: They realized we weren’t going to go home and bake cookies!

Calvin: First of all, another group formed that was a lot of company supporters and people who had a financial interest in the company. They called themselves the Pro-Palmerton Group. That was really psychologically interesting because, by inference, we were the Anti-Palmerton Group. [*Laughing*]

Colangelo: It’s one of those “love it or leave it” things.

Calvin: I mean just a lot of nasty things in the newspapers.

Colangelo: Personal attacks.

Calvin: A lot of personal attacks.

Colangelo: Personal.

Calvin: But the longer we were formed as a group—whenever a personal attack came years later—I used to inwardly really smile, because now I was smart enough to know [that] we really had ‘em. They can’t debate the issues; they have to come after us personally. I came to see that as a real victory. But we sure didn’t see it that way in the early days.

Colangelo: No, we were scared.

Calvin: …and had no idea how far they were going to go.

Colangelo: Exactly. Many times we would be concerned. Any time a rock could come flying through my window. Our children...

Calvin: Many of the women had small children at that point.

Colangelo: We all had small children, even a male member of our group. He was at the elementary school one time, and he saw a list of people who were suing the company on the teacher’s bulletin board. He went in and told them, “If anybody, anybody looks cross-eyed at my child, you’re going to hear from me.” Because his name was up there on the board.

EPA Interviewer: Were there ever acts of violence or vandalism?

Calvin: The only one that comes to mind is when the interim cleanup first started in the summer of '94.

Colangelo: Oh, yeah!

Calvin: Late that fall, one of the last places to be done was just down the corner here. The home that's at the corner of Franklin and 6th Streets. There's a lot of through-traffic coming down that street. It was a big open yard, and it was real obvious how beautiful it looked compared to how it used to look. The night after EPA did that yard, the next morning somebody had spelled [an expletive] in the grass with gasoline by burning the gas. It was real clearly seen. That was to send a message. Several years ago, several of us were on Hazard Road delivering newsletters when one of the big industry supporters…

Colangelo: An employee, too!

Calvin: …employee came flying down the road, stopped his truck and double parked it, and came out after us, threatening us. We ended up going to the police and ended up going to the magistrate and to the courtroom over that.

Colangelo: The judge ruled against us! He said, "Well, the guy was angry because they had delivered a newsletter to his house." He came flying after them, saying, "Don't you dare put your trash on my porch!" The judge actually said that he had the right to do that!

EPA Interviewer: To chase you?

Colangelo: Yes.

Calvin: …and to threaten us.

Colangelo: Yes. If a local store comes up and puts their flyer on your porch, I guess we have the right to go flying after them. But it was… Louise and I went to the courthouse and when he gave that ruling, we could have picked our jaws up off the floor.

Calvin: The policeman we had talked to after that happened… I said, "I don't really know what to do here. I know this is a fellow who was real volatile…"

He said at the same time, "Now Louise, I know fellows like him. If you don't stop him at the beginning, they keep going to the next level. I don't want to tell you what to do, but if you were my sisters, I'd tell you to pursue it." So we did, because us not doing anything would empower him to go further. He [the policeman] also came to the courtroom when it was held at the courthouse and testified. He turned around and looked at us. His mouth was hanging open; so was ours. He felt so bad that he urged us to go forward.

Colangelo: It was unbelievable. For him to say that it was OK for a man to come flying in there in his truck and get out and start physically coming after the women, it was unbelievable. I didn't have any problem seeing him go off the bench.

Calvin: But the worst part was in the early years, when everybody had younger kids and were concerned for their kids…

Colangelo: We were concerned for the children. Not only from the contamination, but the uncertainty as to how far that these people would take things.

Calvin: When—and you may have seen this—when the cleanup went on here, EPA did something they never had to do before. They had people from the Coast Guard here. When crews were in my yard that week from Monday to Friday working on the outside during the day, there was also a crew inside, decontaminating the home. And because the intimidation had been so heavy, when I was gone that week the whole property was sealed off in yellow crime scene tape, and a Coast Guard person was patrolling my property overnight. They never had to do that anywhere else in the country.

EPA Interviewer: That's remarkable.

Colangelo: That's right.

Calvin: It really was intimidating. The crime scene was out there. Everybody knew your place was being done that week; there was no place to hide. And at the same time, trying to blame the homeowner for your lead paint!

EPA Interviewer: I'm going to come back to that. Before I leave the relationship with the community, you had mentioned that there was the Pro-Palmerton Group that organized itself…

Colangelo: There was also the Chamber of Commerce….

Calvin: And the Palmerton Task Force.

EPA Interviewer: Tell me about that one.

Calvin: EPA really gave the green light for that to develop. I think we would all agree, we think that was shameful. That hurt us really badly, because here was this task force that was supposed to be representative of the community but really in fact was handpicked and were almost all industry supporters. Tess Roberts, our Hazardous Waste Chairperson, sat on that committee for several years. We all admired her tremendously, because we could not have sat with those people week after week. She did that for several years, and every issue that came up, they tried to make everything a consensus.

She finally said, "I have to quit. I'm the one sitting on there saying all the environmental things, they're sitting there saying all the lead-paint things, and we can't come to a consensus. That's not what we're about. We have a point of view, and we're pushing it. And the industry has their point of view, and they have the money and the means to support their own point of view."

When EPA gave the nod and Tom Voltaggio did that, that hurt us tremendously for the next couple of years. EPA should never do that; they should be supporting the TAG group. Along that line, the other thing that EPA must do [is] much more easily communicate and share information with the TAG groups. There were so many issues we had to be sure to follow up on, request it. That shouldn't even have to happen. You're getting the technical assistance; that information should be flowing and really communicating to you from EPA.

Colangelo: And unless we attended a Task Force meeting….

Calvin: There were times we didn't know what was going on!

Colangelo: We weren't informed. We were not informed. For Tess to sit there with the personal insults that she had to endure from certain Task Force members—I'm surprised she lasted as long as she did.

Calvin: None of the rest of us would have, I don't think.

Colangelo: No, no.

Calvin: And again, we can do nothing but praise EPA. Living in a company town, to rise up against what's going on by an industry is hard enough in itself. We never could have done that without EPA support and the TAG group. But in the future, if EPA is looking to make some improvements, the communication and sharing of information really should come real freely to that TAG group. Not that the burden is on them always to know what state are we at, what stage is next, what should we be asking for.

Colangelo: Because unless we were constantly calling EPA, we had no idea that there was even something to ask about.

EPA Interviewer: I know that, at least internally at EPA, there were many discussions. Not necessarily relevant, specific to your site, but questions of what the definition of a community is, since there are so many different stakeholders. Members of industry are also members of your community that live here. How did you differentiate, or how did you legitimize your voice as the community voice versus someone else, or was that an issue for you?

Calvin: The industry as a PRP always had their own voice, and their attorneys helped make their voice. But especially here… Now I had a train of thought and I just lost it. Oh—I really had such a good thought, and it just went away.

EPA Interviewer: It'll come back. I'll ask another question and see how that goes. Did the TAG in your community help you become more involved or understand better the cleanup of the zinc site? I think the answer is yes, but let me hear you say it again.

Calvin: Oh my goodness, I think we all got an education unequal to anything we could have imagined!

Colangelo: But then again, it also led to more questions, and it led to the fact that we were totally blown away as to what direction the EPA took. It was always our understanding that cadmium would drive the cleanup. Then after the Task Force and everything that went on with that, then it's lead.

EPA Interviewer: How did that happen? I also understand it moved not only from lead, but it moved to lead-based paint.

