

Meet the real Mike

BY MIKE BAKER

So, I guess I have some explaining to do.

For those of you who didn't notice, there was a new name in last week's edition of the Free Press. Mike Baker comes to us after spending several years trapped behind something of an unintentional pseudonym. Confused? Allow me to break things down. Without getting into too much long-forgotten family drama, I officially went through the process to change my name earlier this year. You see, Pickford is the last name of my father, a man I haven't had any contact with for closing on 20 years. The name is, and always has been to me, just that ? a name.

I have long since been known as Mike Baker to my family and to my friends. Those of you who have gone to the trouble of adding me on Facebook will know this already. So, if I've always been known as Mike Baker, why have I used the name Mike Pickford over the past year in the Free Press? You see, that all comes down to a simple misunderstanding, that stems back to when I first joined the Orangeville Citizen two years ago. But I'll get to that later. The root of the problem lies at a certain post-secondary institution hell bent on following protocol.

Upon gaining my high school diploma, which is, by the way, signed as Michael Baker, I spread my wings and made the arduous 55-minute trek west to attend Durham College. Journalism was, of course, my subject of choice. After filing my paperwork under Baker, using Pickford only where absolutely necessary, I was a little perturbed to find that Mike Baker did not have a campus log-in on his first day of classes. For those of you not understanding what I'm getting at, Mike Baker wasn't enrolled in any classes at all. At least not in journalism. If my memory serves me correctly, there was a Mike Baker studying dentistry. Insert stereotypical British people have bad teeth joke here.

Anyway, back on track. Try to put yourself in my shoes for a moment. In my head, I had been Mike Baker for 10 years. Being a 20-year-old with very little responsibility, I, of course, wasn't the one to fill out the finer details of my college application, an international student college application I might add. It didn't even occur to me to check to see if there was a Mike Pickford in the system.

That 30 minutes I spent in the campus library before trudging off to the international student department was one of the longest 30 minutes of my life. All sorts of reasons and possibilities were racing through my mind ? did my tuition fee not go through on time? Did I ACTUALLY register for college this semester? Had Punk'd made a comeback? WAS I BEING PUNK'D? (Fun note, it was announced that Punk'd would be revived in Oct. 2010, a solid six weeks after this incident occurred).

No, it turned out that I, apparently, didn't know my name. I tell ya, the strange looks I got in the office that afternoon? I'm surprised they actually let me go to my afternoon classes.

So, I put up with Pickford, officially at least, for my two years of college. The process to legally change my name, while in the country on a student visa, with a work permit application also in the system, was too ugly and time-consuming for a kid like me to even comprehend. So I left it as it was and Pickford I remained.

I shed my name like a snake skin upon graduation, once again known to all as Baker. I eventually got fed up of working my pizza delivery job that I swore I wouldn't continue after graduation (I worked there for six months after graduation), and started to apply for jobs more befitting of my expensive education. And so the story continues.

I took a job in Bonnyville, Alberta. You've heard all about that already. I was ready to head west a new man, prepared to forge a reputation that would take me to the very top of my profession. For the first time ever, I would have a story appear in newsprint with the byline Mike Baker. Or so I thought. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the Nouvelle of Bonnyville had already announced my impending arrival ? as Mike Pickford. In 2 1/2 years there, I didn't once get around to correcting anyone.

Fast forward another few years and here I am, on the cusp of my first real taste of the industry in Ontario. I entered the Citizen office on my first day, introducing myself as Mike. I. Left. Out. The. Last. Name. During that first paper, there was a story titled ?Introducing Mike Pickford, news editor'. I'm not sure if it was timidity (doesn't sound like me, but I digress), an oversight or a lack of caring. Let's face it, by this point I'd been Pickford for pretty much five years. What does it matter at this point? Naturally, I kept up the schtick when I took over the Free Press last year.

Then, last year, I got married. And, naturally, my wife wanted to take my last name. It was at that point I realized how important it was, to me, that I officially be known as Mike Baker. So I filled out the necessary paperwork, changed my name and sent off for a new passport. That passport arrived in the mail last week. All that's left is to change my permanent residency card. And driver's licence. And health card? And bank card? Oh, and my Costco membership card.

I'm starting to realize again why I let things slide as Pickford for as long as I did!