

OPINION

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It's easy to point fingers without having all facts

Re: Offensive photo shows lack of respect for less fortunate, letter to the editor by James Simm, May 3.

Often, we judge other people's actions based on our own experiences.

One day, my five-year-old son was jumping on our trampoline with a seven-year-old friend.

My son inadvertently gave his friend "the finger" and his friend reported it instantly.

Now, the friend had seen this action at school and knew the label for it, but my son had never been to school and I knew he didn't know such an action existed.

Did he actually give his friend the finger?

My son would say no, because he did not know what this action meant, but his friend would answer yes, for clearly the middle finger was shown.

Can one correctly judge Ron Elliott's actions then?

According to James Simm, the fingers in the air represented Mr. Elliott being insensitive, rude, disrespectful, insulting, demeaning and robbing this child of his dignity.

Mr. Simm states Mr. Elliott intentionally wanted to make this child the butt of the prank and make him appear silly.

Well, Mr. Simm, if you put your fin-

gers behind this child's head, then we know that would be your intention, but how can you be certain of Mr. Elliott's intention?

How can you be sure Mr. Elliott even defines "fingers behind the head" the same as you?

Likewise, do you know how much time Mr. Elliott and the boy spent together before and after the photo were taken?

Mr. Simm, you state this child was clearly not a friend.

Were you there?

Can you be certain they were not?

Mr. Simm also states Mr. Elliott has a lack of respect for those less fortunate.

I see it differently.

I see an older gentleman who has given his time and money and risked his health to go to another country to serve.

Perhaps Mr. Elliott actually did give of himself just so he could go to Africa to insult and demean the people.

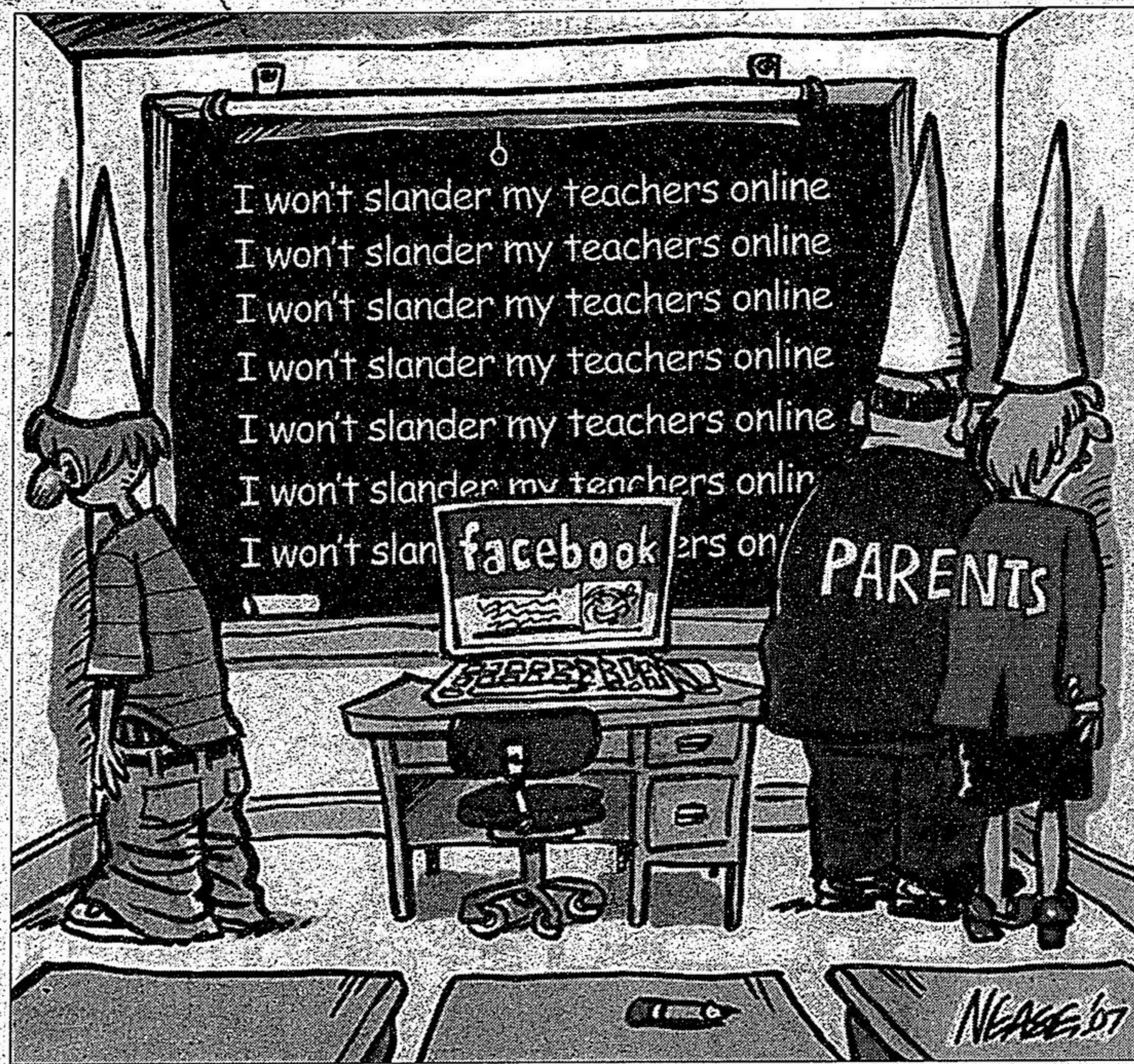
Perhaps he wanted to rob people of their dignity.

