



December 2025

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Editorial

Leaders of questionable intelligence?

What kind of leaders are we electing in Canada and elsewhere?

Many leaders in various places think they are the ultimate authority, that when they speak, it is the epitome of truth, validity, fact and authority.

Dog Fraud, premier of Ontario, declares speed cameras are simply municipal cash grabs. He totally disregards the experts and the research studies that justify speed cameras as effective regulators of traffic. None of these experts touts cameras as tools for generating revenue. They clearly and definitively explain the purpose of speed cameras as traffic regulators. But the screw-loose-thinker at Queen's Park focuses on an infrequently mentioned benefit of these traffic-controlling devices completely disregarding the experts' take on them.

T**** is too easy of a target when one discusses leaders disregarding studies and research expertise. However, T**** is a real and noted danger to AmeriKa with his power of appointment. He appoints wackos to ministerial positions, ministers who disregard science, authoritative research and established experts. He appointed Robert F. Kennedy as Secretary of Health, and this wacko is an antivaxxer who opposes vaccinations and also claims vaccines cause autism and measles. According to research, medical and science experts, this claim is unsubstantiated. It would be something to overlook if it did not have mortal consequences. Because of RFK's ridiculous claims, the number of measles cases in the state of Texas is climbing at an astonishing rate.

The same thinking is rooted in Alberta, where the premier takes it a step further. Even as authorities show the contrary has more validity than Premier Smith's declarations, she kicks it up a notch by invoking the notwithstanding clause to pass legislation contravening Canadian constitutional declarations. She is a danger to all of Canada as she gives implied support to the Alberta separatists.

Perhaps contrary policies and declarations without connections to the health of people may be acceptable, but leaders making medical declarations could have

mortal consequences. Antivaccination declarations are killing people. What's wrong with these leaders who seem to care little about their medical advice conflicting with experts and authorities, resulting in deaths? This is an inane disregard of researched truths. That this may cause deaths seems inconsequential. What kind of leaders are these? Are these leaders actually that out of touch or are they just that autocratic?

POLITICAL Desk:

News from councillors, elected reps and community associations



Political commentary:

Each month we invite elected officials to submit messages intending to give them opportunity to update their constituents with news from their constituency. We publish all received responses here or on our website at www.szpin.ca .

We wish the Pickering Council, the Ratepayer associations and federal representatives a safe and happy Christmas holiday.

From the PICKERING City Council



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FROM COUNCILLOR BUTT:



Shaheen Butt
City Councillor – Ward 3



A Holiday Message from Councillor Shaheen Butt

As the holiday season approaches, I want to extend my heartfelt wishes to the residents of Pickering. This time of year is about togetherness, reflection, and gratitude. It reminds us of the importance of kindness, generosity, and the bonds that unite us as neighbours and friends.

Yet, I also recognize that the holidays can feel difficult for those who may be alone or experiencing hardship. That is why it is so important to create opportunities where everyone can feel welcome and included.

I am pleased to share that I will be hosting a **Holiday Lunch on Wednesday, December 24**. This lunch is for individuals who may be spending the holidays on their own or who could use a warm meal. If you would like to join, simply send me an email at sbutt@pickering.ca.

This gathering is about more than food, it's about kindness, connection, and reminding one another that no one should feel alone this holiday season. Together, we can share stories, laughter, and goodwill, closing out the year with community spirit and hope.

On behalf of my family and myself, I wish you peace, joy, and good health this holiday season.

Your truly

Shaheen Butt
City Councillor, Ward 3

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FROM PRESIDENT JOHN MELOCHE:

Lynn Heights Neighbourhood Association – Community Update

The Lynn Heights Neighbourhood Association (LHNA) is now an officially recognized ratepayers' association with the City of Pickering, representing more than 375 homes across Lynn Heights Drive, Blairwood Court, Alanbury Crescent, Sherman Crescent, Escott Court, Maury Crescent, Colonial Street, and Benton Crescent.

Our mission is simple: to strengthen neighbourhood connection, support local initiatives, and build meaningful relationships between residents and nearby businesses.

To help achieve this, we've launched a new initiative — the LHNA Neighbourhood Partner Program.

This program invites local businesses, restaurants, and service providers to connect directly with families in our area by offering perks such as neighbourhood discounts, family-friendly deals, or seasonal specials.

In return, participating businesses receive free promotion through our website, newsletters, and community updates — helping highlight the many great local organizations that make Pickering such a vibrant place to live.