Calvin: It was driven down that road by the industry. I think the thought that I was trying to formulate before… After a number of years with the Task Force, we came to feel that the EPA had their own political agenda. With so much contentiousness here, rather than look like they were the government bullies coming in and try to do something… We were satisfying a need from EPA, because we were playing the role on this hand, pushing this way, and the industry was here pushing this way, and EPA really politically centered themselves. That was a nice place for EPA to be, but they don't have to live here. We did. We really felt we were allies of EPA. We were not only allies; we were the people that EPA Superfund was designed to support. And if you don't want to walk around town with your arms around us, that's fine, but I think they went really far to the extreme to make everything so accessible and look nice for the industry. The industry had their own money and lawyers. It pitted us in another place, while it put EPA in the center, which was comfortable for EPA and maybe that helped drive the cleanup more, but it almost scapegoated those of us that were fighting for a cleanup, too.

Colangelo: I think that the result of the way things played out was that that gave EPA the opportunity to say, "OK, here's the cleanup. You had a voice, you had a voice." Since the industry participated so heavily, they really had no leg to stand on if there were any complaints, because they did have so much participation.

Calvin: Involvement, absolutely.

Colangelo: There was even some things that were changed because of the way that they….

Calvin: Absolutely. It makes you wonder. Is the Superfund law that weak that we need the permission of industry before we have the will and the authorization to go forward? If that's the case, then the law itself could use some forming up. The industry had its own agenda all along. And the stall and delay that they did for years ended up being real good for them. They ended up paying nothing for this cleanup. Viacom stepped forward with $25 million. So stall and delay always works.

Colangelo: They filed bankruptcy, so they were able to skate.

Calvin: I think that's another thought that EPA really should look—well I know they look for this—but should be so serious about it. And the Congress should be serious along with them. A community shouldn't have to wait until there's money from the PRPs. Superfund should always be heavily-enough funded that cleanup can get done as quickly from the get-go as possible. And then you're going after the companies later on to recover the money. Of course, if that funding isn't there, then that just helps grow the "stall and delay" program that everybody else is on. But that we're on the Superfund list for 22 years, and the water issues are what drove it and started it, and that we still don't have a Record of Decision on water issues is just an outrage.

Colangelo: I thought it was a cinder bank?

Calvin: No, the water issues.

Colangelo: I think it was the cinder bank that initially got us listed.

Calvin: I think the water issues are what really had people alarmed at the beginning. It all came together to put us on Superfund.

Colangelo: Well, everything should have alarmed them.

EPA Interviewer: I'd like to go back to the company town image that you were painting before. Why do you think there was so much adversity by individuals who were not necessarily employees of the zinc industry here? You talked a lot about how the industry had its own agenda. What was the agenda of the individuals who were opposed to this?

Calvin: They were getting pension checks from there. If the company went out of business, what does that do to the town? In the '40s and '50s, there were 4,000 to 5,000 employees here.

Colangelo: Mmhmm. Two plants running.

Calvin: By 1995, they were down to maybe several hundred. And now they're at 130. It's real different, and the community has survived. But you look at '81 to '82…

Colangelo: …everybody in town.

Calvin: There was some nasty unemployment going on in those years. By the late '80s, things were just starting to recover and get healthy again.

Colangelo: You could look at every house and you could say either there's a pension from the company coming into that house, or somebody in the house worked for the company, or a relative. So they had their tentacles throughout the town.

Calvin: Or they lived here and owned a business here and they didn't want to see that business suffer.

Colangelo: Yeah. They did business with the company. The hospital was built by the company. [So was] Borough Hall—that was the neighborhood house where there were classes and all kinds of things. There's a bowling alley; there's a shooting range. Everything you could look to, the company had their stamp on. And they started up their fund again.

Calvin: In 1990, when I was still on Borough Council, I got some of the others on council to start looking at an act in Pennsylvania. I think it's called Act 101 or 102, that says a host municipality shall charge $1-per-ton of hazardous waste coming into your community. The one fellow on Borough Council had a salaried supervisor position at the zinc company, so I bypassed him and met separately with the five other members of Borough Council. In the beginning days of January in 1994, I brought up a motion that we were going to pursue the zinc company for that $1-a-ton, and that motion passed. Six days later, Horsehead developed their Horsehead grant program where they're now going to give out $50,000 a year throughout the community. "Well, we're going to buy them." And that worked, too!

EPA Interviewer: How much revenue would the $1-per-ton have brought you?

Calvin: Between $300,000 and $400,000 a year to the community.

EPA Interviewer: My next question was going to relate to the local government. The Borough Council is the lowest level of government here?

Calvin: Right.

EPA Interviewer: They started off being amenable to this, but did that change?

Calvin: Nothing ever went anywhere with that. First of all, we had three meetings with DEP [Department of Environmental Protection] people in Wilkes-Barre. They fought us as well. We finally went back to one meeting and took our state Representative along. The head of DEP tried to tell us why every time we went, they gave us another reason why they didn't think we'd qualify for it. So we finally dragged our state Representative along who said, "I helped to draft this. I helped to vote for it. I know what it was meant to do. And these people are absolutely the people we were thinking about when we drafted it." The company wasn't going to give it voluntarily, and by that time there wasn't the support on Borough Council to go after them legally.

EPA Interviewer: You're speaking specifically about that $1-per-ton?

Calvin: Right. And again, the will was never there. They wanted to pursue it if we could do it amicably, but they weren't willing to go out on a limb and take legal action against the company. Ellen was talking about how the company built the hospital and the schools. In 1994 when the interim cleanup started, EPA wanted to go into the schools and explain to the kids why they were going to be seeing people in white hazmat suits walking around in people's yards. The school district would not allow them to come in. They didn't want to get involved in any controversy. Well, look at the message, an educational message that they sent to young people! "Don't speak out. Don't stand up. Keep the status quo." I thought that was the most outrageous thing that's probably happened here. I think when that happened, we were real busy on some other issue, because we never addressed that in the newspaper or anything else. Yet over the years, that's what stands out.

Colangelo: We were never confrontational.

Calvin: No, we should have been more.

Colangelo: We were never confrontational. We just… they said, "No." There were people working at the school…

Calvin: Out of everything's that happened to everybody, that almost stands out as the most awful thing to me that happened here—that a group of educators would take that position.

Colangelo: Well, you gotta consider the source.

Calvin: Well, they're still educators.

Colangelo: When my son was in 6th grade, he had Mayor Delager's son as a teacher. My son comes home and tells me that Mr. Delager told them that the reason the mountain looks like

that is because it was over-logged. I said, "You tell him…That's outrageous! That's not why the mountain looks like that.

Calvin: And the man was a science teacher. He knew that wasn't why.

Colangelo: He knew darn well the mountain was dead. And to tell the children that they logged?

EPA Interviewer: What did the mountain look like?

Colangelo: Worse than now.

Calvin: Oh, terrible.

EPA Interviewer: Tell me what it looked like.

Colangelo: Barren. Just brown dirt with… The closer you got, the more you could tell that there were petrified logs up there. They were all crisscrossed and all piled up. They just were there.

Calvin: Because the mountain was literally dead, no bacteria was existing. These dead trees couldn't even decompose. So in order to get to that point, they did a fly over with sludge and fly ash to reintroduce bacteria. And then, of course….

Colangelo: That made the town stink!

Calvin: Oh my word. Then we were calling DEP 'cause it smelled so bad. They told me they had a new process they were going to bring down, and it would smell like piña coladas. "I don't believe that," I said.

EPA Interviewer: Did it?

