

# OPINION

**Stouffville Sun-Tribune**

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Ordinary residents won battle with multinational, province

Re: *Revisiting an ugly but necessary chapter in Stouffville history, column by Jim Mason, Dec. 12.*

I do not make a habit of writing letters to the newspaper, but as a former member of the Concerned Citizens of Whitchurch-Stouffville, I feel obliged to respond.

I am not sure why you would want to revisit this after 25 years, but, since you have, it is appropriate we clarify a few things for the benefit of our new residents.

Firstly, we should make clear that we were not initially trying to close the landfill. There was a proposal made by the operator to significantly expand it and that is what we were looking to prevent.

There would have been a much larger blot on the landscape and a much bigger deterrent to future development in Stouffville, if our group had not "fought the province, town council and anyone else who got in the way".

Secondly, your comment that a health study revealed no cause for concern is not entirely accurate. It did, in fact, show a higher incidence of miscarriages in our municipality than the national average for both 1977 and 1978 and a higher incidence of breast cancer occurring here than in

control groups.

My family moved to Stouffville in 1980 and discussion amongst our friends and neighbours of what seemed to be an unusually high rate of miscarriage was what prompted us to get involved with Concerned Citizens in the first place.

Regardless of what you interpret the cause to be it was shown we were right to be concerned and, of course, the health study would never have been done had we all just sat back and done nothing.

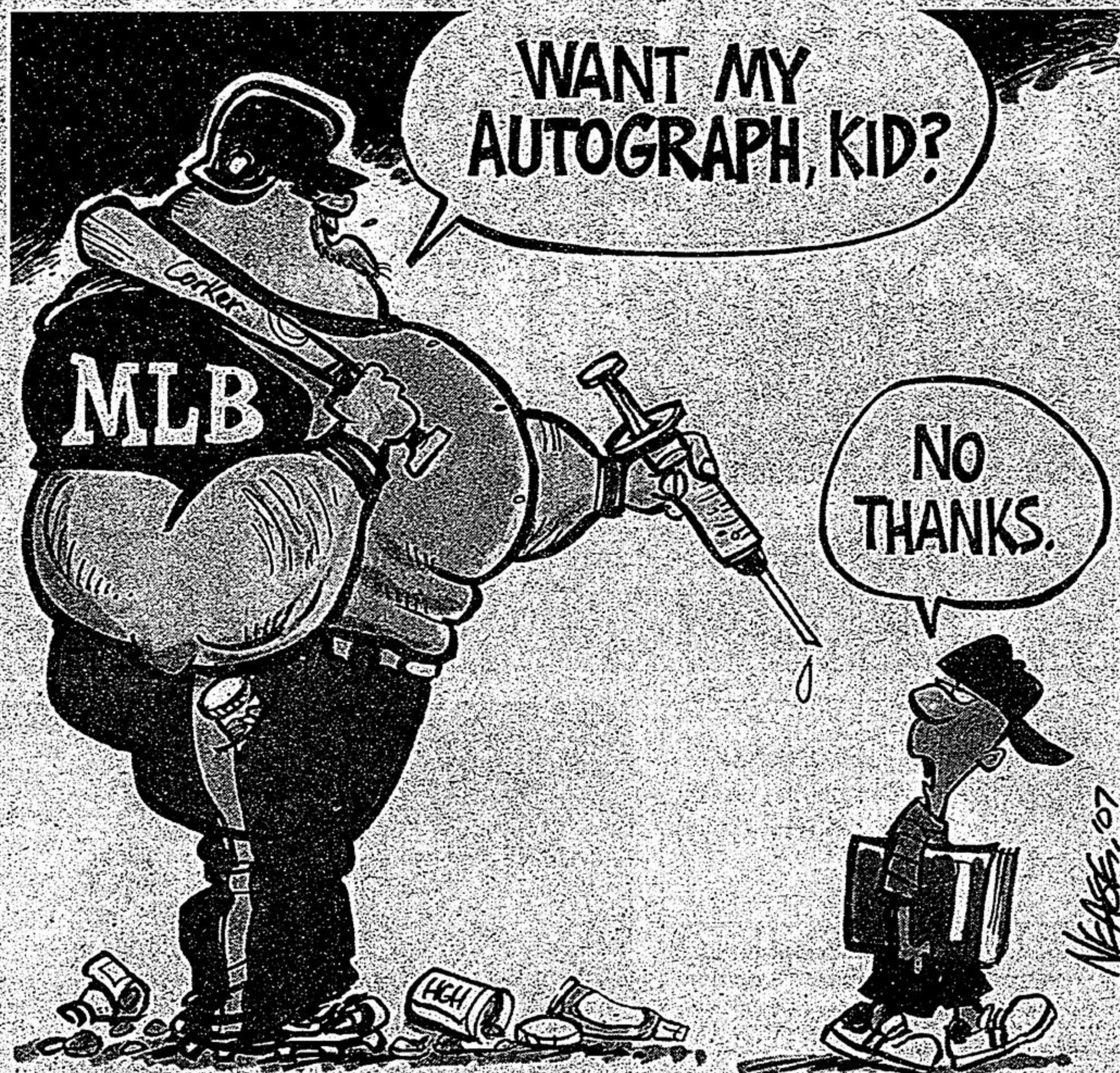
I am not aware of the businesses you are that closed purely because of our efforts (other than the landfill, of course) and the only people I know who left town did so because they were genuinely afraid that the government was not telling us the truth.