Residents and business owners who would like to learn more or get involved can visit:



<https://LynnHeights.com/partners/>

For any questions, you can contact us at info@lynnheights.com.

A Christmas Message to Our Community

As this may be our final update here before the holidays, the LHNA would like to extend our warmest wishes to every family in Lynn Heights. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all who celebrate — may this season bring peace, joy, and time well spent with those you love.

This year has been a remarkable beginning for our association. We want to express our sincere appreciation to all our new members, whose enthusiasm, support, and willingness to get involved have helped energize and shape the early success of the LHNA. We are truly grateful for the strong community spirit that continues to grow across our neighbourhood.

We look forward to building even more together in the new year.

Warmest wishes from the Lynn Heights Neighbourhood Association.

John Meloche & Steve Sattz

John Meloche
President

PWSCA

Pickering West Shore Community Association

Scott Loyst
President

From the NORTH POLE...

We snagged a letter from Santa's mailbag. An interesting letter.



Ah, it's almost that time again. "The most wonderful time of the year", and "hap, happiest season of all" claims the 1963 song. I truly believe Christmas was that magical back in the "good old days" when expectations were low and maximum joy was found surrounded by family for the big turkey, stuffing and fixins', followed by a lump of delightful Christmas pudding and mincemeat pies with brandy sauce or custard, usually all home-made. Cards were sent by mail to family and friends we might not see often or at all during the year; small gifts came from the heart, not the wallet; bonbons (aka Christmas crackers) were cracked open to reveal a

tissue crown (mandatory to wear!), and a riddle to keep you guessing; a glass of rum and eggnog or a tot of brandy were rare treats; songs were sung after dinner by tone-deaf family members emboldened by the cheap wine at dinner; and most often the ladies hand-washed the dishes, while the men smoked cigars - not anti-feminism, just familial bonding.

Our family festivities always lasted at least two days, before Boxing Day shopping became a frenzy for bargains on next year's cards, wrapping paper and ornaments, and when commercial greed and materialism gradually ruptured the Christmas spirit. Fortunately, Santa and his elves still work hard at the North Pole, receive letters from children and poses for photos when he's in town. Unfortunately, finding real chimneys has gotten tougher, so that fairytale needed updating, but Rudolph and his helpers still appreciate the milk and cookies left for them by excited, sleepless children on Christmas Eve.

For years, Christmas was my favourite time of all. When the actual meaning of "Christ's Birthday" was the cause for celebration; when Carolers appeared at your door singing songs of hope and glory; when Christmas trees dripped with baubles and lights, tacky decorations were the norm, and "have a merry Christmas" was the standard politeness, not "happy holidays", as "woke" or "politically correct" didn't exist. Although Christmas is not celebrated by many cultures and religions, it is the most important Christian celebration and remains a joyous but often stressful time for many. It can also be the most depressing and sad time for those who have lost their loved ones if the songs and festivities of Christmas trigger fond and loving memories of family gatherings long past.

Family and friends gathering was the soul of Christmas; before cell phones destroyed the joy of personal interaction and chatting around the dinner table or the fire; before the distraction of sports on TV on Christmas Day; before it was less work to go to a restaurant for Christmas dinner or order in a pre-made one; before gift-giving became an outdated obligation rather than a pleasure; and before Christmas lost its meaning. My biggest hope is that we will preserve the spirit of Christmas and that its true meaning of joy

to the world, peace on earth and goodwill toward all will continue throughout the year. Otherwise, bah humbug, but a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to one and all!

Richard's Desk

Briefly:

- To the cynics, skeptics, pessimists, and naysayers out there....

In the late 1890s, an 8-year-old girl named Virginia O'Hanlon, wrote a letter to the New York Sun newspaper asking if Santa Claus really existed. The editor, Frank Church, replied with a response that is as timeless and meaningful today as it was then.

To all you skeptics, cynics, naysayers and pessimists who see the world in a dark and gloomy light, read what Church wrote and feel the essence of his words.

Dear Editor,

I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say that there is no Santa Claus. Papa says "If you see it in the Sun, it is so." Please tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus?

Virginia

Your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except what they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds.

All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the

intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to our life its highest beauty and joy.

Alas! How dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus? You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your Papa to hire men to watch all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove?

Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see.

Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders that are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, or even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernatural beauty and glory beyond.

Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else as real and abiding.

No Santa Claus? Thank God he lives and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, maybe 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the hearts of children.