Calvin: [*Laughing*] No. But truly, all these years of working with both the agencies, we've had really good people from Region 3. We really have had good people. I just think some of the policies, maybe at a national level, need some review. The health study, communication should be flowing easier without a group having to ask for it or know what should be coming next.

EPA Interviewer: I'll ask you a little bit more about that in a little bit. What was your relationship, or what kind of activities was the state government partaking in here?

Calvin: We have gotten to the point that we're almost hostile with them now. We have seen them as trying to do as little as possible. We have seen them and heard them make statements… Well, they didn't want to do anything to impact any job situation. I'm real sorry, that is someone else's role. That is not the role of the DEP. That is not their mission. That should not be what's driving them. And I would think with both agencies… We've been disappointed and frustrated over several issues when nobody's looking at cumulative effect. EPA's looking at what kind of damage and risk is there from historic Superfund. And the state is looking at what's the damage and risk from current operations. Well the people that live

here, their systems aren't seeing any differentiation. The law should require that you're looking at a cumulative affect, yet the law doesn't. So we're often frustrated over that.

Colangelo: It seems like one hand doesn't know what the other is doing.

Calvin: Well, they are different hands on different bodies.

Colangelo: Well, what about when…

Calvin: They should have a joint understanding of the dual effects of historic Superfund damage and current hazardous waste operation.

Colangelo: When they wanted to raise their permit levels or the levels that they can emit for their permit, we were astounded. We're in the middle of a Superfund cleanup here!

Calvin: Final cleanup was starting at homes, and the state allowed HRD [Horsehead Resource Development] to roll lead levels back to 10 years ago. That was madness in our view. Madness. But once again, we forced a public meeting, and three people came from the public. Well, the few of us can no longer really battle.

Colangelo: I would think that EPA should have a lot to say, because they're the ones doing the cleanup, and here the state's letting it get dirty again. Right when they're trying to clean it.

Calvin: Of course, the problem down the road… It's those higher levels again… Pennsylvania has a standard of 500 parts per million of lead, but because there were so many studies done on Palmerton, we had a site-specific standard of 650 parts per million of lead. [*Laughing*] There had to be politics and people are figuring out, well, how much money will this standard cost us? I absolutely believe that. There may have been meetings with the industry that we never knew about, never will know, but that is truly what we believe, [that] the finances helped to drive that standard. If a home now had 550 parts per million of lead and didn't qualify for the cleanup, but now with current operations allowing more emissions… When they're contaminated, there's nobody here now to clean up that home.

By the time PCCE started and formed in 1990, those trucks of hazardous waste were rolling down the main street of town—100 a day. They were not tarped; that EAF dust was blowing anywhere, everywhere. Certainly EPA knew it was a Superfund site, DEP knew it was a Superfund site, but there was no intervention by the Agencies. So the 100 trucks a day are rolling down the street, everything's blowing off the mountain, everything's blowing off the cinder bank.

EPA Interviewer: This was during the remediation process? Or was this during the…

Calvin: No, that was in—by 1990 when PCCE formed. Many things had come to a head by that point. The iron-rich material that the company gave the borough was being used as anti-skid. That's blowing everywhere. We're dragging it into our houses. You could see a constant deterioration of the whole environment when we're washing cars and porches. You couldn't hang the wash out one day and not hang it out the next day without washing the line again. It was getting so visibly worse.

Colangelo: I was in tears when I would be cleaning, because it was just so filthy. I had no idea where it was coming from. I had never experienced anything like that. It was just horrendous.

Calvin: By ’92, when we came to learn how contaminated the homes were inside, that was really the defining moment.

Colangelo: When the children were little—I guess it was the first summer we were here, which was probably the summer of ’90—we put up a small, three-foot pool in the backyard, and it had a filter system. The filter would get—oh, my gosh—it would be this grayish-tan stuff. It would be caked on there. At one point, Dr. Rosen, he’s a doctor up in New York…

Calvin: He was quite a renowned lead…

Colangelo: He’s the one that developed that X-ray florescent machine something or other. I don’t even know whether that’s the term. It measures the lead in bones; it’s like an X-ray. The attorneys had sent us up there, up to New York—to Brooklyn, I think it was. They were X-raying the kids and taking hair samples, and he did an analysis on the pool filter sludge.
Calvin: Today when I got home from work there was a message on the machine from a woman who lives adjacent to the plant saying, “Please call me with the number to call for the state.” This is terrible again what’s spewing out everyday.

EPA Interviewer: This was…

Calvin: Just tonight when I came home.

EPA Interviewer: Wow.

Calvin: Last summer was terrible. The people near the plant were wild. They had stuff going on all the time and still don’t have a resolution. It’s been quiet all this summer. But now she said today it’s been so bad again.

EPA Interviewer: So why do you think so few people came for the blood-lead screening?

Colangelo: Apathy. The same as what’s plagued the town for all these years. And whether its right or wrong, we like to think that they feel that we’re doing such a good job, that they don’t have to get involved.

Calvin: [*Laughing*] And it’s easier for them not to do anything. Absolutely.

Colangelo: It is easier, but haven’t you had people tell you…

Calvin: Absolutely, yeah. Many in town were glad that we were doing what we did and told us so—privately.

Colangelo: Yeah, and that’s… If we didn’t think that, I think that we would just tell them to pack it in.

EPA Interviewer: How has your group managed to cohere so long?

Calvin: First of all…

Colangelo: Stubbornness.

Calvin: Stubborn; we're stubborn. We believe we're right. We believe in justice.

Colangelo: And we're going to prove it!

Calvin: Every year at Christmas we have let it all hang out. We have a "Getting to Superfund" board game.

EPA Interviewer: I read about that, I want to take a picture of it.

Colangelo: Do you have it?

Calvin: Oh, yeah. We have a marvelous poem on the night before Christmas in which Tony Coller was Santa Claus bringing stuff on the roof. [*Laughing*] We have just been so irreverent and whatever else we had to be…

Colangelo: Limericks

Calvin: …to get rid of this tension. That one month we could laugh and carry on. You must do that…find the humor.

Colangelo: And laugh at their expense.

Calvin: You must do that.

Colangelo: We had to laugh at their expense.

Calvin: Not our own, exactly.

EPA Interviewer: Have you had much support from other community groups outside of Palmerton, or interactions with other community-based organizations?

Calvin: Very limited.

Colangelo: No.

Calvin: Very limited.

Colangelo: No. There had been talk. Bob Hawsking would say—he was our technical advisor for a time—that we should get involved with other environmental groups, this, that, and the other. But you know what? We're strained with what we're doing.

Calvin: We were so overwhelmed here, and none of us had the time or the effort.

Colangelo: We all had full-time jobs; we have family obligations. For crying out loud, who's going to clean my house? There's only enough time in the day. It was enough for us to keep our minds on what we were doing here; we couldn't go to another place.

EPA Interviewer: How much of your lives have you put into this?

Calvin: Lots. Boy in those years…

Colangelo: I've been here since '89, and it's been monthly general membership meetings, at least six a year, monthly board meetings…

Calvin: And often those board meetings would generate a lot of work for us that we decided we need to do this, this, and this this month. Everybody had some projects to do. And then twice a year with the newsletters, just gathering that material, writing it, getting it printed, taking it door to door, that's time consuming.

Colangelo: Then it was the Task Force meetings when they were going on. It's the meetings that weren't regularly scheduled with EPA people. The stuff that I have to do with the—for Superfund with the grant, the quarterly report, the financial stuff, applying. Just applying for a deviation is—oh, my God, it's so time-consuming. This is time I have to take away from my work, and I'm self-employed!

