Christina Tobin

I: If you could just start by saying your name.

R: I am Christina Katrina Tobin.

I: Great, thank you. So can you tell me something about the city of Meadville that you love about it?

R: I like the fact that it's a medium sized town. There's enough stuff here where i  don't really have to go outside of it to meet my needs.

I: And is there anything.. like why is that interesting to you that you don't have to go out of it?

R: Interesting to me?

I: Well like why is that.. So maybe you want to go out of it, maybe other people are like that. But why do you want to stay in this area?

R: Well like to stay in this area? I just don't like to have to go out of the area to get my necessities met. Lives are busy, there are only so many hours in a day. Groceries, necessities, the things that I need are right here. I live just like 5, 10 minutes outside of town so i can get everything i need without having to go more than a half hour away. Everything is right here.

I: That's cool. Alright. Are there places you go to regularly? For when you need something.

R: Aldis is my main go to spot.

I: So what originally brought you to Meadville?

R: Well i was born here, my roots are here. And Im petrified to leave, thats the honest answer.

I: Do you know why your family came here or anything?

R: Well my family is from around here. We're farmers. My dad is from Cambridge Springs area, i went to Maplewood. We're just all from this general area. So we've just always been around here.

I: So was your dad a farmer?

R: My dad was a farmer his entire life. He bought his farm when he was 19 years old. And he farmed his entire life.

I: What kind of farming?

R: He had a dairy farm. I grew up on the largest farm in crawford county.

I: Is it still around?

R: The Farm is still here. Unfortunately, it is not still farmed. It's just land now, it just sits there.

I: So when did your dad stop farming?

R: When 326 foreclosed. And the Mennonites bought it  for pennies on the dollar.

I: Do you know why they foreclosed?

R: Because the price of milk dropped and the price of produce dropped and it was no longer.. I was 11 so it was '91 when it happened.

I: I hear about that so much how dairy, I mean I think dairy still is the biggest thing how it was huge here

R: Well industry took over, ya know big industry. And it was no longer even.. You couldn't even put food on the tables.. It was no longer a profit thing. IF you just couldn't even survive.

I: So what did your dad do after that?

R: He started raising  chinchillas for pelts.

I: So is that more how you remember him? As that guy?

R: Not really. Because after that my parents split up, and it was all like single mom trying to work two jobs kind of thing.

I: Do other people in your family still farm?

R: I guess that's what actually brought us into Meadville. My parents split up and we came into town and lived in Fairmont government housing because mom was trying to work two jobs.

I: So it was easier for her to live here, that makes sense. Do you feel there are certain things that capture the feel of this town? Or the spirit of it?

R: Well the college definitely is a lot of what captures the spirit of this town. The first thing i do when i describe what this town is, i say its a college town. I think quiet is a lot of what i use when i describe the town. I like the fact i don't have to worry when my 16 year old walks down the street. I Really like that. If i forget to lock the doors in my car when i park at the downtown mall, i don't have to have an anxiety attack when I'm in the mall. Thats definitely, the quiet peaceful atmosphere of the town. That's definitely something that I think captures the town a lot that matters a lot to me. I guess those are the important things.

I: I know you mentioned college at first. What does Allegheny being a part of this community mean? Is there a certain vibe it shoots out or?

R: I like the kids walking the streets and them coming and going at certain times of the year and knowing the jobs are shifting. It's something you know is happening and it's part of what is coming and going.

I: Yeah it's a cool part of the culture.

R: Yeah, it's something you know is part of the town. If you know somebody needs a job, you know those are the times of the year that you can get one and sad to say, if you need a tv or something else, when the kids are leaving, you're going dumpster diving. It's just part of being here and it's just something that is part of the community.

I: Are there other things like that that being here is just like dealing with this?

R: Define "this".

I: That's what I'm asking you to define, like one of this this's is college students. Is there other things? Like everyone knows this happens.

R: The votech is definitely something I've always taken for granted as a "this" that Meadville has that I'm now learning other places don't have. My kid is in tenth grade now and she's in cosmetology and loving the heck out of it and I'm realizing not every place has those things available to their students that they can just take half the day off of school and start their future ahead of time i guess. And that's something that I guess I really just took for granted that everybody had. I went to Maplewood and they make sure even the surrounding schools have available to them and i think that's another "that" that is something great that why make sure is here and another thing that isn't the college, but another schooling opportunity that is here and isn't everywhere else and something that is awesome. I think it's really cool. Although I think it's horrible they took out the farming aspect.

I: Do you know why that was taken out?

R: I have no idea why.

I: Because culture still exists but it might be less farming.

R: I think what they did is they took it more towards the landscaping.

I: That's interesting you say that because I work with people that are really big in developing community gardens and building farmers.

