PMC\_022417\_zimmer

my name is Peter Zimmer I live in Meadville

Great Peter. This is Peter McCaffrey doing the interview - on Friday February 24th 2017 Peter, these questions are orientated toward place where a lot of them experiences you have had  in Meadville specifically grounded in place.Things that happen here over and over again repeated in cycles. Things that you like about Meadville and things that challenge you and things that distinguish Meadville. I will sort of guide you with questions. To get an idea of what you are feeling.

What do you like most about Meadville:

The summer is the best part. And really that kind of plays into the fact that pretty much about anywhere in town you are about 5 minutes away from being almost in the middle of nowhere. You can be at the lake you can be at the swamps the woods, you can really get away very easily. The summer times lends itself to spending more time outside.

Specific Places you like to frequent:

All of French Creek from Waterford down to Franklin. Its an navigable river you can camp on the shore.You can do short trips like, from Saegertown to Meadville is less than 3 hours depending on how much water flow there is. or like Cambridge to Cochranton full day 12 hours, so that's one of my favorite things to do. Erie Wildlife refuge is a good spot for stargazing hiking - people go out there snowshoeing, cross country skiing, dog walking. Woodcock lake is great for like sunsets disc golf. and then in town what's really nice is - so there are about three ravines: the one right behind Robertson field un on campus here is you just walk through and there's a trail and what not. And then where I grew up Cora Clark park -basically in between Cora Clark park and Huidekoper there is another ravine. These are just kind of ignored places. You can develop them I mean - they're good water ways and kind of steep, but they're good place for kids to play, good places to walk your dog - I remember growing up we played paint ball back there and like capture the flag and a bunch of other stuff. In town those are my favorites. And the other ravine is kind of where the cemetery is - um Greendale cemetery and back in that way. That one - I mean because its a cemetery there isn't much development- I mean there is some development around, I mean a couple of houses that kind of abutt it - it seems to be those trees that are saved - there are Hemlock trees back there that are probably almost 100 years old, I mean they're massive. Unfortunately the Woods by Huidekoper are similar age, but a lot of them got cut down a few years ago. and Up by Robertson that I think was pretty much clear cut decades ago, and it seems that what they are doing now is select harvesting. So they are doing more tree management up there but you won't see the size of trees up there that you can by Greendale.  There are a couple of Beech trees up at Robertson that are pretty big - they're probably like 60, 70 years old.

To me in some in some ways that particular ravine like kind of the spiritual epicenter of Meadville in some ways - something that is so sheltered - It's just quite extraordinary.

Yeah it really is amazing, there is something really incredible about it. Whats nice is there are a couple of them, we've got these little pockets of areas that are not really isolated in the sense that there are houses and roads to get to them, but they're accessible, easy to get to they are public spaces, you know for the most part the City owns them, so we all own them. um and you can just kind of go and you know, hang out and do stuff.  and Generally they are pretty well kept. The one behind Corry park there are some maintained trails, if you've got some troublesome limbs or like some dangerous trees, they get addressed and taken care of and they're good assets.

When I visited the one behind the cemetery with Mark Ams, we just naturally quieted down, we just stopped talking  - some hushed reverence came out automatically. That is what great about the outdoors is like you are quiet, you get quiet, and then you get to hear everything.

Exactly. When you go outdoors, are these group activities- community activities or something you do alone?

Not necessarily solo activities but small groups maybe 4 or 5 people - but yeah maybe a few of us  go out to walk some dogs, or to go hiking or whatever.  But usually its either by myself or with one other person - they're like getaways.