Calvin: The last number of years we've given up being at the hospital festival and the community festival for a three-day weekend in September.

Colangelo: Mmhmm, the fundraisers!

Calvin: …which we did for years to raise funds, but that was so much work. [We] really did it not just to raise funds, but be a presence in the community. "We're here! We're not at home hiding under the bed. Here we are!"

EPA Interviewer: No horns!

Calvin: Here we are!

Colangelo: Task Force didn't do it, no.

Calvin: Until the last two years, we said, this is almost getting to be too much work for the few of us that were knocking ourselves out. We've been lucky in that, as a retiree of Prudential, I can apply for a grant every year. So the last couple of years we've gotten $1,000 grant from them. Which pays for our newsletters.

EPA Interviewer: Are any of these other organizations still active?

Calvin: No.

Colangelo: They were just smoke and mirrors.

Calvin: They were there to prevent a cleanup. Once the cleanup was completed, their roles were finished. The Task Force was ended…

Colangelo: Don't forget Dolores Zigenfus, who was the head of the Task Force. She was paid…

Calvin: …by the industry, so of course there was a conflict and a plan and an agenda.

Colangelo: …she was paid. Both Horsehead and Viacom paid her a salary. At one of their meetings, I asked how much; they wouldn't say. They would not say how much she was paid. But the attorney for Viacom, "We give money to them for…'ya know." But they would never account for any…. remember the big to-do? They would not open their books. Everything is open on us. Everything.

Calvin: And we have never used the TAG money for anything but technical review.

Colangelo: No, and I mean we were accused…

Calvin: EPA has referred us to other groups throughout the country who said, "We were told to call you, that you guys really know how to run a TAG." Well, we don't spend one penny except for technical advisors. Ellen—I guess really legitimately—could have charged and be paid for the time that she spends to manage it. We've never done any of that.

Colangelo: No.

Calvin: What we've all cost ourselves in time and money—and then we pay dues to belong—we are either certifiably insane or just really committed! [*Laughing*] Or should be committed!

EPA Interviewer: You were accused, at one point in time, for misusing those funds?

Calvin: Yes, and that drew a federal audit.

Colangelo: Yes, and then there was another time when we were accused of being in cahoots with a competitor of Horsehead, and they deposed us.

Calvin: Mmhmm. They wanted to see our personal phone records.

Colangelo: Oh God.

Calvin: As though we were working with some other industry to do them in. We have never been [anyone] but exactly who we appeared to be.

Colangelo: Yup.

EPA Interviewer: Did you ever have legal advice through any of this?

Colangelo: Mmhmm.

Calvin: As a group.

Colangelo: We had an attorney.

Calvin: We went to that Charlie Elliot…

Colangelo: Charles Elliot in Easton. Yeah, he was an attorney down there.

Calvin: Mmhmm and some of the things… One of our girls was really concerned. If she was a member and her husband wasn't, could they come after personal assets. I think he reassured her on a number of those issues.

EPA Interviewer: How are the other women in this group? Are they still as active as you are?

Calvin: The ones that are, are. It's just that there are fewer of us. Some of the girls had some family obligations and had some health problems. The men—[we're] really disappointed with the men because, there were a number of men in the beginning. I don't know if they don't have the patience for the long haul—we're at this 15 years as a group. That is a really long time for a grassroots group to make it. I think the men ran out of patience

Colangelo: I also think that the men, in other circumstances, were used to taking the lead and directing. Whereas we did it. We did it.

Calvin: Sometimes we restrained the men from being more vocal and wild, the way they wanted to be.

EPA Interviewer: Why did you restrain them?

Calvin: Because I think we all felt we had to be properly behaved. We had a point, we were asking the questions, we were getting the information, but don't be out there giving a bad impression of us. It's going to hurt all of us.

Colangelo: We were dictating the terms, and they didn't like that. They wanted to be the leaders, and we wouldn't let them.

Calvin: [*Laughing*] Well, they weren't our elected officers!

Colangelo: No, they weren't. What was it that Bob Hawsking called us—benevolent matriarchy?

Calvin: [*Laughing*] Now of course that was also in the '90s before… That may have been before the interim cleanup started. Horsehead sent a letter out to all their employees telling them that PCCE really wasn't representing everyone's views in town, so employees should come and become members of PCCE. So one night there's about 30 employees sitting in our membership meeting—at our public meeting—wanting to become members.

EPA Interviewer: Did you let them join?

Calvin: No, we went off and changed our requirements. You now had to be referred by a board member.

EPA Interviewer: Really?

Calvin: Of course. They would have taken over the whole group. We would have been gone. Sorry, we never said it was our role to represent every view in the community. We're representing our view. If you have another view, go join the Task Force, or Pro-Palmerton.

Colangelo: Plus, because they were employees of the PRPs, that would have put our TAG in jeopardy. So, couldn't have it. Yeah, there was a big to-do about it. That was stressful, going through that. That's what they wanted. They wanted to conquer from within, and we wouldn't let them.

EPA Interviewer: Well, let me go back to the TAG for a minute. Well, even prior to the TAG, if there is a prior... What was your first relationship with EPA? Was it applying for the TAG? Or had you had other involvement with them before that?

Colangelo: I don't know.

Calvin: I think it was applying for the TAG.

Colangelo: I think that they were walked through it.

Calvin: Yeah, they were helpful.

Colangelo: Cathy Ozales, she was our first President. I think Cathy and Sandy—Sandy was in charge of the TAG at that time; they were walked through it. How to apply for it. I think they were given a lot of advice from, what was her name? Amy?

Calvin: Amy Barnett was our Community Relations Coordinator. She was great. She really believed in what we were doing.

EPA Interviewer: How did you find EPA?

Colangelo: No idea.

Calvin: I don't know.

EPA Interviewer: How did you know that there was a TAG to apply for?

Calvin: I knew there was a TAG because I was on Borough Council, and the Borough Manager at one of our meetings mentioned that there was this available.

Colangelo: I think they must have told the girls [and] then they had to walk them through it. OK, you must get incorporated. You must get the 501(c)(3) in order to qualify. That sort of thing.

EPA Interviewer: You mentioned that managing the TAG was burdensome.

Colangelo: I wouldn't say burdensome, but it does take time. Especially because I have to remember to do it. [*Laughing*] That's something that I have to shoot out to Amelia every quarter. [*Whispering*] And I'm probably late! [*Laughing*]

EPA Interviewer: I know you've told me this already, but I want to focus it a little more for you to identify of all these issues that you've been describing. What was the most significant issue you actually had to deal with in trying to get the site remediated? What sticks out in your mind the most?

Calvin: I think we were so pleased when EPA came along with the interim cleanup that that was really wonderful. That there was going to be relief here, and people didn't have to wait until a final cleanup. That was just absolutely terrific. But then as a couple of years passed, and we went into this final stage… Again, I think there was a lot of negotiation, and I think the will wasn't there. Maybe the money wasn't there; the standard for testing was different.

EPA Interviewer: Are you talking about the 500 versus 650 parts per million?

Calvin: Right, there were so many things. I know that if my yard [was] almost 1,500 parts [per million] of lead and 120 parts per million of cadmium in 1994. And I had grandchildren—so my yard qualified with those levels—and children under six. 10 years later, my neighbor across the alley, her yard didn't qualify. There were different standards used, and nobody shall tell me, "Well, now everything's been tested and cleaned up and it's fine."

