So, I will just ask you to say your name the first time before you talk just so we get your name. So, I will ask what are some thing you love about Meadville? And you can start with a story, start brainstorming, um, you can tell me a story about something that happened to you that was really fun or that you cared about.

Merry Lee Melis. Um, I grew up in the Meadville area and I always like the different activities were available for families. We used to come down to the Halloween Parade and park their by the Academy Theater and then climb up on top of the car so we could see and we would hangout and watch the parade when we were younger. When we got to be teenagers they were not so fawned of us on the roof of the car. But, the Academy Theater always had movies and there was a group that moved up to the Odd Fellows building that did plays in the community theater. There were lots of choices for activities for people to come to and they were not that expensive.

I am Joyce Aredneck and I am not form here but I have lived in the area for a little more that 20 years almost a little over 21 years and I guess I like the small community and the friendliness of everybody that lives around the area, and the fact that there are colleges close by that people can go to. Different activities like Marry eluded too.

I have no idea what to say.

Ya, that's fine. This is so informal we are just trying to talk and share a story.

I'm going to read a paragraph from a book that kind of summarizes how I feel. The name of the book is The Long Live The Kind and autobiography of Clark Able by Win Tornapin published in 1976, it's page 30. First paragraph, on page 30 and it is talking about two cities, Meadville, PA and Gadez in Ohio, but I think everything in here pretty much reflects at least some of my experiences in Meadville. 'These are rural Appalachian town Meadville and Gadez, typically of borderline Midwestern communities. Were populations grow to a few thousand and seemingly remain with the same number of people coming as going, dying as being born, in such towns you are considered a newcomer until you have been here 20 years. They were muddy make shift foot hill cities at the turn of the century, dewy in the spring, snowy in the winter, and muggy hot in the summer. They were towns near lakes where kids learned to fish and swim, and groups would gather for outings while the members of a church or all the oil men in their family or their offspring of the old sheepherders. They were square towns with good intentions as much as the heart of America as any amber wheat fields or purple planes.

Can you tell me what brought you to that particular in the book?

We are discarding our collection most of it. When the books get discarded I get to look at the big cart of books and I try to save a book, and I never know what I am going to save, but out of that cart I am going to save one book. And, this book has not been circulated, well it circulated six years ago. So, it is on the cutting block and I picked this up because I knew Clark Able spent his childhood here, his parents live down what's called gable hill and he spent his younger years here so I thought there would be a mention in their about Meadville, and so I looked and somebody had actually ex-ed that paragraph before I got to it. And, I read that paragraph now the next paragraph keeps going on with that same though process it is extremely turged 04:08 to the highest degrees, so I won't repeat the rest of it. But, that paragraph really summarizes how, my own insights about Meadville. Especially about being here, I cam here 25, what 26 years ago and I know the feeling of being here 20 years and still being considered as an outsider. So, that's what brought me, I actually saved the book, and I have used that now in like three or four presentation that quote so.

I will ask you, but for everyone as well, I'm interested in what brought folks to Meadville, either to work here or to live here?

Well, I lived my whole life in Erie, I went to school in Erie, well I was born in Cleveland but I spent most of my elementary and college career in Erie. I did get my masters degree in Tampa but I was working at the Erie library and this job came up and I applied for it, the first time I ever came to this town though I lived my whole life in Erie, was when I came to interview for this job. So, I had never been to Meadville, never been to the fair, so that's what, this job brought me to this town.

Anyone else?

My husbands job brought me to the area, we live by Cambridge Springs, then I saw the add in the paper and that's why I came to Meadville I applied for the job.

My dad worked at the Talon plant all his life. He ran the tape through the machine that took the coils and made the teeth for the zipper, and I could to go on take your kid to work day one day, and I got to see the machine that he ran.

I am Cindy Aims, I grew up here, I went to Sagertown. I only lived 5 or 6 miles out of town so I was always coming here and I just decided to stick around, creature of habit.

