Heather: MY relationship began when I was a Bonner working at women’s services. It made me get to know the area because…talking with people who were living there all their lives. Staying over the summer and get to do fun things.

Staying in Meadville has helped me in seeing the value of staying in a small town. Usually success is labeled to a big city and jumping in to something new and succeeding immediately or dealing with that struggle that you’re expected to have. But seeing the value of growing your experience over a long time, you can get so much out of it.

If you want to leave and you know that you really want to, I would really encourage that. If this is where your heart is but your brain tells you to be somewhere else, I would listen to your heart because there’s so much that you can’t see until you’re in it.

Taylor: FS EVSC classes took her downtown. I stayed over the summer and that was an awesome time. The best kept secret about Meadville is that the summers are wonderful.

I went away for a year and did a fellowship in Boston. Everyone says you’re supposed to go to a big city after school and that makes you successful. When the year ended, I was like, “What do I want to do to be happy?” and I wanted to be in a place where there were people that I loved. Meadville was the last place I’d been really happy. I was looking for people I loved and this is where the people were. Feeling like you could come back and do change things in a place you know rather than moving somewhere random and saying “I am going to fix things!”

I don’t like being in cities where you can’t see the depressing stuff going on because it seems like a lie. Meadville feels authentic, even in its fucked-up-ness. None of us know what we’re going to do.

The world is going to tell you you’re not successful if you stay here. They make you feel like you have to go do something new and exciting…and maybe you do. But there’s a lot of value in staying in a place that you have an understanding of or you want to deepen your understanding of.

Get a bunch of friends to stay together and figure it out!

Paige: The summers were definitely the thing that solidified the relationship, beyond service, attending events with community members. Ian Colley took his residents downtown. There are so many wonderful things to do here if you look for them and if you have people to connect you.

I want to run around and explore new different things… I want to go to a place that I know that I love and where there are people that I love. There can be excitement and adventure and new things in the same place if you look at it from a different angle.

I went to a place that I didn’t know and I don’t want to do that ever again. I need to be surrounded by excitement and adventures and new things, yes, but it’s also about the people and having a connection to place.

Austin: As a student, I wasn’t constantly thinking about Meadville every day. I did service Saturday’s and make a difference day, but, other than a church downtown, I didn’t get involved in any organizations downtown.

As an admissions counselor, I try to take the mentality that students have of Meadville and try to turn that around even before they get here. It’s possible to do just about anything in this town. When I moved back to Meadville, I wasn’t sure if this would be just a stop along the way. Meadville has done a good job of teaching me what I can do and what I can’t do. Meadville has been very forgiving to me.

So, since moving back to Meadville, I’ve really been able to become part of the community a lot more. Even just sitting on the porch with the people who live under me. I’ve really grown to love my connections and my place in this town.

Zach: I would engage in safe spaces for Allegheny students like the market house. Graduating was something I didn’t want to do. I chose to make a comfortable transition in a place I felt safe in. And seeing what Meadville had offered me for four years, I felt guilty and wanted to do something for Meadville in the smallest sense of the word. It felt like a nice half step into the adult world rather than moving everything and changing everything.

Autumn: I chose to stay during the summer I was here and that’s when I fell in love with Meadville. I decided that I would stay here for a year or two as a transition time. And now, I’m getting more and more entrenched in things. It’s going to be hard to make that transition.

I fear that I won’t leave because I’m getting more immersed and investing more time and energy in. Part of me doesn’t want to leave and not see the things I’m working on happen. Part of me feels like if I stay indefinitely that it may be because I’m comfortable and safe here and I didn’t take a risk. But maybe staying here is the risk I should take. Because people in big cities aren’t inherently happier.

Pick one organization or something you can get involved in and meet people through those in a way that you can meet people who already live here. See if you can get a bunch of people to stay!

Lee: I said that I saw a lot of potential in certain things and I was excited by that. I thought if I devoted time to those things, that potential could be organized. It’s such a small town that anyone can do anything. You can do anything you want in this town because there are so few people here. If you want to become mayor…it’s not that hard.

It is such a safe environment that you can try something new and have enough support to fall back on. It’s a great place to come back to and a great place to go.

This year, many recent graduates have decided to stick around or return to Meadville after graduation. I decided to get 7 of these graduates together in a story circle to discuss why they stayed and what impact their decision was having on their future plans. This not only made a great story, but was also a chance for these graduates to connect and reflect on their time so far.

What was your relationship to Meadville as a student?

“As a student, I wasn’t thinking about Meadville every day. I did service Saturday’s and make a difference day, but, other than a church downtown, I didn’t get involved in any organizations,” said Austin Rock ’14 who returned to Meadville this past year to work at Allegheny in the office of Admissions. Like Austin, many cited that service was their greatest form of contact. Taylor Hinton ’14, now employed by the Community Wellness Initiative, expressed “I stayed over the summer and that was an awesome time. The best kept secret about Meadville is that the summers are wonderful!” This sentiment was echoed by 6 of the 7 graduates who spent time in Meadville over the summer. They expressed that the beautiful summers are an opportunity for students to really experience Meadville as a resident rather than a visitor.

Why did you decide to stay/return to Meadville?

“Graduating was something I didn’t want to do. I chose to make a comfortable transition in a place I felt safe in. And seeing what Meadville had offered me for four years, I felt guilty and wanted to do something for Meadville in the smallest sense of the word. It felt like a nice half step into the adult world rather than moving everything and changing everything,” said Zach Cramer ’15, the current AmeriCorps VISTA at the United Way of Crawford County. Similarly, Autumn Vogel 15’ serving as the Year of Meadville organizer stated, “I decided that I would stay here for a year or two as a transition time.”

How has being in Meadville influenced your future plans?

“Part of me feels like if I stay indefinitely that it may be because I’m comfortable and safe here and I didn’t take a risk. But maybe staying here is the risk I should take,” said Vogel. This theme continued to come up. Hinton recalled, “I went away for a year and did a fellowship in Boston. Everyone says you’re supposed to go to a big city after school and that makes you successful. They make you feel like you have to go do something new and exciting…and maybe you do. But there’s a lot of value in staying in a place that you have an understanding of or you want to deepen your understanding of.” Heather Fish ’15, the current Davis Coordinator at Civic Engagement, commented “Staying in Meadville has helped me in seeing the value of staying in a small town. Usually success is labeled to a big city and jumping in to something new and succeeding immediately or dealing with that struggle that you’re expected to have. But seeing the value of growing your experience over a long time, you can get so much out of it.”

What advice would you give to a student considering staying in Meadville?

Paige Missel 14’, the current AmeriCorps VISTA leader commented, “I went to a place that I didn’t know (Lexington, VA) and I don’t want to do that ever again. I need to be surrounded by excitement and adventures and new things, yes, but it’s also about the people and having a connection to place.” Even still, Fish added “If you want to leave and you know that you really want to, I would really encourage that. If this is where your heart is but your brain tells you to be somewhere else, I would listen to your heart because there’s so much that you can’t see until you’re in it.”