I don't personally believe that because—especially going door-to-door this summer with all the newsletters—I saw a lot of yards that looked real bad. Real bad. And I know them when I see them. That is one of the things we have to follow up right now in that there were internal controls to be put into place that if a property was sold, what was going to be made available to that new owner. Nobody has ever yet said. And places have sold now this year. What is being done, and is something being done? PCCE felt from the early years and had a list in 1992 of what they felt EPA should try to follow. One of the things was we felt there should be an escrow account set aside of several million dollars for properties down the road, years later and that's not been done. There's going to be no relief for people. People will move in and never know it was a Superfund site. Well, ignorance is not bliss, I don't think.

Colangelo: No, and if those properties haven't been cleaned, those people are going to be responsible for cleaning it because the state… When a property is transferred to a new owner, the owner is supposed to supply the buyer with a disclosure, and one of the questions on the disclosure is environmental. If anybody in this town says, "No, my property's not affected," they're lying.

Calvin: And it should really negate the sale. Could negate the sale.

Colangelo: It should. It should. But if the property's….

Calvin: But years later, people are going to move in that property and have small kids who once again will be playing in that dirt. And then with the state rolling back to 10 years of lead levels. I can't believe anybody is really protecting the health here. And I think the health here

has gotten short drift. We, in our last two newsletters in the last year, have included a page with a mini health survey. It would seem to us that down the road when EPA's then trying to test a community who's been cleaned up, has this cleanup been successful? What are you going to use as a standard? How much grass grew? How many trees came back? That's not what drove this. Concern about health is what drove it. How can you measure how well it did, and what is the health of the population, if nobody's doing any health studies? It's a big gaping, gaping hole in what was really everybody's first concern.

EPA Interviewer: Related to this, I understand that in 1997 your community was one of the first in the nation to actually participate in a community-based risk assessment. Was that an experience that stands out in your mind? How did it occur? Did it occur in your mind?

Calvin: No, it didn't. No.

Colangelo: Are you talking about the study where they compared us to Jim Thorpe?

Calvin: No, that was earlier. That was the ATSDR [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry] study in '92 when 23 percent of the kids had lead levels. That was another issue… That was one of the first issues. Our technical advisors protested that location endlessly because Jim Thorpe has naturally occurring uranium in the area that might have triggered their lead levels. So to say, "Here's a pristine, normal community, and we'll use it as a comparison group." We protested the location right off the bat. There were so many things that were so contentious. But this all-encompassing risk survey, that sounds to me like more of what was done with Horsehead and the Task Force involvement in trying to appease all the parties.

EPA Interviewer: Was that more related to what the Task Force was working on rather than the PCCE?

Calvin: I think so.

Colangelo: I don't remember it. I'm going to need more information to jog my memory.

EPA Interviewer: I'm going to have to stop there without going back into my notes. Let me move on to a different type of question. You've also answered this maybe several times. Do you think the community of Palmerton has changed as a result of the presence of the Superfund program?

Calvin: I do, absolutely. If suddenly tomorrow everybody woke up and it looked like it did in 1990, then I think there would be a great outcry. They wouldn't go back to that. It's funny how desensitized people get, though. They've been living in town for years. They're looking at the mountain, "Yeah, we've got a bad mountain. We got a dead mountain. Yeah, it looks bad." So they're not even looking at it anymore! Really, we tried to remember to look with new eyes at things and not just look and think, "Oh, yeah, we saw that before." There's a plant in Palmerton that grows in Palmerton that does not grow anywhere else in Pennsylvania.

EPA Interviewer: The sandwort?

Calvin: The branching sandwort. We have really come to see that as a signature plant. This spring when all of EPA's cleanup was over, I can't tell you [in] how many yards that was still blooming in Palmerton. Those yards are not decontaminated. I don't care what level—who says what—that is a contaminated yard. So we really got to see that it wasn't what we were seeing that we had always seen, but what we were not seeing, too. That we weren't seeing the fireflies and the butterflies. I've got three rabbits living in my backyard, which is the most awesome thing that there's a life form here!

EPA Interviewer: Where did they come from?

Calvin: [*Laughing*] I don't know. Where do bunnies come from? They're bunnies. Nobody will understand—who lives elsewhere—how thrilled we get if we dig in our ground and find an earthworm. You didn't find that. It wasn't here; it couldn't live. The ground couldn't sustain it. But that I still see so many yards that are really bad…

EPA Interviewer: Are these folks that just don't seem to care about their yards?

Calvin: …and they're done. Some of them were tested and told that they were OK. I don't believe it.

EPA Interviewer: They didn't qualify?

Calvin: I don't believe it.

Colangelo: They used composite sampling.

Calvin: Right.

Colangelo: Whereas with the first cleanup in '94, if they hit one spot that had elevated levels, you qualified. Now they take…

Calvin: All these composite samples.

Colangelo: Yeah, mix it all up

Calvin: The different standard…

Colangelo: The solution to pollution is dilution.

Calvin: This whole final cleanup was a different standard than was used for interim, and it negated a lot of people needing a cleanup. But now if people think, "Well, our yard is fine…"

Colangelo: They're wrong.

Calvin: And those kids are sitting there, playing in that dirt. That doesn't satisfy me. But the community now thinks they're OK.

EPA Interviewer: You may have already told me this. What is your most memorable story about your involvement with the Superfund program?

Calvin: Wow.

EPA Interviewer: There's so many. We've already heard a bunch of them.

Colangelo: I guess you'd have to put it in categories. Disappointing…

EPA Interviewer: Well, what was the high point of your involvement in the program?

Calvin: Well, absolutely when the interim cleanup started. The whole tone and tenure of the whole community was… We thought if 50 people had enough courage to come forward and be tested, that would be awesome. That it ended up being over 200 homes was just really fantastic.

EPA Interviewer: That agreed to be tested?

Calvin: And cleaned up, and be it known publicly. Now your neighbors know so you're also going to be viewed as being anti-industry. I mean people put a lot on the line to do that.

EPA Interviewer: So it was a victory not only for the environment, but a victory and a validation of the group?

Calvin: Absolutely. Absolutely. And of the fact that there's a problem here.

EPA Interviewer: Yeah, acknowledgement.

Calvin: Absolutely.

EPA Interviewer: And what was the low point, the lowest point in your career here?

Colangelo: The Task Force.

Calvin: I think the lowest point, and the most unbelievable, was that when the state would allow them to roll back emissions when we were on the brink of the final cleanup. That was madness. After 15 years of struggle, how can you stab us in the back like that?

EPA Interviewer: Can you tell me more what that was? What were they rolling back?

Calvin: They were rolling back the levels of emissions that the company could spew out with current operations.

EPA Interviewer: Still of the EAF dust?

Calvin: Yes. It brought it again to a total of 940 tons of lead that can be spewed out every year. That was, that's madness. Here we are on the brink of the cleanup, we think we've come so far that, how could anything be worse than that, when you're at the end of the road? The road was a struggle, but we always knew we were getting further. The community's coming along. They're not screaming at us anymore when we're delivering newsletters. We're getting somewhere. And then the state itself rolls us back. That was really my low point.

EPA Interviewer: But you're still going?

Calvin: Yeah, here we are! But I'll have to show you one of our newsletters.

Colangelo: Like the Energizer bunnies! Keep going and going and going…

Calvin: We've gotten real satisfaction, the last couple of times on the front page or our newsletters. I've seen it in my son's newspaper in Connecticut where he lives, that on their editorial page every Saturday they give different groups and organizations a thumbs up or a thumbs down. It draws your eye right away to their editorial page. We've started that the last year and a half. We're giving thumbs up and thumbs down on the front page. We gave EPA some thumbs up this time. We even gave a thumbs up to Viacom for coming forward with the money to pay for the cleanup. We'll recognize industry when they're doing a good thing. But all we're giving DEP is thumbs down. They know that we've gotten real hostile. We used to feel we had a good relationship, but that's not working. Now we're going to be hostile, and we're going to show it.