Interesting, so you sort of have a balance of Town and Country, city and rural area here and both are very Accessible:

Yeah I definitely think so. The city of Meadville itself has got the things that you need -like grocery stores, laundry mats, pharmacies, whatever. A little bit of entertainment - movie theaters, stuff on campus going on uh things like at the parks - like Diamond Park or whatever, but then as far as like a larger metropolitan area, like we are are situated in a really accessible space so you know - 40 minutes north, you've got Erie, which isn't a huge city, but its got more.  um 90 minutes south you got Pittsburgh about 2 hours west you've got Cleveland and then  2 hours north you've got Buffalo. Or -  4 hours north you have Toronto, like the third largest city in North America. Yeah its really, I think its within about a 200 miles radius there's like 6 million people here.

That's incredible - that's a great statistic.

That's A lot of people.

You also have a huge lake up there. Like an inland sea.

Yeah its nice. And What so cool about that is the water that's up in Minnesota in like lake Superior does eventually filter down and come into lake Erie. So All of those lakes are all connected. So Its really one giant fresh water way which is really cool and like very I think important that I think we should respect and appreciate.

What do you mean that in respect to?

Not polluting it, not abusing - just making sure that it is - that continues to be the resource that we want it to be - you know natural resource.

You know French Creek - when I drove out to Chataqua, I crossed the french creek and whoo  - the waterway again is just an immense ecological system. How do you think that we are as a local entity managing our water resources?

I think you can look at it a few different ways.so, When I think of french creek I think of french creek conservancy - I think they do a very good job of promoting it, um educating people about it, um preserving it, um and maintaining it for years to come. I think that's great.

You know lately there's the big talk about The Meadville water source where we get out water from.

Which is where?

The wells are kind of over by 5th ward. I think there's 3 major wells that they pump water out of. and you know, We're pretty fortunate in this area because we're a glacial - glaciated soil, it filters very quickly and it captures water very easily. So there's you know really accessible water not that far down. One of the big conversations right now, is like well how do we manage the water source?

 So It used to managed by the city of meadville, then they sold that for like 3 million dollars, and now its managed by a private entity. And people in the city and meadville medical center especially are promoting flouridation of our water source - so to go with how does Meadville manage the water um its kind of a bunch of different avenues. Its not really the city because the city doesn't have water authority, I mean they're not providing the drinking water, the city is not managing the French creek watershed - really. So its kind of Reliant upon these other independent groups. I don if the entity that manages the water supply is a for profit - I imagine that it is. The French creek conservancy I'm pretty sure is not - its a land trust. And, We are not in the lake erie watershed, we're just south of it.

So if you look at the French creek watershed, um, it goes directly north and then it kind of follows the same bend that Lake Erie does, but 30 miles south. Like Pennsylvania and NY state that watershed is actually very very close to the lake.  Whereas in Ohio, you'll have like the Cuayahoga River, which is like starts in Portage County which is west of Pittsburgh and it goes all the way north into lake Erie - so just, basically on the other side of the Allegheny mountains, you've got the lake Erie watershed that comes way south, but because of the geology its - we're very different.  We are in the Ohio river - mississipi river water shed but if we were just 30 miles west we would be in the lake erie watershed.

I think there are some different priorities, I think that if you know, If we were in the lake erie water shed we might be paying more attention. One of the nice things about - We're in mississipi watershed but we are like one of the furthest out from it, so we're kind of like virgin water going into the Mississippi water shed, so we don't have all of the industrial waste and the residential waste that places like Cincinnati would have because they are further down the Ohio river.

So it kind of builds up and accumulates by the time it gets there.

Yeah, so you know some of the bigger water supplies in western PA - french creek turns into the Allegheny. And I think, it's little beaver that turns into big beaver which also flows into the Allegheny.  Both of those water supplies have a lot more industrial and residential use on them. So, We are really in a very unique position - of being a pristine untouched water source. As far as like French Creek and then because its such a fast like Glacialeted soil - it replenishes itself very quickly things get filtered out really quickly, so we've really got good water source.

We have high rain precipitation

Yeah we sure do

We are water rich, no question about that

Yeah definitely

This is a question I probably should have asked earlier, but how did you come to Meadville?