Frank Church

HEALTH:

Briefly:

- Every "sternutation" needs a '**bless you**' followup. Here's why?

Ever wonder why people respond to a person's sneeze with "Bless you?"

The History of "Bless You"

Few social customs are as delightfully absurd as our collective spontaneous response to sneezes. Someone sneezes in public and suddenly all the amateur clerics throw around verbal blessings like confetti at a wedding. "Bless you!" we cry, as if the sneezer just narrowly escaped demonic possession by violently expelling allergens at 100 miles per hour.

We have absolutely no idea why we do this, and spoiler alert—neither did the ancient Romans.

Even Ancient People Thought This Was Weird

The custom of verbally responding to a sneeze is ancient. Its origins were already mysterious when togas were in fashion. The Roman philosopher, Pliny the Elder, mentioned people saying "salutations" after sneezes way back in 77 CE, noting that even Emperor Tiberius Caesar insisted everyone bless his imperial sneezes. The hilarious part? Even Pliny had no clue why this was a thing. People in the first century were doing it purely out of habit, and no one knew why.

People were blessing sneezers for completely forgotten reasons when Jesus was walking around Galilee. That's how deep this rabbit hole goes.

The Plague Made Everything Worse

The most popular origin story involves Pope Gregory I. Picture this: Rome was

being absolutely demolished by the bubonic plague; people were dropping like flies, the streets smelled of death, and then someone sneezed. Oh, no. Oh NO! A sneeze apparently was an early symptom of impending illness, likely followed by death, a horrible one at that.

Pope Gregory, as superstitious as anyone around him, ordered everyone to immediately bless anyone who sneezed. "God bless you" was the hopeful wish that its verbalization would prevent someone's imminent, agonizing death.

This actually makes sense if you consider that before modern medicine arrived in the 19th century, the average life expectancy was about 30. Thirty-two, actual research states. A sneeze genuinely could be your last hurrah. So, people blessed you just in case they needed to start planning your funeral.

The Soul-Snatching Theory

Over time, various supernatural theories emerged about sneezing being dangerous, spiritually dangerous.

Theory #1

The ancients believed your soul would shoot out of your body like a cartoon character, and Satan was apparently just hanging around waiting to grab the wayward soul in mid-sneeze. "Bless you!" was essentially the retort used to ward off the possibility of Satan capturing a sneezer's soul.

Theory #2

The exact opposite—the sneeze was you yeeting a demon OUT of your body. The blessing prevented the evil spirit from capturing the expelled soul.

Theory #3

There was a belief that one's heart stopped during a sneeze and the blessing was a desperate prayer to defibrillate the stopped ticker and restore life to it.

Some People Thought Sneezes Were Lucky

Not everyone was paranoid! Ancient Greek historian, Xenophon, recorded that sneezes were good omens from the gods. So "bless you" was a quick prayer of thanks to the gods.

Everyone Does This, Just in Different Languages

Despite all the many cultural differences, nearly every society decided sneezes need

acknowledgment: Spanish speakers say "Salud" (health), Germans offer "Gesundheit" (also health), and Latin Americans have a whole progressive system: first sneeze gets "Salud," second gets "Dinero" (money), third gets "Amor" (love). The Irish say "Sláinte," the French say "Dieu vous bénisse," and you can imagine the variations across 7,000 world languages. Humanity has universally agreed: all sneezes must be unacknowledged verbally.

We're All Saying It Without Knowing Why

Fast forward to today. We now know that sneezing is just your nose dealing with dust, pollen, or—in a condition scientists actually named ACHOO syndrome (Autosomal Dominant Compelling Helio-Ophthalmic Outburst)—bright lights. Your soul isn't escaping, demons aren't involved, your heart keeps beating, and you're not dying of plague.

Yet we STILL say "bless you" like our lives depend on it. Likely most of us don't believe in the idea that souls can escape through nostrils. Yet, letting a sneeze pass without acknowledgment feels like a serious social faux pas. And even though the phrase has become divorced from religion, even hardcore atheists reflexively bless sneezers. We've essentially secularized a spiritual incantation and kept it around because... it would be rude not to?

Meanwhile, coughing—which is arguably more disruptive and actually spreads disease more effectively—gets ignored completely. Burps? Eye rolls at best. But sneezes? MUST BE BLESSED. The social contract on sneezes is clear and immutable.