R: And i wanted to make sure to mention that today and how great last year i saw little spots of community gardens and the one you guys put up here last year and that was awesome that those were out. And the one by the police station. I saw several people taking care of it and how that was really cool that those are coming up and.

I: Why is that cool to you?

R: That is cool to me because it is a community project. And I think the way to "save the world" is for the community to come together. Everything else is falling apart and if we don't come together one person at a time and our community doesn't do it then the corporations that are taking over everything are not the answer. It's the communities, its the little things, its remembering how to put plants in the ground. And all the little stuff, its remembering how to take care of each other one person at a time. It's all that little stuff that is going to matter. We somehow forgot how to care about our neighbors and if we don't remember, its gonna keep going really really bad. Like we're observing at the pipeline right now.

I: I totally agree. These gardens, just like growing food, i think meant a lot to me and hopefully it's something that will keep growing. I know we have like 11 gardens in the city now.

R: It's a physical representation of people coming together.

I: Are there other representations like that other than the gardens?

R: Not that ive seen.

I: So if there was something in meadville that wasn't here anymore, like just picked up and left, what comes to mind when i say that? Like it wouldn't be meadville if "that" left.

R: The one thing that I remember that I miss the most and that I wish was back is cruising. Such a simple thing that I wish my kid had. And like some place for the teenagers to go.

I: And your daughter is a teenager?

R: She's 16.

I: So where does she go now?

R: In her basement on electronics.

I: What do you think she might want to do?

R: I don't know. And that's usually what she says. But i remember just the laughter and the fun just driving in stinking circles. We weren't doing anything wrong, we were just driving in circles. And people knew where we were. We were easily watched. Yeah, sure things went wrong. But things go wrong anyway. It doesn't matter where teenagers are at. And at least you knew where they were at. Thats what this town is seriously lacking is some place for teenagers to go. Something for them to do. And every once and a while someone will try to come up with something and it miserably fails.

I: Is there anything in particular you had in mind that like failed?

R: I know theres been a couple dance things they've tried to do and i can think of two in particular they've tried in the last 5 years or so. That's the only thing I can think of right off the top of my head.

I: Where would you guys cruise when you did?

R: Well we went around the Diamond, in front of the movie theater.

I: Park ave movie?

R: The one downtown?

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, the one that's the dollar cinema now or whatever. And then we turned around somewhere down there and then came back in front of that and went around the Diamond again and just did that loop. Friday and Saturday night for like two hours or something, parked at the Diamond.

I: Would you get out at the time?

R: Sometimes.

I: What would you do if you got out at the Diamond?

R: Talk. Act like teenagers.

I: It's such a simple thing just like having a thing where people can talk.

R: Just chill.

I: Like i do all this research about like making a place a place people wanna be and one of the main things people want is to just watch other people and like see other people.

R: Exactly. Like and it was before the time of cell phones. So if you wanted to know where someone was at, you wanted to look for somebody, they're at the Diamond. Thats where everybody's at.

I: And that's so cool to me. It's like people say to me 'things around here aren't that exciting' and I'm like if people just show up, it will be exciting. Vibrancy is just people being people and coming to things.

R: Exactly. And like it was fresh air, it was everybody's windows in their cars were rolled down. It wasn't just everyone driving around with their windows rolled up, everybody just cooped up in their own little space. It was everybody sharing vibes, it was just fun, laughter, and ya know. It was just cool.

I: So maybe other than cruising, is there other things you want your daughter to experience growing up here?

R: i don't know. i just want her to be able to get out and have fun and do things, and that's what this town does not have. there's no space for her to get out and have fun and do things. I've gotta take her to Erie or some place else for her to get out and do things. She can go bowling or come swimming, and other than that, i don't know of anything else she can do in this town.

I: Can you tell me a time where maybe you had something really fun to do in town?

R: In this town?

I: Yeah.

R: Nah this town has always been pretty dry for teenagers.

I:  What about as an adult?

R: As far as entertainment goes?

I: Just a fun time you've had in town.

R: Um.. the college has offered quite a few times fun entertainment. We've gone to a few concerts up there that have been quite a bit of fun. I can recall a stomp type concert up there that was quite a blast. I still have a stick. We've gone to a few of those Thursday night things they do up at the college, i don't know if they still do them or not. It was a few years ago, my daughter and I were doing them for a while. They would have, each month, they would have a theme and we would go up and.. Um Ernst Trail has provided many evenings of great entertainment. Can you tell I love the outdoors?

I: Yeah I love it.

R: Seems to be a theme of mine. Um, the new movie theater coming into town was quite nice. We've definitely enjoyed that on several occasions. We don't honestly go out a lot and do a whole lot of out type entertainment. Mostly because we fall on that nice little category of.. what do you call that? When you don't quite make enough money to qualify for help, but you don't quite make enough money to have fun either.

