Neighborhood Walk with Bonnie, Jan, and Ruth. September 7, 2017

When did you each come to Meadville – how long have you lived here?

I was born here.

I was born here too.

1990 from Ambridge, PA, near Pittsburgh

So, what brought you here in 1990 –

My husband got transferred here from Mellon Bank

Were you glad to come here, or when you came were you kind of like, “I don’t know if I’m going to like it?!”

No, I was excited because I’d never moved out of Ambridge until I moved here.

So what are some things that you like most about Meadville – things that happen regularly here?

We have a nice neighborhood! We can walk around the whole neighborhood without going out in traffic, lots of streets

What is it about your neighborhood that you like?

The neighbors are like family. Everyone is close – everyone enjoys talking to everyone else.

Feel safe to let kids ride bikes and go out on their own

No through traffic

I didn’t grow up in Meadville – I grew up near Cochranton – I went to Guys Mills schools. Did you and your family come into Meadville much? Yes, there were stores in Meadville. You could get everything in Meadville. Maybe if you wanted something really special, you’d go to Erie…

If you saw in the paper a few weeks ago – there was a picture of downtown Meadville on a Friday or Saturday, but the sidewalks were packed full of people shopping, and it was always like that on a Friday night – I can remember that!

And we used to cruise on the Diamond. We had a couple drug stores in town where all the teenagers went because they had soda fountains. It was just really neat because it was a place where everyone congregated, ya know, we’d talk, and we used to have dances at the Y – the YW had dances, when we were in grade school, on Friday nights, and when we were in high school, the YM had dances in their gym, and the armory, where city hall is now, they used to have dances for the kids. And that’s what I hate about Meadville right now – there’s nothing for the teenage kids to do. And I think that’s why so many of them get in trouble.

I feel bad for them because we always had so many different things going on.

Roller skating rink – that was a big thing, then that closed down. And they used to take busses and go collect kids to go to the roller rink, so anybody could go even from the country.

You know, we used to have playgrounds near our house – every neighborhood had their own playground – we had one at Gator park which my kids absolutely loved, they were there all day long every day. Shelly just mentioned that the other day – “I wish my kids had Gator park to go to”

So the city staffed it? High school or college – usually college students I think.

They’d go up at 9 in the morning, come home for lunch, go back and come home at 4! They learned so man different crafts – it was something to do

Is there anything you’d say captures the spirit of our town?

I think most everyone is friendly. Of course it probably depends on where you are, but when we moved here , it seemed like, wow, this is just like living at home and in a short time you had all kinds of friends. Maybe that’s in town and if you lived further out, it’s a whole different story.

Jan – what’s your experience having grown up in the country and now living in town – do you have a preference? Yes, I do because I like neighbors. I lived on a farm and you worked all the time.

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

Diamond Park. I don’t’ know why – it’s just maybe because it’s always been here ever since I was little – I just think it’s – I just love riding around and seeing people sitting on benches, and kids playing, and now they have picnic tables. It’s just really nice.

My only thing is I wish they would do something and use it more, and I can never understand why they don’t’ have like craft shows like Franklin does with their park – and that would bring in a lot of money.

Second Saturday – yeah, that’s getting bigger, but that’s usually our local people, whereas if they used Diamond Park they could get crafters coming in from all over the area

Even Erie’s park does that once a year. They did that years ago, I can remember 2-3 years ago they did tid and I don’t’ know why it stopped. There were always a lot of people there and it was fun and something to look forward to it.

They have something like that at the Lew Davies Building in the fall

I think of the downtown mall – it’s small, but if those stores were filled it would be, like quite a few years ago, all the stores were filled down there. Rain or snow – it was a nice shopping area.

I think its’ starting to fill up more – I think they only have like a couple empty ones.

What was it like when you were young -was that there when you were a kid?

No – I’m trying to think what year they did that. Before the bypass went in? Yes, because my dad’s business was down there by the railroad.