So I was born here. My dad grew up in saegertown. He was living in the meadville area - so this would have been like 35 years ago. And so he grew up in Saegertown, went to high school, went to college, went to Vietnam for a bit. Then moved back here and during that time he had a couple different jobs worked at Avtecs and I think maybe worked at Talon, and then ultimately I think he had a job with the city  - he was the health inspector for a while, and then he got a job with the state - he was health inspections - restaurant inspections, and then started doing water treatment and like uh dealing with industrial waste - like landfill remediation. During that time my mom from here, she's from Toledo, ohio - she grew up there, went to high school, went to college, and then she got a job at the Iroquois club - She was the manager of the Iroquois Club back in like the early 80s late 70s.  So they met in meadville. My Aunt was working for her at the Iroquois club and how she met my dad. They got married and had kids - and they've lived in the same house since I have been alive.

Where, up on Chestnut?

On Arch so its kind of the funny area where chestnut splits off and turns in to alden and then it merges with Arch - So I went to East end elementary school for a bit.  Yeah, so I Grew up there - after high school left and then 4 years ago moved back.

Where were you in the meantime?

After high school I did a year at Juniata College in Central PA, then I dropped out, and then I moved to Colorado for a bit- i lived in the mountains and worked at a restaurant. And it was really important... So both my parents were First generation college students, so it was important for kids to go to college too. So they thought it was really important that I get a degree, so I decided to go back to school.  I went to Denison University in Ohio, was there for 3 years, got my degree then moved to detroit MI. I was there for 2 and a  half years roughly, then i moved back here.

What drew you back here?

Well initially it was going to be a temporary stay. So i left detroit and I had studied cinema/film making - and that was the draw for michigan, MI had just passed some tax incentives build up their film industry and so I moved to MI to capitalize on that and to work in this burgeoning industry. And then now notorious Rick Snyder got elected and dismantled  the whole incentives and basically kind of the industry collapsed upon itself - I mean at that point it wasn't really an industry it was just growing. But I mean it captivated me, I mean I was a new graduate - a young educated, um wanting to work in the industry, willing to move to a new city - that was broken, like detroit is a failed city - there is really no beating around that bush - and they had something they were using to bring people into the state and into the city. Then they decided they didn't want to do that anymore. So I stuck around and I did some other things, but it wasn't what I had intended to do, so I moved back to meadville to wrap up a project.So -  in the meantime i had gone down to panama was living with  a college roommate of mine who was doing like Peace Corps. And we basically started shooting a documentary in panama around the people down there, their culture and like just what was going on. So, I Came back up to  meadville to wrap up that project and I was going to do some other projects and basically use that as a portfolio - to send it out, so I was looking at Boston, Atlanta, NY, LA, and Chicago - all these places that I thought about moving to. so I Started doing promotional videos, and one of the promotional videos was for Voodoo Brewery. So I was working with them for a few weeks and the event that we were promoting, it was their first barrel-room release. Which are now becoming like Huge - they're like hugely successful. They've got one coming up, I'm not sure when, but I mean these are huge events, they're doing 10s of thousands of dollars of business in a day. Like, they're Selling tons of product. And the beer that they're selling is like - I think they're 20 oz bottles and they're selling them from like 15 to $20 per bottle. They are these Massive undertakings. So, I Talked to them - like hey let me make make some videos for you guys and they're like - oh, promote this, this our first barrel-room release and we're super excited about it, you have to come  the day before and get a ticket because we only have a certain allotment, and so we were promoting and had this whole series or this half dozen videos . And I Went to drop off the lost batch and it's like a week before the event. I was talking to the guy running the kitchen before hand - like once we're done with these like barrel-room videos let's do some videos on the kitchen and like the food that you're making  - So I went in to drop off the last batch of videos and was talking to Matt and Curt the guys down there, and I went well where's Jess to talk about food? And like he quit, and was gone, and this was is like a week before this event. Well, I've worked in kitchens, let me give you a hand. So we talked some more and they had me come down, I think I came down on a Tuesday, Wednesday they had a fundraiser, Thursday they just had their regular food, Friday was the night before the event, and they had corded off some of the sidewalk and the road too, and they had basically put a waiting line in there where people  could camp out and wait, and they did, they probably had about 30 people were camping out on the street the night before. And so, like people are going to be here and they are going to be hungry and so Friday night we did a ton of food, Saturday was the event and there was probably a thousand people that walked through the doors that day. On Monday, they called me up and asked if I wanted this full time position.