I want to do a couple follow ups, I mean for all of you I am just interested in a little bit more into maybe what like the spirit when you first got here was like, what do you feel like the spirit of the town? And, you can define spirit however you want to really, whatever you like, maybe the feeling that you get when you are walking around or when y ou drive here every morning or when you wake up in the morning and step out of your house.

Well, I like that it is a walk-able City, and I walk almost every day to work. And, you would be surprised how many people come up to me and say aren't you that guy from the library and they say you walk by my house everyday. So, it is a really sens of community out there, everybody kind of watches what is going on, it's a small town so everybody knows what's going on. And, I like that level of conectedness, I like the level that I can go out and people know me, so?

Why is that something that is important?

The familiarity, its just like America was back in 1955 in many respects. We have been very insulated in this town and that's the reason why everybody here except for choice but everybody here has connection to this town, and that is not by accident, I can't recruit people to move into the City, I mean that is why we do not recruit people to work at this library, I have tried that, that does not work. So what we have to do is we have to go out and tell them internally so when we hire someone we identify them as being excellent then we pay for their education to go get their masters degree because we cannot recruit people into this down we have to develop everything locally. It is a credit to this City, it is a credit to this library that we do things in this library that very few other countries do, we do a completely open source program where we write our own software at this library and then manage it and distribute it to other libraries across the whole world, and I think it's that kind of spirit that we are used to doing things on our own that allows us to do that at this library.

What do others think about that?

Well, I know this area didn't go through the depression a way a lot of the others did because we had so many different wide variety of manufacturing jobs you had the Talloon plant, they made artificial fibers at the viscos plant, and so on and so on and that's why I think people tend to stick in this area because they didn't have to leave for jobs, jobs were always here, not so much now. But, there were during the war there was the TNT, where they stored the TNT not to far from here down by Atlanta

Pieced and Orden.

Write, Pieced and orden. We always called that the TNT because my mom lived in one of those 09:09 after the war. And, there was a lot of farming in this area a lot of different groups of people with the Mennonites and the Amish and we have one of the larger African American communities in Crawford County in town. So, we have some variety too but people still tend to stay here because the jobs are still here.

And did your Father move here because of Talloon or?

He was from Atlantic so he didn't have that far to come to get to Meadville. His parents ran a grocery store, which got basically destroyed by the tornadoes so it's no longer there. his family was coming from Atlantic and coming into Meadville was not that big a drive, in fact he was driving into town to go to work at the Talloon plant when somebody stopped him and told him he really didn't need to go into work today because he had just heard on the ready, this was Halloween, that Martians had invaded, and he's going okay ya. And he went to work didn't think twice about it and then he heard the radio broadcast from the Ortion Mercury theater here.

I have never heard that story.

So, my Aunt was a teacher in one of the local schools, like I said their were jobs for a long time here so people did not really need to go hunting around for jobs.

Do you think you Dad would echo similar sentiments about the spirit of the town?

Probably, because he helped found one of the local volunteer fire departments, so he volunteered that way. He did not belong to any social clubs but there have been a lot of them who have been in town in Lions and the Elks and what not.

And the service clubs.

Ya, the Italian civic center and all those different clubs that people could belong to if they wanted to there's lots of different kinds of churches in the area. So, when my brother wanted to go to the Baptist Church there was one for him, they were Presbyterians.They took us to the Baptist Church if that was were we wanted to go because there were choices.

Anyone else? Spirit of the town?

Well one thing I like about it is that it is small, but it's not too small. It doesn't take too long to drive out of town and within a few miles you can be in the woods and I like how close we are too nature and it feels like we are surrounded, like I have birds outside my window. One year, I did a count and I had like 20 different bird varieties outside my house.

Must have been before you got all of those cats.

Haha.

Why is being close to nature something important to you?

It's something I really like since I was a kid we always went camping...

She grew up right next to nature too...

Not really we were on route 98 so it didn't feel like we were in nature, but we went camping a lot. And, I always spent a lot of times in the woods. Just wandering around12:24 .