EPA Interviewer: You've referred several times to your children, to environmental education. You gave us the example of what they weren't willing to teach in the schools. What has been the experience of the children here over 15 years? Is there a higher level of environmental conscious among that group?

Calvin: I think so. For years until the last two years, PCCE had a poster contest every April with the school children. We'd have a 100 to 130 people show up for that every spring, and that was great. I think that did help. But then one of the girls that was running that program had some family obligations, so our involvement in some of these things aren't as much as they were before. But I think some of it did turn a corner.

EPA Interviewer: How do you think your own children view you?

Calvin: Oh, mine think I'm awesome! And I have grandchildren who just say, "Boy, Grandma, that's just great! Way to go." I hope the message got through to them. I just talked to somebody about this last week. I had a birthday. We talked about birthdays and I said, the only one I remember was 16 and it's when the light bulb went on in my head and helped me come on this road. I was standing in town waiting for the bus to go home after I had chorus, and two boys were on the corner from Catholic schools.

This town used to be real fractured as far as Protestants and Catholics and Mexicans and Pennsylvania Dutchmen. This wasn't some happy melting pot. There were a lot of real friction going on and tension between everybody.

As I stood there, two older women stood not too far away and started saying really vile things about these two Catholic boys. And I walked right over to them and said, "Madame, what is your problem? I'm a Catholic. What are you doing?" Of course I'm a Lutheran, I'm not a Catholic. But it really made me see that you could be empowered when speaking up and that sometimes you have to speak up.

I think what really did it was when my son was in high school. We went to Germany for two weeks and spent an afternoon at Dachau. My dad had been in the tank core in World War II, so it really was like the pilgrimage for me to get to Germany and how to find the answer. What's the answer? How could they do this in a civilized world? What is the answer? Well, there was no German answer and there's no Uwanda answer. When good people do not speak, bad things will happen. That's the core of what really drives me. There's a justice and an injustice, and sometimes you gotta stand up. And I think personally, it's made my life. That has made my life. I can't imagine the life I would have without that. If it's not that 'cause, it going to be something else. I know Sandy always said that, too. She said, "I can't imagine anyone caring about something and not speaking up." We have been so empowered that you have to speak up.

EPA Interviewer: Has this been an empowering process for you, Ellen?

Colangelo: I haven't recognized it. I didn't grow up here. What I've seen in this town as they're held down...you know what I mean.

Calvin: You were good about speaking out the right way because you weren't from here.

Colangelo: Yeah, I'm not from here.

Calvin: So we did come at it from different…

Colangelo: Yeah, it didn't seem abnormal to me.

Calvin: [*Laughing*] That's right.

EPA Interviewer: You weren't part of the in-company crowd.

Colangelo: [*Laughing*] No, I'm from Philly.

Calvin: [*Laughing*] She already knew how to speak out. It was fine.

Colangelo: [*Laughing*] I'm from Philly. I'm a big mouth from Philly, and I've always been a big mouth from Philly. I wasn't coming from the same place.

Calvin: But it was good because you and Patty and Sandy, not being from here, really did help bring a base to those of us that were from here and were so trying to get the courage to speak out and speak publicly.

Colangelo: What the heck are you afraid of? We weren't afraid to peak our mind, right or wrong.

EPA Interviewer: That was very motivating for other folks.

Calvin: Exactly.

Colangelo: Apparently. [*Laughing*]

Calvin: Oh exactly.

EPA Interviewer: You've been called environmentalists. Both positive and negative…

Calvin: That would be a compliment!

EPA Interviewer: Do you see yourselves as environmentalists?

Calvin: I see myself more of an activist than an environmentalist. While there certainly are the issues that I was concerned about—the health issues, the whole deterioration of the environment—I think the injustice of it that really spurred me even more. Because if I wouldn't have cared about the injustice of it, I could have just as easily packed up and moved somewhere else. That would have been justice, to live somewhere else. But who was going to speak for the people here? I think after a couple of years, once we learned all we did and knew what we did—even though we'd all had cleanups, we really felt we had an obligation to keep going, because now who was going to drive the bus for everybody else if we just said, "Oh, well, you know what? We're done."

Colangelo: [*Laughing*] You just want that meeting every Tuesday.

Calvin: I do, sure.

EPA Interviewer: How often to you meet now?

Calvin: Once a month.

Colangelo: First Tuesday of the month.

Calvin: Then we have a public meeting, about six of those every year. I can guess you like that meeting once a month. I always have two pots of coffee on, decaf and regular. And we always have dessert or I bake. Who wouldn't want to go to that once a month?

EPA Interviewer: Where do you meet?

Calvin: Here. I'm divorced, live alone.

Colangelo: This is my seat.

Calvin: That's right. That is your seat! I said from the beginning when I became President because they would have them at each other's homes. They all had younger children, they all had families. I said, let's not disrupt anybody. Let's always have it here. Then we know where we're going every month.

Colangelo: Plus, I had a different situation, where my neighbor worked for the company. Anything that was said in my house could be heard. So that was not a good situation.

Calvin: We would have had harassment from him just coming into your house.

Colangelo: I used to play some tricks on him.

Calvin: Now, bear in mind this might be on the Web and everywhere else!

Colangelo: [*Laughing*] I don't care! I had a good laugh, and so did everybody else that knew about it. It was real, real early on. Well, my girls were in kindergarten—well my one girl was in kindergarten, I don't remember which one at the time. One could have been in first and one in kindergarten. So, we always would talk to each other in the morning. "Did anything new happen?" This, that, and the other. I waited to see him come home, 'cause he would come home for lunch. When I saw him come home, I dialed the phone to make it ring, and I made pretend that it was one of the other girls. I'm near my party wall with the phone and I'm acting like I'm talking on the phone. "Hi, Loretta, how 'ya doing? You're kidding! The Greenpeace bus is coming?!? Oh my gosh! When?!?" I just played it on. Then the siren went off, so I said, "I gotta go, I gotta take my daughter down to kindergarten." So then there I leave. He shot down the street. So here… Louise was on [the Borough] Council at the time... I even specified a date that this was going to happen. Do you remember that, Louise? So my neighbor had gone to the company and told the company that, "The Greenpeace bus is coming!"

Linda calls me up and she says, "Who have you been talking to?" and I said, "I haven't been talking to anybody. What are you talking about?" "Well, we heard that the Greenpeace bus is coming." I bust out laughing, "Oh, my gosh! That was just a thing that I did!" She said they were going nuts at Borough Hall that day. People were up on the mountain with binoculars, watching for the Greenpeace bus, and it was just hysterical. I think my main motivation was to prove to myself that this guy listened to my walls.

EPA Interviewer: And that seems to be what happened?

Colangelo: That seems to be what happened, yes. [*Laughing*]

Calvin: Now here's one of our things that I had forgotten that we did. I think Cada did that, our secretary. But we did this one here at Christmas. Here is an official document and this is a "GAG" application, a GAG grant, instead of a TAG grant. This was called the Guido Assistance Grant. [*Laughing*] And it took stuff from EPA and tried to make it funny. "How many members in your organization? One, two, several, or we can't say." "How many are women? All, none, several, we aren't sure." "Do any of your members use lead-based makeup?" "Do you hold public meetings? A. Yes, but we hate it. B. Yes, and we love it. C. Not anymore. D. We're not sure unless the public consists of…"

[Phone ringing in background, tape is stopped and starts again.]