So you cooked during that whole space?

Yeah - there were so many people, there was so much food, and I think at the time all they had was - a refrigerator, a steel table, two hot plates, and a big steam kettle and that was it - yeah, it was pretty nuts.

Is that kind of event particular to Meadville?

No, they have it all around, they are a fairly new thing, but as the craft brew industry has grown, they've become more popular, but yeah any of your more successful breweries do these barrel-room releases and basically what it is - you brew the beer, you get typically whisky barrels and then you age the beer in the barrels - certain beers lend themselves better than others

So the flavor of the whisky lingers in the barrels?

Yeah, its not so much - like why wood is such a great vehicle for storage is that it's really porous, so the whisky permeates the wood and your basically pulling the tannens out of the wood going into the beer or whatever you put in it - and tannens have flavor - its not like if you take a bourbon barrel and put beer in it that there will now be whisky in the beer, but you have the flavors that have comingled.

That's kind of cool. What did you learn about Meadville from the vantage point of being one of the chefs at Voodoo?

I met a lot of new people, I had been gone for about 5 years, and I got to work at arguably the coolest place in town, so I got to see the industry people, the older folks who have stuck around they were coming in, there was the faculty at allegheny coming in, there were students at Allegheny, and then there were people who were coming in over holiday breaks - basically my peers who had left town, but came back because of family.  I think the one thing that surprised me so much about Voodoo was the cross-sectional appeal. You would always hear these arguments like Voodoo, its so expensive, or I don't like that beer it tastes like whatever - and you typically think of that as kind of being a long kind of class divides. So you may have lower income folks who are like -I don't like Voodoo, I like drinking Bush or Yuengling like whatever, um and as diverse as the population of people who didn't like that beer it was equally diverse the people who did. You would have guys and groups of people coming over from CNJ Industries, from SecoWarick, you know, you fundamental laborers would come into Voodoo and enjoy the beer, but then you would also have you know the people who owned those businesses - the people who owned these multi-million dollar industries in town. So you had this really rich cross section of all different kinds of people who are into the same product and they're all hanging out at the same spot. And I thought that was really cool. And then because it's so new - and it's damn good beer - people from Pittsburgh all the time were coming up, people from Cleveland were coming over, so you would have people from out of town and they'd be like, never knew this spot was here - what else is around here.

Do they have other Voodoo locations?

Yeah, so they've expanded, the only place they brew is Meadville - they had the expansion on the other side of the arterial highway, their first expansion was in homestead, like a brew pub - you can buy the beer and get growlers filled. And then they opened one in Erie, I think on State Street, but that's again just a place where you can go and you can get beer and six packs and whatever, but they have a pretty big kitchen there too. I don't know if they highlight different beers at different locations or if they have a special beer based on those locations, I don't think so.

So they've made an imprint in surrounding communities.

Oh, definitely, they're a beer on the national stage - yeah they win national awards, they're arguably one of the breweries in the country - yeah and they're right here in Meadville.

So in Voodoo you saw this cross section of people getting along together sharing different views of the world, are there any other venues in the city where you see that happening?