I think I agree with Cindy on that one because I am surrounded by woods on two sides and a field across from me and it kind of nice. I am not the far from Erie, not that far from here, you can go to the movies if you want there are things to do. I am not one who needs a lot of night life entertainment so I don't miss any of that. But, I like being close to nature too, I grew up, actually I lived outside of, I lived in Erie for a few years too when I was younger, and we had friends that lived about three minutes outside where I live now, outside of Cambridge Springs, and I used to go in the woods in the winter, I mean all summer an play in the creeks in stuff, and I have the same, you know I take my grandkids there to do that now. And you can walk on Ernst trail and it is nice.

When my family comes from Chicago I have half an acre back yard, it's gigantic!

Haha.

Big yard! And there are trees time, and a swamp to go swamping in. All that start of stuff, and a fire haul to wake you up, it's very exciting!

Haha.

You know I am going to Chicago this weekend and maybe I will walk around with a sign on my chest that says that I have a backyard.

I have a big backyard!

That will make you popular!

Ya, right!

Because their backyard is about the size of this table.

Is there something that if, if something just like picked up and left the town, maybe it's something, maybe it's someone, maybe it's a place, a feeling, if it left the town you would be like this doesn't really feel like Meadville anymore?

The Market House.

Can you say why? Why do you think that?

Just because it feels like a central hub for activity and there's vendors and Second Saturday, there is always something going on down there.

Do you have a particular story about a time where you were at the Market House?

Um, not really.

You can think about it too.

We used to have a drum circle and there were a couple times where we did drumming along with Couty Harris's Tai-chi group and that was a lot of fun. So, we are drumming like mad and everybody is doing the Tai-chi and people are watching it was just really fun.

Have you ever done Tai-chi?

No. I have not.

I think I would say the fairgrounds, the Crawford County Fair Grounds because not only is the fair the big thing up there but there are lots of other things that go there or come into town. I got to see the Liperzoner Stallions, ya up there on the fair grounds, and if you like demolition derbys they are up their too. And they host recycling events, and all kidns of things like that. So, if they ever sold that to put up condos I would be very upset.

Is there any one specific time that you would like to talk about?

I tend to go to the fair that is what I associate with the grounds up there. We went up there is young-ins and we went up to one of the booths that was up there and this guy got to talking to us and he had all of these cowboy hats, and he asked us or name and we were talking to him and he's working with a bottle of glue writing our names on these cowboy hats and then putting glitter on it, and then saying that will be $2, which was a substantial piece of change at the time. And, we bought them because we were stupid enough.

You could have just wiped it off.

I know! But, we bought them and we wore them. But, we always go up and play the games, I go up there a lot of years with the same friend.

What keeps you coming back to the fair?

Well, we like the food. The junk food is the main factor.

Haha.

It's amazing that it's only up their for a week or 8 days whatever it is now, but it's like that musical16:41 it's like you leave on the last Saturday in September and then last Saturday in August and then you go the Third August and it's like the same thing, it doesn't change, everything is always in the same spot. All the vendors are in the same spot.

We know where to find the rabbits.

Right, haha.

Ya, it is amazing it's just. I used to be17:06 and we had the Pancake Palace up there for many years, and we actually spent, we would start getting it ready in June and we would be up there you know two nights a week from June all the way to September. So, I have a lot of memories being up there when nothings up there just the cleaning, cleaning the shit out of the...

There's a charming story...

Off the gill.

Now, Conneaut Lake has gone way by the way side. We used to go to Conneaut Lake park all the time and it's got smaller as I have gotten older. It's amazing how much smaller it seems, and then one building after another burnt down or stopped being used and that's kind of how sad I would be if something like that happened to the fair grounds.

That's the thing with this town is that everybody talks about cuts and cutting back and doing more with less and I am just freaking tired of it. I am. I really want the 1960's back in some respects. I mean I was born 62, and I remember the 60's and back then we grew our way out of these problems. We didn't cut things and cut and cut and cut. The way we have to go forward not only for Meadville, but for society as a whole is to build, to invest, and to put our money where our mouth is. This cutting, cutting, cutting, is just not getting us anywhere, it's just making everybody frustrated and fighting over morsels, and what we need to do is grow, as a society, as an economy, and as a people. I think if we do that we will be much better off.

