

Old-timers and newcomers

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June 21, 2013

When I was in Williston, ND, [reporting](#) for the *Century* about churches in the oil boom, I found that longtime residents often feel they are in conflict with short-term oil workers, who have no plans to stay. One evening I found myself at a table with a longtime resident of the city and a short-term resident, who were sitting across from each other.

The longtime resident was mocking the city's attempt to plant trees and flowers in the downtown to make it more attractive. She was noting that no one really went downtown to spend time anymore. "Benches, trees and flowers," she said with disdain. "Not to point fingers."

Then she raised her fork and pointed it at the short-term resident, who had just told us that he lives in his truck. "But the bums will love it," she said. Old meets new, utter stability meets utter transience at the end of a fork. The moment was raw and honest, if hurtful.

When people say, "We just need more conversation between oldtimers and newcomers," this is at least in part what they mean.