EPA Interviewer: The larger-scale question that I wanted to ask you was whether or not you think the Superfund program has had an impact on environmental protection in America?

Calvin: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean there have been a lot of setbacks, there have been a lot of disappointments, but absolutely. When all the lakes and ponds and places that were getting so bad by the end of the '60s—and unfortunately it's wonderful if everybody would regulate themselves, it's not the reality. We really need the laws that are gonna make the regulations and not have every company be driven by its sheet bottom line. We all have a bottom line at home. We all have a sheet. We have to live within our means. But that shouldn't be the only line in our life. We have ethical lines and moral lines and all other kinds of lines. So for a company to say, "Well, 'ya know, that's the bottom line," that's a real poor answer. We need EPA to do that. We need the regulation. I just wish sometimes that EPA would have more of the will to enforce what already seems to be within their laws to be able to do so. And we need the funding. That has made such a total impact here in Palmerton and absolutely throughout the nation. I can't imagine this country without a Superfund program.

EPA Interviewer: You were about to tell me about experiences you've heard from other communities.

Colangelo: Well, in response to the other question that you had, we have a hard time comparing ourselves to…Or we don't have the same experiences as the other sites. We saw that just from participating in the two Superfund workshops. We were listening to horror stories from other regions. That has not been our experience.

Calvin: Not at all. Our Region 3 people have really been terrific, they really have.

Colangelo: Absolutely. It's night and day. I don't know why they have such different experiences than we do. I can only guess, but ours have been wonderful.

EPA Interviewer: Personal relationships are very important in all of this.

Calvin: Absolutely.

Colangelo: Yeah, and we do have our complaints. We have our complaints.

Calvin: And we've had our differences, but we never felt with any of them that we couldn't verbalize it or expect to be heard or expect to have a seat at the table.

EPA Interviewer: Do you think [the] Superfund program has had an impact on preventing hazardous waste sites from developing?

Colangelo: I don't think I'd…

Calvin: Probably not. I certainly wouldn't know to answer that, but I would think probably not anymore than the death penalty has ended crime or horrible murders. I don't know that it's been a deterrent.

EPA Interviewer: You've talked about how the funding for the remediation here has been very valuable to getting the cleanup done. Your understanding of the dual funding role, with the PRP, the potentially responsible party, and the federal funding aspect of it—do you think that dual funding mechanism works?

Calvin: Well, I do, and it's my understanding that EPA is mandated by Congress to go into federal court if need to and collect the money under Superfund and find the responsible parties and force them to pay. But a community shouldn't have to wait for the cleanup until the money is found somewhere by those PRPs. The money sure has to be there ahead of time so that a cleanup doesn't take 20 years.

Colangelo: Then again, when you think about what has occurred here, a lot of the… It's our opinion, I believe, that a lot of the methods of testing were geared to minimize the cleanup so there wasn't such a hit on Viacom's pocketbook.

Calvin: That is our belief.

Colangelo: So if EPA had come in and done the cleanup to whatever their specifications were, without initially getting the assurance from Viacom, going after them after the fact, we might have had a different cleanup, don't you think?

Calvin: Well, we might have had a better cleanup. And yet, playing devil's advocate, it might have made it harder for themselves to collect it if they hadn't supported it with all the science available and everybody participating. So often—its follow the money, I guess. And while we can understand that on a generic level, on a personal level, of course we wanted to see the best cleanup we could see. We thought the interim cleanup was so fantastic…

Colangelo: Absolutely!

Calvin: …that when the final cleanup came about, when it wasn't up to that standard, we really felt a lot of properties were excluded that would have been included in the earlier years.

Colangelo: Oh, yeah! There was even an incentive not to do an interior cleanup because... What did they say? They would have an interior cleanup…they would have to test the interior and they would test for lead-based paint.

Calvin: But they took that out at the end.

Colangelo: Did they take that out?

Calvin: That was removed.

Colangelo: That was nasty. But they never replaced rugs, did they?

Calvin: Nope.

Colangelo: The first one, they replaced rugs because, let's face it, how're you gonna get that out of your rugs?

Calvin: They told us you could not. So the Federal Government bought us new carpeting.

Colangelo: Absolutely. And they also told us that they could not get it out of mattresses and upholstered furniture, but the mattresses and upholstered furniture didn't get removed, just the carpet.

Calvin: My big complaint when the house was done—if I have hot air duct work all over the house and nobody's cleaning up that duct work and this house is 80 years old…

EPA Interviewer: That wasn't done?

Calvin: …that wasn't a cleanup. You did not decontaminate. That's an air passage. I have a good friend who is now on Borough Council and who owned a hardware and plumbing store. He said to me right from the beginning, "Start pushing them to do your duct work. If that duct work isn't clean, I'm never gonna believe, as an individual, that they really were here to decontaminate." He had several arguments with EPA people. That would have been a real expense, but it would have done the job.

Colangelo: How much is a duct cleaning? They do that all the time.

Calvin: I have no idea.

EPA Interviewer: Well, it probably would be more costly if there were hazardous contaminants they were dealing with, as opposed to just regular…

Colangelo: But they were already dealing with hazardous contaminants.

EPA Interviewer: When they came were they wearing the hazardous…

Colangelo: Absolutely!

EPA Interviewer: How did the community react seeing people in gigantic moon suits coming to your home?

Calvin: Well, again, that's why EPA wanted to go into the schools and explain to the kids.

Colangelo: I was out there filming!

Calvin: And what were people at home telling their kids because their neighbors were having it done? I have no idea.

EPA Interviewer: Did you think that people got a sense that this was dangerous stuff if people were coming here dressed in hazmat suits?

Colangelo: I think…at that time…

Calvin: The Task Force was so trying to play everything down.

Colangelo: No. Louise, remember when they were out at the different houses doing this, they were actually stalked and challenged at every opportunity. You remember two individuals who used to go around and harass?

Calvin: …that were actually following the crew. Yeah.

Colangelo: My house was the second house to be cleaned. They had a big write-up in the paper, and my picture was on the front page standing at the front door with my daughter. My

daughter was only five. That was a lot of fun. The council had a fit over seeing my picture. We knew how to manipulate the media.

So there was a big write up afterwards in the paper about a neighbor [who] was challenging the Coast Guard and was threatened with arrest if he came onto my property because it's all cordoned off. I still have the article. He was charging that the EPA was using Gestapo tactics and all that. They weren't playing it like, "Oh, my goodness, this is so dangerous." It was, "How dare they come into our community!" There were articles that they were gonna come rip out the trees and the shrubs. The bulldozers were gonna come in and rip up your property. Remember those?

Calvin: Oh, yeah.

Colangelo: They weren't playing it like it was a hazard. They were playing it like it was a challenge, an invasion.

Calvin: Us against the big government.

Colangelo: It was an invasion.

EPA Interviewer: To take you off in a different direction slightly, I think most of what we've talked about in terms of remediation has been the cleanup of yards and homes. I don't remember. Have you also described for me the work that's been done with respect to the remediation/restoration of Blue Mountain and the cinder bank?

Calvin: Well, the cinder bank is pretty well complete. I don't know that they're doing anything more there except monitoring movement and the runoff into the creek. But the groundcover that's been put on there has almost meant to encapsulate the flaking and dusting that was going on from that all being bare. The mountain has been successful as far as the grass program. But I think until the Appalachian Trail people and the U.S. Park Service approve doing something at the top level… Of course, the runoff and erosion is just continuing there, too. We're not going to see a heavily populated forest there—not in my lifetime, and probably not in my grandchildren's.

Colangelo: No.

