

### Meeting with Naden Parkin, Oilpatch Poet

Today, I had the distinct pleasure of sitting down to lunch with Naden Parkin, a fellow who works in the oil patch in and around GP, and who in his spare time, authors rootsy-yet-stark tales about life in the oil and gas industry. He has recently published a book, entitled 'A Relationship with Truth', a collection of verse.

Naden came onto my radar a few months ago, when I had lunch at Wa Sushi. My wife was visiting at the time, and she was the one who noticed the small volume of poetry amidst a pile of magazines. She pulled it out and handed it to me. I flipped through the book quickly, skimming the verses, and smiled at the tales of work, whiskey, and women. I saw that he had a website and an email contact, so I took a picture of these with my phone, and then turned my attention back to our lunch.

I finally made contact with Naden last week, through emailing his website. He called me within minutes of the email, and told me he was on holiday in BC. He would be back in GP next week, but only briefly, as he was heading out on a month-long book tour of Alberta and Saskatchewan. I suggested we meet for a quick coffee before he left, and he promised to contact me when he hit town. I wasn't entirely sure that would happen, but then, I hadn't met Naden yet...

Fast forward to this morning, and around 11 am, a text message appeared on my phone from Naden, asking if I wanted to have lunch at Wa Sushi, the place I first encountered his book. I was happy to accept, and we met there for noon. I arrived first, so I secured a place to sit, and waited. He came in just after 12, beaming his way around the restaurant, in a pleasantly out-of-breath sort of way.

Naden is a totally disarming person: he has a wide, honest face, a bit cherubic, and the handshake of a labourer; firm, hard, and confident. He is something of a local celebrity at Wa Sushi, but doesn't seem to expect it. Rather, he is surprised and pleased at the reception. He laughs a lot, and I found myself

doing the same thing. We chit-chatted for a minute, and then ordered some food and retreated to our table. I brought along a notebook and pen, in the event that I would write a few things down, but we just ended up talking for an hour, and it felt nice not to interrupt it with writing breaks.

Naden the person, like Naden the poet, is very much an open book. I asked how long he had been writing, and he tells me “All my life, since I was a kid, all the time”. He’s pleasantly surprised that his very personal circumspections have struck a chord with people who work in and around the industry, and he’s excited to see what the future brings. He’s easygoing, but a straight shooter, qualities much admired in the ‘patch. As I sit there, watching this round-faced young man smile his way through love, laughter, and loss, I can’t help but wonder if I’m witnessing the emergence of the Leonard Cohen of the oilpatch. Did I mention he sings and plays guitar, too?

We talked about the book tour, about his job as a mud man, and how he somehow manages to both draw a salary through breakup, and use the company truck for said book tour. We chatted about the possibility of turning some of his verse into spoken word, or accompanied by drums and bass, as a way to reach other audiences. I’m excited at his potential, and I say so. He seems surprised, and then pleased. He’s very real, very cheerful, and easy to spend time with. No wonder his boss lets him use a company vehicle for off-work pursuits!

I needed to get back to the office, so I thanked him for taking time to meet and told him to enjoy traveling around Alberta. He gave me a pin that states ‘Art equals Freedom’, “My new mantra”, he tells me, smiling. We make plans to meet up again, and he asks me to keep in touch, and to pass along any useful contacts I might have. He wants to attract some media attention, but is unsure how to get it. I tell him I’ll see what I can do...

And now, I am back in my office, with the jagged currents of This Will Destroy You moving relentlessly through my headphones, writing about my lunch with Naden Parkin, an ordinary guy who traffics in the inordinary. I wish him much success, not because he needs it, nor because he deserves it, but

because he is honest and open. He has a meaningful relationship with a kind of truth, and that itself deserves to be seen and reflected upon by more people everywhere.