There is less community involvement then there was in my youth. Fewer people volunteering, fewer people stepping up and taking leadership positions, and I'm not sure people wouldn't still do that, it's just that it doesn't occur to them or nobody's approached them in the right way or...

When I moved into this town the 19:24 club in Meadville had 150 people in it, and the reason it had 150 people in it was because every bank manager had to belong to a service club, every law firm had at least two or three people, most partners were invested into service clubs. Every business that did business in this town belonged to a service club or something, and that was payed by the businesses. In a service club it costs about a 100 and a quarter to belong to it, it's about a 500 dollar a year investment because of insurances and meetings and so on and so forth. And, those businesses were willing to make that $500 investment in the communities. Well, Quanas right now last time I went to a meeting we had 20 members there, what's the difference now, well the businesses will no longer pay the fees, the banks no longer require their vice presidents to belong to a service club, and that's the thing I am talking about these cuts. Ya, we saved $20,000 this year by not having our members go into the service club, but that $20,000 created an investment in the community that cannot be measured but it was much more than the $20,000 that went into it and that's what we are loosing and that's why these constant cuts are sucking the life out of this country and it needs to stop, we need to get a new perspective on things. And have the records show that John Bryce is a graduate from Gannon University in the class of accounting. I have a major accounting so I know about e-commerce and I know how...

I don't know if anyone else wanted to share. Okay, well where, I guess I would like to ask John got to talk about a little bit of challenges he presently sought, does anyone else some challenges and maybe what they would like to see in five years happen to get at some of those challenges?

Well, I know that their High School has started pushing out to do community service and that is a fairly new with in the last 5-10 years, and it would be nice if it was a little better organized instead of just saying go out and do some community service. Maybe, if we had some like the Key Club and other student organizations and we got the teenagers interested in volunteering most of them would probably be more than willing to step in and help out with community events and things like that. If they A knew how to do it, were encouraged to do it, and got the chance to try it out and enjoy it. I know we have the Make A Difference Day and I am trying to think of any other really organized things and there are not a whole lot.

So, in five years if those things happen what would be different about it?

Well, I think more people would be invested in the community. If you could see ya I worked on that, I helped clean up the Diamond Park after a storm. I'm just making stuff up off the top of my head, but I know that the Make A Difference Day folks go ahead and do projects that have been requested they have built a ramp over at the 23:09 Cultural Center. And, they worked all day on it and that ramp is still there it is still good and they can go back and point to it and say ya I helped with that. I don't know project like that were many generations can get involved and work together.

And, you said invest in your community what exactly does that mean?

Well, I am not talking investing money, I am talking investing time, something that gives you pride afterwards but something that kinds of have a lasting impact. Mowing someones lawn is a very nice thing to do, but that grass is going to grow back. But, having a project where people can go and contribute at their skill level, whether it's fetching and totting or hammering or whatever and putting something together that's a little more permanent. Something you can point to and say, ya we worked on that a whole bunch of us did that.

And, not only would that help the person that they were helping25:51 but it was also bring people together. You would meet no people and...

socially...

Ya, socially I think that would bring people closer together.

Ya.

The question was what challenges do you see and what would you like to see in five years times to make those challenges I guess strengths?

The problem is that there are nothing here for kids or after you graduate college. We have a wonderful college up on the hill, one of the best for year tradition colleges in the United States, but none of those people stay here. We invest all this time and effort for them to come to this community and then they all leave as soon as they graduate, and the reason they leave is because we don't have the high tech industries here that this economy requires so there really needs to be an incubator or some type of a place where local industry can work with the Allegheny College students and I think we would get a lot of synergies off that. We have Allegheny students come in here as work studies and we have had some unbelievable students we had one student who we found out he was working at the circulation desk checking books in and out and then after a year and a half we discovered he was a computer science major and we put him in the IT department and he ended up writing programs for us that allow libraries to share resources across the state. And, I think there are a lot of stores out there and there just needs to be more partnerships between the local industry and a more structured way of doing those types of things. Frankly if you want to grow your way out of the problem you have to invest in the future technology and the future infrastructure and that is all digitally bound pretty much, so that is the future to success and to growing.