Calvin: I think that was one of the most discouraging things when a scientist said to us years ago… When we said, "What kind of timeframe are we looking at to see a viable mountain return?" He said, "500 years of tender loving care." Well, that's not gonna happen. Probably not. And if this industry ever left, there'd probably be townhouses springing up along the mountain. And then they'd be planting in their own patch. That's why I'm convinced, if this whole valley had not been homes and yards, this whole valley would look like the mountain. It's that individuals were taking care of their own patch, planting trees, trying to take care of stuff, because everywhere you go outside of that cone, it's bad. The whole valley would look like that if there hadn't been a population here.

EPA Interviewer: That's remarkable. Going back to the global picture and to start wrapping this up for you, what do you see as the biggest challenge of the Superfund program today and into the future?

Calvin: The biggest challenge is having a legislature who's willing to fund it and an Agency who's willing to have the will to do what they're authorized to do. I think all the agencies have had more authorization that could have done more here, but they didn't always have the will. They wanted to be politically comfortable or were maybe under constraints as to the money that could be spent. But I don't think we've always seen the will go with the authority that could have been done.

Colangelo: I agree.

EPA Interviewer: Do you think that you'll see a day—or there will come a day—when hazardous waste sites will be cleaned up and Superfund will no longer have the same kind of role that it has today?

Calvin: No, because there's always going to be people of greed.

Colangelo: Well, it's not always greed that produces problems—sometimes its just plain accidents.

Calvin: Well, that's true, too.

Colangelo: Look at what's going on in New Orleans. That's gonna be a challenge right there to clean up.

Calvin: Well, and does anybody have the will to say, "It just doesn't make sense to rebuild it there."

Colangelo: Rebuilding aside, from what I hear, the water is just so toxic. Who's gonna come in there and take out…?

Calvin: "We're draining that out." Well, out to where? It's going out, and it's going down, and it's going over.

Colangelo: That's not a man-made disaster. That's a natural disaster, so it's not always greed.

Calvin: But that wouldn't be treated under Superfund necessarily, would it?

EPA Interviewer: It depends on the situation. Superfund is active there. There are Superfund sites that EPA has to make sure are still being protected even though they are several feet potentially under water.

Colangelo: So there's always…

Calvin: Yeah, I'd like to say that the need will surely someday be gone for that, but I don't believe that.

Colangelo: As long as there's people…

Calvin: The need for oversight is always gonna be there.

Colangelo: Yeah, as long as people have requirements, there's always going to be manufacturing and this, that, and the other. There's always the potential. It just goes hand in hand.

EPA Interviewer: Are there any other issues that you wanted to discuss, either about your experience here or messages that you want to leave for prosperity?

Calvin: [*Laughing*] Let me out! Let me outta here! Well, if you came through Palmerton today, you saw how nice and wide our sidewalks are in the Main Street. Wasn't that foresight? We have no idea the names of the people that designed that or decided that was a good idea. And we often joked, if 150 years from now nobody knows our names either, but somebody says, "Boy, thank God there were people 150 years ago who did some work to get this straightened out here." We don't know who designed the sidewalk, but we still appreciate them and wouldn't want to go back to skinny sidewalks. So maybe it made a difference down the road. We always felt, too, even once the Superfund issues are resolved and if the work there would be basically over, there's still always going to be a need in this community for a group to play watch dog to the current operations. You really put yourself at risk if you're not watching and they know you're not watching. There was a time there when they believed, and some people on the Task Force believed, that we were watching them 24 hours a day. We didn't dispute that. [*Laughing*] That's what they thought. That worked for us, because it helped keep them honest.

EPA Interviewer: Super. Before we go, I wanted you to describe for me, as precisely as you can for our listeners, this game that you created.

Calvin: From the very beginning we knew that we couldn't spend 12 months a year under this great stress and intimidation, and we decided every year at Christmas and the holidays we really had to have a Christmas party and let our hair down. Take everything that everybody had tried to intimidate us with and turn it into a joke or a game or charades. One of our members did create a board game called "Getting to Superfund," and we have all kinds of spots on the board to land on. I think there's one place that said, "You just slid down the cinder bank, go back three spaces." Then we had many cards—people picked cards and rolled the dice to see where you went to go. We always had a lot of laughs. Every Christmas we had something different. We had a great thing on the night before Christmas and turned that into a Christmas Eve in Palmerton with the contaminants here. We really felt we had to use humor wherever we could, because a lot of the months of the year were real stressful in what we went through.

EPA Interviewer: So just looking at this board, it looks like it's based on Monopoly. You've got a start and then there are different squares you can land on, remediating different operable units of the site. You can land on Chance or Cleanup.

Colangelo: There are the little Chance tickets there, that if you landed on Chance, you drew from one of the…

EPA Interviewer: Do you want to read to me a couple of the less controversial ones?

Calvin: Well, here's one: "Sludge has just slid off the Blue Mountains. Slide back five spaces."

Colangelo: These are a little different, these are questions. "What Bill McDonald says to Louise when she becomes the DEP Secretary?"

Calvin: Well, that might have been something else.

Colangelo: Yeah, that's gotta be.

Calvin: These were all Superfund here.

EPA Interviewer: I see the last point on the game board was "Delisted from the NPL."

Calvin: That's right, that's when you get to the end of the game and you're a winner.

EPA Interviewer: Is there something specific about the shape of the board?

Calvin: The board is shaped like an Irish shamrock. That was supposed to be good luck that we had it in that shape.

[Ellen laughing in the background.]

EPA Interviewer: Do you want to read us that particular card?

Colangelo: It's an inside joke. "What Mike Toll said when offered a new site for the EPA trailer?" Do you remember that?

Calvin: No, I don't.

Colangelo: They were moving the trailer around, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like Mauch Chunk Road." You had to have been there.

EPA Interviewer: I want to thank you both for all the memories that you've walked through with us here.

Calvin: And I'm sure we've forgotten a lot. And that might be God's way of blessing us and keeping our mental facilities.

Colangelo: Do you remember this one Louise? "What PCCE thinks about Bob's thesis? It will be as well-known as the Bible."

Calvin: There was another joke—I guess not…

EPA Interviewer: Can you tell us a little bit about Bob's thesis?

Colangelo: I'll let Louise tell you.

Calvin: Well, when Bob Hill called us and said he was looking at three different sites in Pennsylvania to make the focus of his Ph.D. that he was going to be writing on adult education in the environment. As soon as he told me a little of his history, I said, "You've been looking for us, and we've been looking for somebody like you." There are so many facets to Palmerton. The whole way that the homes are set up, with the richer people higher up on the hill and away from the plant.

Colangelo: Behind stone walls.

Calvin: The whole history of the whole socioeconomic thing. This is much more than an environmental story here. It just felt for somebody in the education aspect, there were so many things here that he could touch on. Then when I found out that he took a leave of absence for six months and hiked a part of Africa, East Africa I think, with a Jesuit group, I knew he was really diverse and would be interesting. It was pleasing to see somebody who could see if from all those points of view and write about it the way he did. It always helps to validate that you're really not crazy. [*Laughing*]

EPA Interviewer: That was a big part of this experience for you?

Calvin: Absolutely.

EPA Interviewer: Knowing that you were not crazy, that you didn't have horns, showing that to the rest of the world?

Calvin: Absolutely.

Colangelo: And make sure your listeners know to go to our Web site: www.palmertoncitizens.org.

EPA Interviewer: That's where I found you.

Colangelo: I created it and maintain it. So that's another hat that I wear.

EPA Interviewer: Well thank you very, very much.

Colangelo: You're welcome.