

## OPINION

# Mike The Knife strikes again and again

By Ruthanne Urquhart  
Algonquin Times staff

**4 a.m.**  
Up all night, checking my notes. Big Al said it. Marty said it. The Fifth Floor.  
When the Colonel was around, things were different. Only money flowed. Nobody thought about slashing to the bone.  
The Fifth Floor was there, but the Colonel — well, those ivy-covered walls made everybody feel safe. It was an illusion, but it was our illusion. Colonel By. Everybody gets misty just thinking about it.

And then, about the time they shut the Colonel down, everything changed. Money got tight. The knives came out. And that's where I come in.  
Next stop — Fifth Floor. Men's and women's careers. Cuts and slashes.

**8:20 a.m.**  
Red comes around with the new camera, but the only shooting I'll be doing today is from the lip — talking my way onto The Fifth Floor.

Bobby's boys and girls won't be there. It's August, and when the pavement gets soft enough to grab tassel-tops, they grab the kiddies and head for camps and cottages like rats leaving a burning ship.



Dianne Vroom photo illustration

**10:05 a.m.**  
From the outside, The Fifth Floor looks like any fortress, with its row of gun-port windows, revealing as a dead man's eyes.

**10:10 a.m.**  
This Otis carries victims from The Fifth Floor, hearts pumping hopes and plans onto the tiles, but the walls are as white as bones picked clean.

The doors open. One of Bobby's guns holds up the doorway of the boardroom. He gives me the kind of smile that makes

a rabbit scream, but doesn't move — his sort have been cut, too. He won't bite the hand that feeds him, but he'll let someone else.

I amble down the hall. An open door invites me in, and I've got a live one. I'm ready with a song and dance, but he says, *yeah, you can look around. If anybody asks, give them this.* It's his card. John S. Johnston. This guy was born with an alias.

**10:15 a.m.**  
I head back to the boardroom and hunt

for a notebook, a scrap of paper, a doodled lunch bag — something to grease the pieces so they slide together easy — but the room's been wiped clean, top to bottom. A pro job.

**10:30 a.m.**  
Then I see it, circled in yesterday's daily. A name. The name.

It's as clear as a corpse in shallow water. Why Big Al's voice dropped. Why Marty's cup of java trembled.

Mike Ontario. Mike The Knife.  
The Fifth Floor is a front. Window dressing for the real operation.

When I get the picture, I want the pieces back in the box, and the box back on the shelf. But you can never go back.

As long as the Ontario family wants Mike heading the operation, he will. And he'll cut and slash — for our own good, he says.

And this is where I get out.  
**10:35 a.m.**  
On the way down, I share Otis with the ghosts of programs past.

Outside, I walk away and don't look back. Not at The Fifth Floor. Not at the Colonel. Not at the corpses of OSAP and full-time teachers and adequate security. Not at 32 student contact hours per week.

You can never go back.  
You just keep on walking forward, eyes down, chin up, one step ahead of The Knife.

## The Algonquin Times Anniversary Issue

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## Knowledge is treasure — just dig in

By Susan Turcotte  
Algonquin Times Staff

**W**hen I was a kid in elementary school, I had the same dream several times and, for some reason, it's still lodged in my memory.

On the way home from school one day, I spied a shiny nickel gleaming in the dirt along the edge of the sidewalk. I stooped down and scraped it out. Under it were two coins. Each time I'd dig up the coins, more would appear underneath. Other people joined in the digging. But that's all I remember — enough coins for everyone, and lots of happy people.

If people were asked to name five types of treasures, the majority would include money on their list.

There's a proverb that says: Knowledge is a treasure but practice is the key to it. Algonquin students are given another kind of treasure.

Students begin to wrap their fingers around that key within months of entering the college.

In 1979, I dug into Algonquin's stash of treasure for the first time. By the time I graduated with a travel consultant certificate, I had spent a semester of Fridays working in a travel agency, practising what I was learning and ultimately learning what I was studying.

At Algonquin, students quickly gain hands-on knowledge in their areas of studies through work placements or practical applications such as cleaning teeth for real



Susan Turcotte  
1980

clients, tending a greenhouse or running a newspaper.

Early one spring morning in 1996, when I opened the mailbox, there sat a thick envelope stamped with the Algonquin logo. As I walked home, my mind said the answer was yes — the envelope was too thick to be a "sorry, you didn't make it" letter. My fumbling fingers ripped opened the envelope, revealing an Algonquin treasure map — I was accepted into the print journalism program.

So, here I am today, again practising

what I've learned and learning what I've studied.

I never pulled an all-nighter the first time I was a student at Algonquin. I didn't need to — I was 18, in love, and getting married the following May.

The rotunda then, as now, was a popular meeting spot. Students still smoked in some of the lecture rooms. Woodroffe campus' watering hole, Bert's Bar, was a secretive place behind solid black doors, and there was always a gauntlet of guys hanging out in the hallway near the candy machines in B block.

And regularly, the same students asked the teacher to end class early so they could hurry home to see their favorite soaps. No VCRs yet.

Algonquin and I have both grown and matured into more multi-dimensional entities. We both have become more outward- and forward-looking.

My address book is crammed with scratched-out addresses; my resume is long, and I'm still married to the same wonderful man. One day, our creative son may earn a place in Algonquin's animation program.

The college I returned to in 1996 is bigger, offers an incredible range of programs, and is expanding into partnerships in the community. As Algonquin grows, so does the number of keys to treasures it has to offer to students.

Let's see, 18 years from now will be 2015. Hmm — the next time I come back to Algonquin, I think I'd like to practise...

**My fumbling fingers ripped open the envelope, revealing an Algonquin treasure map — I was accepted into the print journalism program. So, here I am today, again practising what I've learned and learning what I've studied.**

—Susan Turcotte  
Student, print journalism