Something else I think is that more needs to be done to encourage kids to consider going into a trade rather than going into straight to college. I graduated in 92 and I feel like I was just steered into an academic track, and it was just assumed that I was going to go to college and I had no clue what I really wanted to do and if I had been encouraged to explore various trade school kind of things, I might have chosen an entirely different route. Not that I am unhappy with where I am now I get to tinker with things all day, but...

What do you think that encouragement might have looked like say in 5 years, if this was happening what might it look like?

Well, like schools working with businesses to do mentoring and to give kids opportunities to go out into various businesses and industries and see what working in those industries is like...

Ya I had one of my patrons just a couple weeks ago that fact that we are loosing a lot of skills electricians, carpenters, because kids aren't going into those things anymore and in the future we might have a shortage of people that know how to do regular work like build and remodel a house, you know that kind of thing. And, I know my soon is getting out of service in a year and he has already told me that he doesn't think he is coming back to this area because there is nothing for him to do here, he is in computers also.

Well, I tell you, you go down to Happy Valley.

What's Happy Valley?

State College!

And you look at Meadville and it is completely a 180 different degree, everything is growing down there, there is bustle. Now it is a much larger University I understand hat but the community is not all that much bigger than this community. And, it is just because the college and the community are so well integrated they feed off of each other and you can just feel it there is an energy there. You can just feel it in the town it is incredible...

I totally agree... it's amazing. You can feel the energy in State College.

So, that's what we have to figure out, that is what we have to tap into, it is here. There needs to be more work done up at the hill and more work done down here. The college has always been separate from this town you look at it at the begging of the 19th century, early 19th century that was it's own, Meadville was not up there back then. Meadville didn't really hit that area till about 1920 so uh, it's just always developed its own attitude up there and it just never worked its way down, and I think the future for both organizations, the community of Meadville and the college of Allegheny we really need to integrate our operations much more closely and much more, have a more unified strategy then what we do right now.

What would make it easier for people like you tor your kids, or people that you know to stay in this area?

Jobs.

Good paying jobs. My son I am sure could probably get a job, but I am not sure if how well he could support himself.

The problem we have here is our Winters, they are tough. You do not realize how tough they are until you move somewhere else for a short period of time. And so, we have to be able to retain our local capital, local30:14 , our local people and because like I said you cannot recruit people. The only way you can live through or winters are you understand it you have lived through it before. You really can't recruit people to come in here, so you have to make the investment in our young people. It is the truth. You can't recruit someone who lived in North Carolina to come up here, I don't care how nice the community is.

30:37 from Maryland.

I would probably move if I could to North Carolina. Not that I don't like the area.

Why do you think I buy property down in Florida.

Do you think if your son knew he had a well paying job here he would move back?

He might, he has been living in a warm climate for 9 years, Las Vegas and now San Antonio for his whole career and he said he wants a change of season. He said he is looking for somewhere, he likes to snow board, and so he is looking to move and he is in computer security in the Air Force.31:17

Jobs that just aren't around here.

Ya.

And he is head of the computer security where he is at right now, so there is nothing that is going to pay him or be comparable around here.

I let things simmer every one in a while in case anyone has a bubbling thought that they want to....

It's about 20 minutes long...haha

And his battery died on his phone, it's not lit up anymore by the way.

Ah! No, I am just kidding.

We are about wrapping up, I just want to ask if you all had a magic wand and you could grant one wish to this area to this community what would that wish be? Take some time to think about it if you would like.

I was going to say less snow..but hahaha.

Global warming is taking care of that haha.

That would take a magic wand.

Bring the manufacturing jobs back.

What? That's not going to happen.

It's a magic wand!

hahaa.

I'm not talking realistic here.

Well, let's dig at that just a little I mean so what about the manufacturing jobs do you want?