What was the hotel that was so big? Lafayette? – Chestnut and Water – there were actually two. There was a hotel there? Did it get torn down when they did the bypass – I think there was a bar in the basement – one of them had a big fire and burned down. I can’t remember.

We used to have a big department store – 3 floors! The Crawford Store. I used to work there! Did you?? Yeah, in the office. Where was that located – on the corner of Water and Chestnut. So that building is still there? No – it isn’t. They tore it down for redevelopment.

Have you been to the new Woolen Mill? No I haven’t. Yes, but it’s not like everything is different though – there is a whole string of everything that is the same, like 5 dresses exactly the same. Yeah, I worried about that when I had a couple people call me that they went there – and I said, high end – it’s just not Meadville – I think she’s going to have a hard time making it. I really do.

But it’s nice to see new businesses – Yes it is and they’ve fixed that corner up nicely. That corner sure looks a lot better.

Jan, how about you, anything –

Well we’ve lost a lot of things like the Crawford store, Prince’s, JC Penny, Grants, all our good stores! We had a lot of dress shops, Jack’s pharmacy – Yes, Jack’s Pharmacy is still there, but they took the soda fountain out! Same location.

I wonder how a soda fountain would go over today, downtown? I think they’d love it – well, my grandkids would love it – they’d go anywhere for ice cream. But if it was downtown, it would seem that families and kids who live there could walk to it…yeah - and see, we’d go there after the dances – we’d go from the Y, we’d walk down chestnut st to either Jack’s, and there was a Wort’s drug store, down a bit further, kind of where the book store is now, and we’d go there, and then our parents would pick us up there. It was fun. We’d go there after the dance.

I like the Rec Center when we came – because that was someplace you could take your grandkids there to swim…

Is there anything that you would change to about Meadville to make it better – if money or resources weren’t an issue, is there one thing that you would wish for Meadville to make it a better place?

I’d change the weather! Once December comes, you can’t look out the window and it’s 6’ of snow outside! Yeah, but we don’t’ have hurricanes here! Yeah, I’ll shovel snow over dealing with 7 ‘ of water in my house!

I wish we would grow again. Well the Y out at Vernon is nice – yeah, but kids can’t walk to it. That’s true they can’t – and even if you’re driving it’s a ways out there. Our population keeps decreasing and that bothers me.

[Regarding some with bad experiences with the MMC, and some with good ones]

I’ve heard a lot of dissatisfied people who go elsewhere because we don’t’ have the doctors maybe?

I’ve heard from those who do the hiring for MMC that they have a really have a hard time getting qualified people here because they don’t want to live in this community.

A lot of it is the doctors’ wives – they don’t want to come here because there’s no shopping, I know a couple doctors who left town because their wives weren’t happy.

Frank was saying that they had to get new doctors and everything when they came here, and he found a doctor he really liked, and he had to have some testst and he said he could not believe how nice our hospital was compared to where he came from.

At Meadville, you go in and everyone wants to know if they can help you, and if you’re walking down the hall looking for something, somebody will walk up to and say can I help you and people will actually take you. And he said that our hospital at home was not like that at all.

When they switched over to the new emergency room doctor thing – when we weren’t using our own doctors anymore they got a firm to come in with their own doctors, people were not happy. And I heard a lot of complaints about that.

What about our cancer center? – I tell you we are so lucky to have that. I know a little bit about that because Ray was there. Everybody was really nice and cared about you. Well, they have people coming from everywhere – different states to have treatment there, and the same thing with our orthopedic associates – we have people coming from everywhere for our doctor.

We thought maybe we got that center, because maybe they checked to see how much cancer we have here – well I think that is part of it because we have so many.

Anything else you’d like to add?

Did anyone mention that we have so many churches – of all denominations? Is that a pro or a con? I think that’s good! They’re all shrinking though – they are! They’re all having their own problems, but that’s everywhere, nationwide.

Thank you!