But, if so, would he really have to leave the country?

Perhaps he could follow your example, Mr. Simm, and sit at home and vilify and criticize those in our own town.

It's much easier that way, don't you think?

CARALYN SHANTZ
STOUFFVILLE



Mysterious phenomenon has scientists baffled

What happens to them is unknown. The adults are simply gone, thousands of them. No corpses left behind, nothing out of place. They are just gone.

It may seem like the set-up for an episode of CSI, but this mystery isn't about missing people, it's about missing bees. Strange as it may seem, a mysterious phenomenon called colony collapse disorder is threatening bees across the United States and may be making its way into Canada.

The problem has researchers baffled. All of the adult bees in a colony will suddenly disappear without a trace, leaving behind only a small number of juveniles. The hive appears unaffected, just deserted.

Remaining juveniles refuse to eat the stores of honey or pollen left behind. Other bee colonies meanwhile avoid the deserted hive, even though healthy colonies normally raid abandoned hives for leftovers.

What's going on?

Scientists don't really know, but concern is high enough to have prompted a working group of researchers in the U.S. to study the problem. From what they have been able to determine so far, stress may play a key role.

Colony collapse disorder is hardly the first problem honey bees have encountered in North America. Bee populations are in serious trouble, suffering losses from mites, pesticides and monoculture crops, especially in the U.S.

There, five species of bumblebees have disappeared in less than a decade.

In fact, the dirt of natural pollinators in the U.S. has led to a growing industry of migrant domesticated bees.

Each spring, tens of thousands of bee colonies are packed onto flatbed trucks and driven across the U.S. to stop at various farms and pollinate crops.

But all that travel isn't good for bees. Bees are naturally used to having a variety of food in their diets,



David Suzuki

but on these trips, they are stuck with a single food source, the crop they are expected to pollinate.

They are also packed into their hives for long periods of extended driving, exposed to temperature fluctuations and high levels of carbon dioxide. In addition, this kind of large-scale movement of stressed-out insects creates ideal conditions for the spread of pathogens.

All of this adds up to bad news for bees. But researchers still don't know which of these factors, or all of

them, or something else entirely, is triggering the collapse of colonies in the U.S.

Fortunately, we haven't seen the problem in Canada — yet. Although bees here are also declining and under tremendous pressure, we don't have such a large-scale migrant bee industry right now, which could be preventing Colony collapse disorder from getting a foothold on this side of the border.

Why should you care about the fate of some insects? Well, honey bees are, of course, important for the honey they make.

But they are also one of the most effective pollinators we have.

In the U.S., they pollinate more than \$3 billion worth of fruits and vegetables annually.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 30 per cent of all American fruits and vegetables come from plants that have been pollinated by insects, especially bees.

So bees are very important indeed. Pollinators in general pro-

vide an essential service that would be extraordinarily expensive, if not impossible, to replicate in other ways.

Yet, natural and domesticated pollinators are by and large considered irrelevant or "externalities" to our economic system.

If we want to ensure this essential service is available in the future, we need to look at all the factors resulting in their declining numbers, from pesticide use, to monoculture crops and genetically modified crops, to the loss of forested areas that provide homes for wild bees and work to reduce these pressures and keep this critical ecosystem service functioning.

Colony collapse disorder may be the most recent and dramatic of bee mysteries, but their consistently declining numbers is just as disturbing.

Take the Suzuki challenge at www.david.suzuki.org

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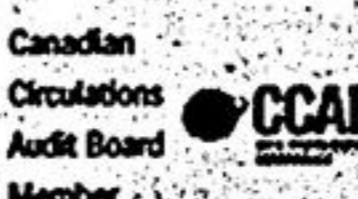
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