The landfill site was closed, continues to be closely monitored, and our water is safe, thanks in part to a group of ordinary local residents who took on both a multi-national company and the province and won.

The town can grow now because we were determined to protect our public water supply 25 years before the Walkerton disaster made it a national issue again.

Now, as far as any new proposals for the site are concerned, that will have to be someone else's fight.

CHARLES PARKER  
STOUFFVILLE



## We're still just getting to know Planet Earth

We know our planet is heating up.

And we know international climate negotiations such as the ones that are winding down in Bali this week are critical steps toward a global action plan to reduce heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

But how will we be able to gauge if such a plan actually works?

In spite of all we have learned about our climate and our planet's natural systems over the past two decades, relatively big holes exist in our capacity to monitor where exactly greenhouse gases are coming from and where they are going.

That's going to have to change in the coming years, because we can no longer afford to leave such important measures to guesswork.

It may be hard for many of us to remember a time when global information was not readily available, but the amazing ability to access such vast amounts of data is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Today, with supercomputers and the Internet, we can now share, combine, calculate and analyse information like never before.

For a simple example, think about the software program Google Earth. The capacity for anyone with a computer to see the entire planet in one instance, and then zoom down to view a close-up of virtually anywhere on the globe is simply astounding.

Still, even with all this data available, we need much more.

The Earth is incredibly complex. To understand how it works, even in a basic sense, requires vast amounts of information to be acquired and monitored over time.

Living sustainably within the planet's limits will require we really get to know Earth.

Recently, a special edition of the journal *Nature* looked at this issue and how well we are doing in monitoring the planet.

The results are mixed. Huge strides forward have been achieved



David Suzuki

With Faisal Moola

in some areas, while others limp along with sporadic funding or political changes that may stop projects entirely.

One of the most obvious measurements that must be tracked over time is the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

As the principle greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide is a key mechanism in global warming.

But critical questions remain. Half of the carbon dioxide we put into the atmosphere gets soaked up

again. Where it goes is the subject of much debate.

Some say the oceans, others say soils or plants. The reality is, we don't know for sure.

Two satellites to be launched in the next year should help us get a better understanding of what's going on.

One, called the Orbiting Carbon Observatory, will circle the Earth measuring carbon dioxide levels a half-million times every day.

This information will be combined with models of how our atmosphere circulates to give us a better understanding of how the earth absorbs carbon dioxide.

Another project is called the Greenhouse Gases Observing Satellite.

It will measure carbon dioxide as well, but also other important greenhouse gases such as methane, ozone and water vapour.

Many other projects are also planned or are underway that will measure variables such as ice

cover, soil moisture, urban growth and desertification, wind speeds, ocean temperatures, phytoplankton growth and many more.

Yet for every planned project, there are budget shortfalls, delays, political interference, international overlaps and duplications that can result in critical gaps in data.

This can be a serious problem. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other human impacts on the planet is, of course, a vital task.

But measuring and accounting for these changes is just as important. It's the only way we'll ever know if what we're doing is having an effect.

Accumulating basic data sets about the planet over long periods of time may be the scientific equivalent of watching paint dry, but it is absolutely essential work for us to understand and protect our complicated little world.

Take David Suzuki's *Nature Challenge* and learn more at [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org)

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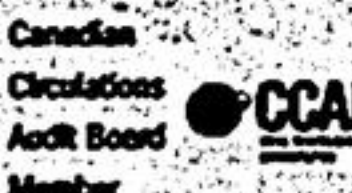
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