Um, no, I don't think so, probably the only other place where you get as much of a cross-section is athletic events and you get a cross section because everybody with kids go to it. But that is also a specific demographic - and others that are left out, like post high school pre family, or maybe . The other kind of venues I think of are beer leagues - like bowling darts hockey, softball, soccer, those are also good cross sections.  And not that Meadville is very diverse - we're pretty middle class, pretty white. But there are of course also people on both ends so socioeconomic differences.  I think that there are some places where they co-mingle - those types of social leagues, I call them beer leagues, because they are usually at a bar and there’s usually drinking.

I just don't really know where people go to play, I don't see them as I might in another city.

It's not like they have an audience, so you're either in it or you're not. That I think is the major form of entertainment in this area.

Is there one or two things that specifically embody the spirit of Meadville, like beer leagues might be one of them.

I think so, I think that might be a pretty well defined element of our culture, of how we recreate - I also think that more of character make up, um, is kind of relentless sense of independence - there is a real sense of pride in being able to take care of yourself, and your home, and like your family, um you know one of the conversations that I hear all the time is people talking about how to fix stuff you know - lawnmower, their weedwacker, their kitchen sink, their toilet, like people are always talking about how to fix things - and everybody has a different opinion on how to do it, which is where the conversation can become really funny, um you know people working on small motors, atvs, dirt bikes, snow mobiles, motorcycles, there’s a lot of tinkerers around, and I think a lot of that is because of the industrial culture around - you know, its something that people grow up with - and I think a part of the socioeconomic make up is you know there aren't a lot of people who can just go out and buy everything new, so they fix it. Or they mess with it, and a lot of that comes from our manufacturing industry - people who know how to make stuff - like tool and dye is making stuff that makes other stuff, which is really interesting.  And then there's a lot of agriculture and its like, well if you're out on a farm and you've got an issue with your irrigation, well then you've got to fix it. and so there is a real sense of self reliance, and you might find that in most small towns, but it seems especially powerful around here.

A lot of that - socioeconomic to a degree, but its also long winters and you've got to be able to fend for yourself, to keep your people together and warm - you've got to know what you're doing out here.

Yeah, and then there's more practical stuff, like the agriculture is a thing, like a lot of people have gardens and grow their own food.  A lot of people go fishing, a lot of people go hunting, and they're not just doing it for the sport of it, they're doing it because its a food supplement - its a very economic way to get a lot of calories is to go out in the woods and harvest a 150 pound animal.

Yes

If something was taken away from Meadville that would really change the character of Meadville - what is it that you would really really miss

Um...well there is probably a couple of things, one the ravines we talked about before, and those types open spaces I think are really valuable - and they're all over - like the fairgrounds and the soccer field over behind Secowaric - theirs Huidekoper park and the woods behind there- if those were to be gone, I would be very disappointed, not just that they were gone, but also in the decision making of the people who decided that those were no longer important and there was a better alternative.  So I went to East End elementary school for a while, and I grew up walking to that school and um and then that school closed, and that was really sad.  I think community and neighborhood schools are really important, I think there are some profound lessons that can be taught and learned on a walk to and from school um and then also to have that immediate access to an institution of education. So that was something that did disappear and it was frustrating and annoying, and if something like that were to happen to you know 1st or 2nd district, um you know that would be disappointing as well - you know there used to be a 3rd district school and a school in 5th ward, schools have closed, and I think that is something that we should look at and have more conversations about, like how they operated in previous decades - you know the junior high closed, that was a beautiful school- it was a little run down and needed some work, but it was centrally located, a lot of kids could walk to it - so you see these smaller schools that are centrally located that maybe don't have massive parking lots closed down, get consolidated into larger schools that then people are driving to and I think that is a real missed opportunity.  I think that is some of the earliest experiential learning that kids can have is you know and it's not that every walk is great you know its kind of what we were talking about before -its cold here, winters are nasty, but there's a sense of self reliance on getting yourself to and from school um, you will have conflict resolution practice on the walk to and from school, and I think that it's important that kids learn how to do that within their peer groups and not always being able to go - hey teacher, here fix this problem, or mom and dad fix this problem. So that's disappointing to see a new culture take its place of being bussed in driving in and um its really just kind of a breakdown of community - you have fewer schools with more people in them, class sizes may or may not be getting larger (for the state of PA generally they are getting larger) I think that affects the quality of education.

