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 Ann Wilson, CHRP, ICCRC R421415  
 (Formerly Citizenship Judge)  
 ann@wilsonimmigration.com

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### GOING BANKRUPT A BITTER PILL FOR N.L. WORKER IN WAKE OF OIL PRICE COLLAPSE

Casualties of the Collapse: More workers tossed into turmoil by economic downturn

Jamie Parsons appeared to have it all a year ago. He had a job in the Alberta oilsands earning \$140,000 and a strong sense of pride and self-respect.

The crash in oil prices has ripped it all away. He lost his job, his income and his dignity.

He finds it hard even to look his wife Lisa in the eye as she goes off to work for long hours at a job in the service industry.

"It's brutal. I have no pride left," he said recently during an interview at his home in Davidsville, a small central Newfoundland community north of Gander.

The 46-year-old is one of a growing number of people from Newfoundland and Labrador tossed into turmoil because of a crash in the price of oil and other natural resources.

Workers in the province are being hit from both sides as fly-in, fly-

out jobs in Alberta dry up and Newfoundland's own offshore sector also sheds workers.

The mining sector has also been hit hard, from the closure of the Teck Resources mine in central Newfoundland to the teetering iron ore industry in Labrador West.

According to Statistics Canada, there are 800 fewer jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador's oil and mining sectors, a drop of nine per cent in just one year.

These are well paying jobs that result in tremendous spinoffs for the provincial economy.

The numbers of transient workers who have been displaced by the storm hitting Alberta's oil sector are less certain, but Parsons is an extreme example of what's happening.

He lost his job 13 months ago. With just three years' experience as a truck driver, he finds the few jobs still available are being scooped up by others.

"I got called into the office on the eighth of January was told, 'I'm sorry, we have no trucks on the road. We have no men working. We don't need you anymore,'" said Parsons.

He hit rock bottom in December. His employment insurance benefits ended, and he declared bankruptcy.

"There's nothing more to sell. Declaring bankruptcy just about broke me."

He now drives a \$350 Ford Focus and spends his days searching for a job — any job.

"There is no pride because I can't stay at home and lose my self-respect whilst my wife is going out to work to provide for us and me being a drain on the system."

Spending more time at home gives him more time to think, and that adds to his depression.

"I've got a fantastic partner in this life and she stood by me. I even gave her the option of saying, 'you know, I'm bust now so if you want to get out while the getting is good, now's the time.' But she stayed and she's been my rock," Parsons said.

Stories like his are becoming more common as the job market shrinks.

This is expected to intensify as major construction projects such as Hebron at Bull Arm, the Long Harbour nickel plant and the Muskrat Falls hydro project eventually wind down.

The number of personal bankruptcies in the province grew by nine per cent in 2015, and there were a record number of people seeking to have their debt payments restructured through a process called consumer proposals.

Yvette Power, who advises people in financial trouble from Deloitte's office in St. John's, said more and more transient workers are coming to her for help.

"A typical client is a transient worker that has worked for the last several years making probably from \$100,000 to \$200,000," she said.

"And now they're laid off or back here working at a reduction in their income. It's certainly a challenge for people to maintain that same lifestyle when they have such a reduction in their income."

While sectors such as real estate, retail and auto sales slow down, however, the auction business is growing.

The owner of Fitzpatrick's Auctions in St. John's has seen a 25 per cent increase in the number of vehicles and other big-ticket items going on the auction block.

"People are saying they were in

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the oil patch, working in Alberta, making great money, and I don't think they realized it was ever going to stop," said Blair Loveless. "Who would have ever thought that a price of oil would go down to \$30 a barrel?" Parsons certainly didn't, and now he's paying a heavy price. "I've got no regrets with Alberta. Just that it came to a horrible, abrupt end," he said.

### OILSANDS VETERAN JACK AVERY REMEMBERS THE EARLY DAYS

'My employee badge number was five, so I've been around for a while'

Gas lines frozen solid, rooms filled with clouds of leaking steam, hands caked with bitumen; more than 50 years later, it's those first few months on the job that Jack Avery remembers most.

Avery started his 20-year career in the Fort McMurray oilsands in the fall of 1966, working for the Great Canadian Oil Sands company.

"I helped start up Suncor. I got to turn the lights on," the 91-year-old said during a Wednesday morning interview with CBC's Edmonton AM.

"My employee badge number was five, so I've been around for a while."

GCOS would later become industry giant Suncor, but when Avery first arrived on site that fall, the refinery was still being pieced together, and it was far from operation-ready.

The company was using water, instead of oil, to test the equipment. Leaks were common and Avery said when temperatures plunged on Grey Cup weekend that year, the gas lines on the processing plant froze solid, and didn't thaw again until mid-February.

"Oh, there was just the odd problem," Avery said with a laugh. "They hadn't quite finished the construction, and that winter we were sent out east so we could learn how to operate and do things. When we came back, we tried to start up at various times."

His job in the oilsands wasn't Avery's first career, but it was certainly the one that stuck.

After graduating high school, he enlisted in the army as a wireless operator and spent two years serving overseas in England and the Netherlands. When the war ended in 1945, he was discharged and moved back to his hometown of Lacombe, Alta., to help out at his father's bakery.

According to an interview he did with the Petroleum History Society, Avery stayed on at his father's shop until a fateful meeting two years later. Just hours before a party, Avery was stood up. Feeling guilty, his 'failed' date offered to set him up with a friend instead, and the rest is history.

"I went to where Olga lived. And I knocked on the door, she answered the door and she looked at me and said, 'You're it?' And I said 'Yes.' Soon after the unusual blind date, the pair fell in love and settled into a marriage that would last 63 years.

The couple moved to Medicine Hat, where Avery got a first job with Northwest Nirto Chemicals.

He started as an accountant, but when construction on their ammonia plant began, Avery asked for a job. He was hired on the spot, and soon moved up the ranks. Within a few years, word about the oilsands was out, and Avery starting looking north.

It wasn't long before Fort McMurray was booming.

"They were building houses so fast here that I always said the heroes of the beast were the women at home, because they were dealing with the contractors," said Avery.

"We were just trying to get that stupid place running."

Looking back at his long career as an oilsands worker, soldier, legion executive, husband, father and grandfather, Avery is glad he made his home in Fort McMurray.

"I was lucky. We got here when it was still more like it had been for years and years, and the boom hadn't really started, so we got both ends of it. And I'm still here."

"It was quite the adventure."

### ALTON GAS STORAGE PROJECT 'WILL PROCEED' DURING APPEAL, SAYS MINISTER

Sipekne'katik First Nation plans to file appeal with Environment Minister Margaret Miller

Nova Scotia's environment minister says the Alton gas storage project will keep moving ahead while she reviews an appeal.

"The work will proceed," Margaret Miller told reporters.

The Sipekne'katik First Nation and other groups plan to file an appeal of the AltaGas project near Stewiacke.

AltaGas Ltd. plans to store natural gas in three underground salt caverns. The government approved the project in January.

"The approval allowed for work to proceed immediately. It doesn't stop when there's an appeal," Miller said.

The deadline for the appeal was Feb 22. Miller said she could have another appeal or two by then.

After that, she'll have 60 days to

come up with a decision. Miller says there were a lot of different factors involved in the initial decision to approve the project.

"All those things could be a basis for an appeal, and we'll be ruling on that when the time comes."



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