I: So if you were looking for things to do they would be mostly free things at this point?

R: Yeah for the most part. My daughter is quite involved in the academy theater.

I: What shows has she done?

R: See if you wouldn't have asked me..

I: I only ask because i just did a show and I'm in a show now. How long ago was it?

R: She's been involved for the last year or so.

I: Oh really? Did she do White  Christmas or Steel Magnolias or Beauty and the Beast?

R: She auditioned for Beauty and the Beast and got really upset with the process.

I: I can understand that.

R: Im not sure how much they kept going on with that. They've been going to Allegheny College and have been doing stuff there. They just went up and got their head shots done for the program.  But her and her best friend do a lot of that kind of stuff together.

I: Do they usually walk downtown?

R: Sometimes. Im usually the taxi. I need a hat.

I: Alright I've got some random questions now. Do you have a favorite memory of being in Meadville? Or doesn't have to be favorite, just a good memory.

R: Good memory of being in Meadville. I have a really awesome memory of when my kid was little, like 2 or 3, Easter time at the Market House. Squeeze the Clown was there and the easter bunny and she had made a little apple, Squeeze made her a little apple out of a balloon. She was so cute, it was just such a great day. They had the Market House all decorated up for Easter, that was 14 years ago and it's just still such a vivid memory.

I: So do you feel like that memory stands out? Does it say anything about our town? Like something important about our town.

R: Well it definitely says that Market House is something that we value and take care of and that we make sure to draw people in for holidays and celebrate young children and families and those types of things.

I: Do you still go to the Market House?

R: I do still go to the Market House. I was there just a  couple weeks ago as a matter of fact.

I: Do you mostly just look around or do you shop or?

R: I was there for breakfast with friends then we shopped around for a little bit.

I: Have you ever been above the Market House?

R: I have been above the Market House. My daughter has taken classes there for artsy things.

I: Yeah, we've got concerts every Saturday and usually there's a group of teenagers doing crafts in the back if she ever wants to come. It's usually around 7 o'clock. Okay and um what do you envision things looking like in 5 years time in Meadville?

R: Well that is one tricky question. Meadville kinda scares me, it really does. It kind of feels stuck to me. I was kinda happy last spring when I started seeing a little bit of construction because I hadn't seen any in so long. No new sightings, no construction of any sort. Like things were really drab. So last year when I started seeing like new sighting and new, like um, road construction and professional type construction and stuff like that and things actually happening, ya know that was a little encouraging to me that it seemed they had released the hold on the money or whatever seemed to have been happening. Like they had been under some scare or whatever, it seemed to have happened. I don't even know. But it does seem like we're stuck or behind or  I don't know. Honestly, i really wanna get out of here. It seems, my daughter has two more years left of school, she wants to be gone, she doesn't see a future here. So my 5 years for Meadville doesn't include me.

I: Do you feel like there  are particular reasons why your daughter doesn't wanna stay around?

R: She wants to do big things with cosmetology and possibly work in, like make up design and costume design for movies, and that's just not here. That's like west or south. Big, far miles. but even if she just did regular cosmetology, that's bigger cities and things of that sort as well. So it's just the money isn't here.

I: Do you feel for yourself, are there things that would make staying here easier if they changed?

R: I don't know. I really don't know the answer to that question. I am in a process of personal transition and I don't have a good answer.

I: That's fine you don't have to. Alright I think this is the last one. If you had a magic wand, and you could change anything about Meadville, and again this is not another favorite question, just one thing that you think would be useful to change, what would it be?

R: That is definitely the spot for teenagers. Some place for them to go, some place for them to 'hey where's everybody at?' and this is the spot. Some place they wanna go, some place they wanna be that they can. Ya know, there used to be a pool hall in this town. Ya know, that they like to hang out. Like we wanted to be. It was a cool spot. But there's no place now, there's no place anybody wants to go and hangout and be. So that would definitely be the one thing that I would give this town. And the way I would do it, is i would ask them what they would want and i would respect their answer.

I: Do you feel like that's been done before and they haven't really respected their answers?

R: Absolutely. I don't think teenagers are respected at all. I don't think their voices are listened to. I don't think they're treated like they're people. I think they're treated like they're sub-class because they are not "fully grown". But the more they're treated that way, the more they act out and do things that they aren't supposed to do. And f we treated them like they were actual people with actual opinions, we would actually get wonderful things from them because they are amazing, wonderful creatures with amazing, wonderful minds.

I: Do you feel like there's anything that we didn't have a chance to talk about that you really wanted a chance to bring up?

R: I got the gardens in, I got the teenagers thing in. I think those were the two big things I wanted to make sure to touch on.

I: I think it's a beautiful way to end with your words on teenagers because I feel very similarly.

R: They are definitely the generation that is going to be able to do something.