What do you feel some of the challenges are here, and then after that, sort of project and some of the things you would like to see happening

I would like to see more sports leagues, like there's a new volleyball club or volleyball group and they've got these sand courts over at 5th ward, they're beautiful, its a great thing to do outside, you know adults can play and kids can run around and it's a really good place for socializing um you know there's a summer league for soccer and that's great, I'd like to see that get bigger.  You know cornhole is popular I'd like to see some other "like throwing stuff at stuff sports" horseshoes, cornhole, bocci, quate, kev, but you're throwing stuff at other stuff and somebody gets to win.  I think having places for people to go and do that to have some organization, to have an interplay of adults and younger people.  There used to be this awesome 3 on 3 basketball tournament - huge, it was like THE summer event, it was down around the diamond usually and they would bring in these street basketball hoops and you would have a tournament and it would go all weekend and it was awesome.

Wow

Like I mean, scores of teams - you would have mixes of teams, with a 10 and under etc to adult teams.  And I think games were like 7 minutes, so you would play 3 on 3 for 7 minutes take a break, play another game - they were amazing and they were such a huge event.

And 3 on 3 is its own game, its way different than 5 on 5 - and these were half court. Everyone's running back and forth and it was great. So to see stuff like that you know, um just stuff where people are out together, they could be playing sports, it could be music, it could be barbeque, it could be all at one time - I think that's a good way to make connections with other people and obviously its kind of self selecting- people who want to go that stuff - but at least there's an outlet, you know and you can't say Nothin's going on - and that's always the biggest complaint - aw Nothin's going on - there's nothing to do in Meadville.

Did you make it Winterfest this past weekend?

I didn't - you know I was really sick this weekend - and I was just knocked down, I started getting sick Thursday, and then Friday I'm like man I don't feel good, and Saturday I was like I was garbage - but yeah stuff like that (winterfest), and then this Saturday out at Conneaut Lake is the ice house fest, similar concept, um stuff like that is great.

Yeah

And they do happen, I think one of the most challenging things is communicating with other people that it's going on - um we don't have a singular news source that informs people of all the different events - you know I know there are some initiatives to get it going, Meadville Calendar is one, um you know the Tribune does an alright job of getting stuff publicized, but only if you send it in - very rarely are they doing outreach about it.

I do see hope in that Meadville Calendar concept

Yeah its a great idea, um and other places work on it - there's a couple different initiatives, there's one in Conneaut Lake, there's a Connect a Lakes which is like Conneaut, Wilhelm, Shenango, and maybe another one - all trying to get on board with the stuff that they are sharing. So yeah I'd like to see more of that.  I'd like to see more educational opportunities -you know I think the READ program is a great addition to the area - the robotics program in Meadville is super cool - you know having more stuff like that would be really advantageous.

If you had one wish for Meadville, what would it be?

I think one wish would uh to have an avenue to reach more residents - to have a way to merely contact people so that they can be informed and then they can choose to do or not do something uh I think that is kind of the simplest way to kind of put it. I mean it would be great to say, yeah I wish everybody were more involved and helped out their neighbors more and did all this stuff - and yeah that would be great it would be awesome, but a more realistic or fundamental thing, where you're not wishing somebody to do something that they may not want to do is just to have an outlet to inform them, and say Hey, people - everybody this is what's going on and this is how you can get involved if you want and if not, that's fine too. But I think we have seen so many people who want to do stuff and want to get involved, but they don't necessarily know what else is going on or what the timeline is or what groups exist and I just think it would be so much more effective, efficient, if we had a better tool to inform people of what's going on. And then they can decide what they want to do.

That's great - wow.