

Smiling, I presented my rental agreement to the burly man behind the counter at the car agency.

“Ford 250?” a gravelly voice proffered. I stopped, confused. *What's that?* I wondered. In contemplation my smile must have faded, because the gravelly voice helpfully countered. “150? Yukon?” Ten minutes later I emerged, blinking into the Fort St. John, British Columbia light, with the keys to a Grand Cherokee clasped in my hand. It was the largest vehicle I felt I could be entrusted with. Standing here in oil country, I felt every bit the boy in a country of real men. I resisted the temptation to brush mud on my newly polished shoes.

But I am not here by happenstance.

Each year I try to experience the Canadian beauty in a locale never before viewed. Estevan, Fort McMurray, Timmins, Edmunston, are all recent finds, each endowed with beauty and charm as individualistic as they are awe-inspiring. Set against backdrops of limitless ocean, endless forests and infinite fields, always uniquely Canadian and yet totally unique. Fort St. John – situated as it is surrounded by raw, untamed wilderness – exudes a spirit of the modern-day pioneerism. It is both thrilling and numbing to note that a few more hours by plane would land me within the Arctic Circle.

The regional differences that our Canadian partners face have always fascinated me. There are wide variances in population, prevailing industry, culture, language, politics and logistics. There are two official languages, three bordering oceans and five time zones to navigate. We are masters of agriculture, manufacturing, natural resources, commerce and trade. We are at the same time country-wild and urban-chic. Possibilities abound in every sector of the economy, and at every economy-of-scale. Every time I visit one of our partners – spread as they are all across this grand nation – I am reminded anew of the plethora of businesses and industries that make up our economy, seemingly as innumerable as waves in an ocean, trees in a forest or blades on a prairie.

Driving down Hwy 99 towards White Rock, passing the Deas Slough (I just love saying that) framed by the Coast Mountains, I realize just how lucky I am. Through the enormous beauty of the land, the openness of the road and the benevolence of our partners, I am able to touch every fibre of the fabric of the country, at least in some small, fleeting way. I feel like I can measure the pulse of the nation through my appointments with our partners, whose relationships vicariously transport me into every facet of life. Whether it be the state of the mining industry, the temperature of the market, or the challenges of paying for mortgages, tuitions and car payments, I am given a personal tour of each locale. All I have to do is listen.

Through my position as an owner of one the ‘anchor’ suppliers in the industry, I am doubly lucky that my requests for visits rarely go refused. The well-oiled machine that is Debco allows me the privilege of these tours, making me all too aware that this is, by any standards, a dream job.

If my Gallen on the Go journey takes me to your fine city, I would be honoured if you would allow me to come to your office and learn all about you, from your perspective. Please excuse me if I drive up haltingly in some vehicle I have never before experienced, and if my boots are just a little dusty.

Talk to you soon!!!!