Well, something that is modern. Right, I don't want them to go back to Talloon or Vizqos, but something that would be bringing technological jobs in there so that they would be making things that could be used around the world. I think of the Tool and Die shops that can make things that pretty much can be used anywhere so long as you tell them what specifications you want they can make them for you, kind of thing. But, we need to modernize the kinds of jobs we have, so maybe they will pay a little better, tap into a world market instead of just hoping to sell the zipper.

Is there anything else about those jobs you think that makes them really valuable?

The middle class has lost the chances to get the jobs that pay enough so that one family member can support the whole family, that's what's going on in this area. Both parents pretty much have to work, whether that is full time or part time or both of them work two part time jobs or whatever it is. But, the wages need to be enough so that you can support the family so that you have go the leisure time to enjoy the area and all this kind of stuff instead of hoping from one job to the next to keep just the basic bills paid.

Globalism has destroyed the economic basis of this community. Frankly, even if we had manufacturing jobs come back to day, you still have to compete with the cost of China, India, Vietnam, Bangladeshi, and as such the manufactures cannot pay what we would have as a livable wage based on those types of jobs, and frankly, if you want a livable wage then you have to invest in the upper parts of the economic spectrum where we don't compete on a global basis or those countries can compete on a global basis, and in that area this community is not kept up, we are not kept up in the high tech or the higher

34:58 services. And, those are the types of things that we have to do. Quite frankly,in those area, you look at the biggest employer in the town and I think it is the hospital.

Mhm, it is.

And, pretty much that organization is not necessarily viable anymore and it is going to be more and more challenging with them going forward to maintain that and if you loose the medical positions that is one of the few things that are propping is up right now and things are going to get difficult very, very quickly. If you are looking for a magic wand for this town it is really the insight that we do have with our own capability to change, but we are going to have to change in ways that we don't want to in some respects or that we are not comfortable with. We have to get outside of our comfort zone. I think if we get outside of our comfort zone and if we didn't go in there with preconceived notions or how we have operated for the past hundred years there might be opportunities for us to, to form partnerships and form areas of common sense of the common good that we all share that we want to do better and we want to expand to improve and I think if everybody came together under those circumstances I think there might be an opportunity to create something unique it can be done. I mean this organization proves it can be done. You just have to get rid of the shackles of preconceived notions and the way things have been done in the past.

Can you point at all to those comfort zones or preconceived notions, or something in particular that stands out to you?

Well, a number of years somebody came up here and they wanted to, they were talking about doing it in Pittsburgh but this area would have probably benefited also, high speed rail situation, and if you look at that and the first question I was in was has this ever been done before? No. It is a new technology it is a new idea, and that took the energy right out of the room because nobody in that room had the energy to buy into something that hasn't been done before. I hate to say this but I saw a clip of Donald Trump this morning and he was mentioning that Abraham Lincoln in 1832 ran on the platform of congress based on bringing railroads to Springfield Illinois. And nobody in Springfield had ever seen a locomotive he had never seen a locomotive, but he had the instinct that, that community needed to be a part of the railroad system, and frankly, that is the type of thinking we have to have here. We have to thinking that we are part of something bigger and that we can go out and compete with China and so forth and so on if we bring our unique perspective and our unique capabilites that we have in this town. We need to go out there and find what needs to be done and go out and do it, its we need to grow. We have to have the can do spirit at one time this country..\*emotional\*.we went out and did it. You look at what we did in World War II where we started with nothing and we had the 42nd largest army the United States in 1940 and by 45' nobody could beat us. We need that spirit. I'm done.

Does anyone else have anything to add to that or to the magic wand?

I can't top that.

Haha.

We are not about topping each other.

We are all coming to this in our own sort of ways so.

Nope, I did my magic wand.

Me too.

Well, I just want to give an opportunity this is sort of a chance to if you have anything to say about Meadville you can, this isn't your only chance obviously, but this is a chance.

Good luck! It is a wonderful goal that you have and I hope that something good comes out of it.

Well, don't wish us good luck, wish us all good luck. We are all just the same as you guys.

Ya, but you are gathering the information in one place. Were it might do some good.

There are a lot of well intentioned people in this town if we all can just get behind some things, we can make a change.