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Can you tell me something about Meadville that reflects what is great or what you love about this community?

One of the things that I think is kind of a signature of Meadville, is how other people are eager to greet each other. My father grew up in Meadville, and my grandparents were from the area, um, and we would be driving places and my dad would wave at the bus driver and he would wave at the guy on the street - and he would wave at the lady in the store, and we would say ' hey dad, who is that?' and he would say 'well I don't know' and we would say well why are you waving, and he would say, well you wave at people, you wave to be friendly, and so that happens still today, and you don't notice it so much until you go somewhere else and you notice that people aren't overly aggressive with like saying hello to people - and some places, people don't even make eye contact - and here that would be considered kind of an affront, kind of like an insult if you didn't say hi to someone - especially someone that you were passing really closely on the street. And I think that that kind of embodies some of the spirit of Meadville, or at least the spirit of Meadville that I grew up with is that people are just generally friendly - people don't mind talking to strangers, people don't mind helping strangers, um and that its just kind of a friendly place.

What matters to you most about living here?

Well, the main reason that I am here is because my family is here - my mother is here, my sisters and their families are here, I'm raising my family here and um that's probably the most important thing is that family connection. I like a small town atmosphere - I would like there to be more opportunities, but uh at the same time it only takes 10 minutes to get to work and I like that just about anyone on the street you know, and I like just that feeling of familiarity with everything, its very comforting.

What is your favorite memory of living in Meadville?

My favorite memory...mmm... so many. I think that maybe the memory that sticks with me and maybe because we're doing this interview around Christmas time, but When we were little, we lived on Hillcrest and I have 4 siblings and my mom and dad - and there's 8 years between 5 of us, so we were always kind of like a pack of kids and we lived in a house that was too small for us - you know we had 4 girls in a small bedroom and then my brother in a bedroom and my mom and dad and one of the things we would do on a pretty regular basis because we didn't have a lot of money is that we would go for rides. and so at Christmastime, we would drive around town and there were certain places that we would stop that were part of our tradition, and the Juniper Village that used to be the David Mead Inn and um, we would go up there and sometimes they would have music playing and we would just be in awe that they had these lights and you could hear music and we would drive over to the hospital and there would be a Santa sleigh on top of the roof and we would look for that and there were other homes, that were always decorated and it was part of our tradition to drive by. And then in the summertime we would go for drives, and I remember that my dad would just go to these places where I would think - we've never been on this road or I don't remember this at all - and as an adult I mean - cause Meadville/Crawford County isn't really that big of a place and we never really went that far - and I'm kind of amazed that he could pick places for us to go that we would believe in our young minds that we had never been. And of course places, like driving out by the hippy farm - back in the 60s that was a big deal there was a hippy farm where hippies lived and you would drive by and look at the hippies - it sounds really stupid, but that's what we did. If you google Meadville hippy farm, there are pictures and on some sights, it'll say like Meadville Memories 'remember driving by the hippy farm?' (laughing) so, its just weird, but kind of weird in a good way, and it reflects how even when we where young and we didn't have a lot of resources we still found lots of ways to have fun and to spend time together as a family.

Why do you stay?

Well I stay because my family is here. And honestly, if I was a more independent person I think I probably would have by now gone somewhere south, a little warmer, the older I get the harder the winters' get, um but in order for me to do that at this point in time I'd have to convince like 15 people to come with me

(laughing)

And uh, I don't know that any of them would go, so I 'm kind of stuck here.

What would make staying here easier?

Well, I joke, but global warming might really be a benefit to us...

I guess just more opportunities, a few new places to shop, new places to eat, a few new faces or unique opportunities, that might make it a little easier - I don't really have plans to move away so the question doesn't exactly fit, but that's what I think.

What things in Meadville capture the spirit of our town.

Well, the Diamond. I think the Diamond really - you know its often times filled with odd people doing strange things, I can't tell you the many times that I'm cutting through the Diamond to either go to the courthouse or to get somewhere, and I always run into someone that I know - or if I'm sitting there at that stop sign I always see someone that I know. And I can remember in the 70s going to street dances and they were at the diamond and I can remember different activities or events. I remember this one time these people from France came, and this one guy gave a speech in French and they didn't have any interpreters, so everybody was just kind of sitting around here like - oh I wonder what that French guy is saying (laughing) and uh, my joke is always that he probably said a lot of inflamatory things and we were all like...Yay because no one understood French. Yeah there's just a myriad of memories that go around about the Diamond and it is kind of the center of town, if you go that way you've got to go around it one way or another, and the Y is down there - um yeah -

What do you like about these memories of the Diamond?

Well, I love the quirkiness of it - I love that Meadville is a town made up of different people, I don't think it's the typical college town because there is a real balance between the smart, I guess crunchiness of the people at the college is balanced out with this very earthy group of uh, town, townie people, where you can really run into a myriad of people, all different kinds of people. and I like that.

What would you miss in Meadville if it wasn't here?

Well, I would miss the Diamond - I would definitely miss Allegheny College - I think that the college brings so much to the town from interesting people to interesting students to opportunities for growth and employment. I know growing up a lot of my friends' parents worked at the college and I know that they wouldn't have lived in Meadville if the college weren't a part of the town and so I just think that um Meadville would be a much darker and very very different place if our sole focus was on dog food and tool and dye.

What about meadville is important to continue in the future?

Well I really think that we need to continue this grass roots effort we have to understand each other better - I love the way that the college is reaching out to the community to try and bring people in - whether its about what are we gonna do about traffic on N Main St to different things along those lines - and I think as long as we continue that dialogue and open to how do we make Meadville better, uh, including all people in that question is really important to me, and really why I encouraged you to be a part of this project (Heart&Soul).

What do you want young people to experience when they grow up in Meadville?

well I hope they have opportunities if they want to stay here - like I really can't imagine you staying - like I can't imagine any scenario where you go to college and you turn to me and say wow, I'm gonna come back and live in meadville and I'm gonna have a great job and I'm going to raise a family = like right now I can't really see that to be possible unless you wanted to be a school teacher, um, so it would be great to have opportunities a higher level of skill and still want to come back and be part of a small town - I mean, right now, anybody that we know that graduates with a degree from a good school does not end up back in Meadville - you know they either go to Erie, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, or Buffalo, or even further away. So , that would be my - if there could be another industry, if there could be a way for there to be higher level opportunities for people that would either encourage people to come or encourage people to stay - that would be great.

What would you change to Make Meadville even better/ if you could have one wish for Meadville, what would it be?

I am really concerned about the heroine/opioid epidemic - and I really see it

On two fronts, like one its killing people, I mean heroine and opioids are killing people and for some people that doesn't seem to raise any alarms or make us think differently or want to reach out to people.

And then I think the crime that comes with people trying to get money for drugs is really becoming scary - and the idea that people need to arm themselves and of people begging for money downtown when you know it's for drugs, people having repeated overdoses - all of that is pretty scary to me and I know that there are some task forces in Meadville to look at that, but I think that it might take more than a task force, but it's pretty scary.

Well, thank you for talking to me today.