Why We Can't Quit This Weird Habit

Here's the thing: sneezes make us momentarily vulnerable. Your eyes slam shut (you're literally blind for a split second), your face contorts, and you make an undignified noise you can't control. It's a tiny moment of human helplessness.

Maybe "bless you" endures because it's a 'micro-moment of kindness.' We're saying "I see you in your brief moment of biological chaos, fellow human, and I wish you well." It's a social acknowledgment that we're all just meat puppets piloted by brains, occasionally malfunctioning in public, and that's okay.

In our modern world where we're all staring at screens and avoiding eye contact, perhaps this ancient ritual survives because we desperately need excuses to

acknowledge each other's existence as humans. A sneeze is a permission slip for human connection, however brief.

The Bottom Line

Whether it started with Pope Gregory panic-blessing plague victims, ancient Romans following traditions they didn't understand, or medieval people worried about soul theft, "bless you" has transformed from supernatural protection racket to polite reflex.

“Bless you!”

It's a linguistic fossil—a verbal appendix we've kept around even though we've forgotten its original function. And honestly? That's kind of beautiful. Every time you bless a stranger's sneeze, you're taking part in a tradition that would be recognizable to ancient Romans, medieval plague survivors, and everyone in between.

So the next time someone sneezes and you automatically say "bless you," remember: you're performing a ritual older than Christianity, whose origins were already forgotten before the Roman Empire fell, based on beliefs about souls escaping through nostrils and heart-stopping that are completely incorrect, yet somehow it's still considered rude not to do it.

Humans are wonderfully, bizarrely consistent. And if that's not worth blessing, I don't know what is.

Achoo! Bless you!

(You're welcome.)

Books Shelf...

Briefly:

- The books listed below are primarily military in theme.



Gail and Heather, two very dynamic and discerning book enthusiasts, both retired school administrators, bring years of experience to the book shelves here. However, Christmas shopping and holiday preparation has swamped them. So for a couple of weeks, they must put their book interests aside. Like Arnold though, they will be back.



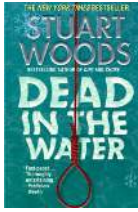
I have favourite authors: Baldacci, Grisham, Tess Gerritsen are highest on my list. But also, Stuart Woods. This month I would like to introduce readers to Stuart Woods who writes detective stories that are little more than adult comic books. Nevertheless, comic books or not, Woods entertains and his series starring Stone Barrington are excellent escapism, either on a sun-soaked beach (one wishes) or a warm set of pillows in bed (can be done). Click on the **TITLE** below each Stone Barrington book cover below to learn more:



[CLASS ACT](#)



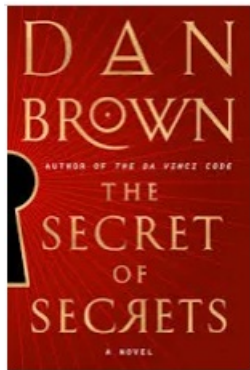
[COLLATERAL DAMAGE](#)



[DEAD IN THE WATER](#)

As promised

Finally, as promised, I have read Dan Brown's new book. Click the title below the book cover image below to read my take on it:



[The SECRET OF SECRETS](#)

Website & Tech Desk:

Briefly:

- Notable changes to my website
- Technology updates: apps I recommend
- Consider a donation to the website and newsletter

Website

The goal of my website is to make the site straightforward and easy to navigate. This is challenging because so much information has been published over the nearly 10 years of publication, almost 10,000 posts. Yes, really. No wonder people are overwhelmed by my site.

Here are **THREE** explanations to help you navigate my publications:

#1

The SIDEBAR WIDGETS

(located on the right of the site front page)

On my website at www.szpin.ca, click the **WIDGET** you want to access to see a list of the relative posts:



#2

The **CENTRAL AREA**

The **central area** is “breaking news” posts. Ones that I feel you should really note.



The **CENTRAL AREA** displays the latest, most current notifications.

#3 POSTS

A list of recent posts, usually about a dozen, is posted below the red banner. To read the post, just click on the post or its thumbnail...



Latest Posts



SPEED CAMERAS: * FAIRPORT BEACH NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOC.** petitions Ford to reverse policy to remove speed cameras - The Fairport Beach Neighbourhood Association has taken a bold step relating to the Ontario government's intention to ban speed camera in Ontario municipalities: a petition. The FBNA is just one... .. [Continue reading](#) ...



PICKERING: Speed Cameras is becoming a hot topic - Speed cameras is becoming a hot topic. Dog Fried has pontificated that they not only are a municipal cash grab but that they should be banned in all Ontario municipalities... .. [Continue reading](#) ...



DAME: A Very Merry Yuletide Tale - Ah, it's almost that time again. "The most wonderful time of the year", and "hap, happiest season of all" claims the 1963 song. I truly believe Christmas was that magical... .. [Continue reading](#) ...



SPEED CAMERAS: Retired cop contravenes Speed Cameras - Here's the situation My wife is driving home at 12:03 AM on a Sunday night along Yonge Street. The speed limit on Yonge Street is 50 km an hour, but... ..

I recommend apps and extensions...

I spend a lot of time doing computer work. Mostly writing and creating text rather than programming. I am continually trying to make myself more efficient here to reduce my sitting time at the machine. In doing all that, I discover some applications and applets to be more useful than others. If you want to make yourself more efficient in your computer work and be more productive in it, these are computer apps and applets that I think can help you reach that goal:

1. **NOTEZILLA** by Concept World

Post it notes on steroids. You like post-it-notes? You'll love NOTEZILLA. Notezilla lets you make text, image, and audio notes. Big deal, you say. It isn't if you just want to make notes...but what if you want to pin them to certain items on your computer? Notezilla ! What if you want to be reminded of them in the future? Notezilla ! What if you have a poor memory and can only remember aspects of the note? Notezilla ! The only drawback to Notezilla is that it is costly, particularly for the first year. But you want a Ferrari, then you'll have to pay for it. Is it worth it...you wanna believe it. Big time. Without equivocation. Notezilla, post-it-notes that will make note making your right hand-man for remembering things. Download the app from -> [NOTEZILLA](#)

2. **EVERYTHING** (Search Everything) by Voidtools. In short, EVERYTHING will find anything on me computer, *anything*. I just have to type the approximation of the item, or a few approximations, and Everything will find them. When I can't remember if it is on my computer, if I saved it, if I used it, EVERYTHING to the

rescue. Within seconds. EVERYTHING, an essential tool in my computer arsenal. Get it at -> [EVERYTHING](#)

3. **My mind** is rather esoteric, way up there. "My mind" is a 'contents management' application. With the help of AI (Artificial Intelligence), it helps you store, manage and recall your computer information. Files, folders, images, audios, can be placed on what looks like a display board of 'cards' which you can manipulate as you wish. Add, delete, rename, organize, even web link...this app will help you do it all making computer organization easier and more efficient.

The *free version* will serve you well while you are exploring 'my mind,' but once you begin to see the power and value of the app, you might consider the approx \$12/mth a real value. That expense will deter many users as it seems a lot for something that the old fashioned file/folder management system services acceptably for most computer users.

Link -> [my mind](#)

Speed dial 2 - technically, this is not an app. It is an extension, an applet, a mini program that saves all your web pages as bookmarks, sites you have visited and noted for recall later. It works the same as an app once you install it to your browser. [The browser used here is GOOGLE CHROME] Use the 3 dots at the top of your browser to get to the 'Extension' download command. Search for "speed dial 2" and download and install it to your browser.

When you have installed the extension to your browser, you will see a little lightening bolt on your command bar. [You may have to use the *extensions icon* to enable the speed dial 2 extension to make the lightening bolt appear]

This applet is a gem because you can mark any site for later recall. A superb tool for recording sites that you like and want to be able to return to again in the future.



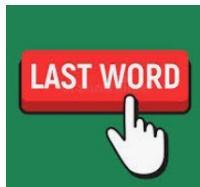
Would you consider donating to my site?

My site is commercial free, no advertising. Hence no revenue income. I pay all publishing expenses from my own pocket. Why do I do this? I feel it is important to help people with information, keeping it minimized and regulated so they are kept informed about important news and events. As I live in Pickering, Ont, most of my information is geographically based, centers there. However, I write researched information about various

topics from aging to technology.

I ask if you would consider a donation to help me with my expenses...
donations can be made using **INTERAC** to zippyonego@gmail.com

Thank you for your help and support.



I hate winter and am grateful that so far winter has spared us its norms, extreme cold and massive loads of snow.....so far. But we are just at the beginning of December. So just wait!

If you enjoy winter, I cheer you for finding ways to enjoy a season that is deceptfully beautiful but actually miserable in my books.

The only redeemable aspect of winter is that Christmas and New Years occur, times I can sip a scotch with my family and friends. These are wonderful celebration times and I hope they are great celebrations for you too.

We wish you.....

