

Flagged Down  
The true story of a flap over a flag

by Dorg

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In 1987, if you drove northbound on Arbutus Street in Vancouver between West Second Avenue and West Third Avenue, you would have driven by a nondescript, very boring beige four-storey apartment building that looked like the hundreds of other three- or four-storey apartment blocks in Kitsilano. The only distinguishing feature that set it apart from the hundreds of other small cookie-cutter, conservative and conforming apartment blocks in that neighbourhood was a large Canadian flag proudly displayed on the outside wall next to one of the balconies on the third floor. If you drove by the same apartment building in 1989, you would have noticed that the flag was gone. And so was I.

I lived in apartment 306 at 2120 West Second Avenue for seven years. Lived. The past tense being operative, because I got kicked out of the place. I owned the apartment and they still gave me the boot. I was expelled for expressing my political beliefs. In a country where free speech is a fundamental cornerstone of our constitution, I went a bit too far for the old fogies, neat freaks and closed-minded denizens of my over-regulated apartment block.

In the mid-1980s I was super-charged with national pride. I still am, but in the spring of 1987 I had just returned to Vancouver after travelling for one year from coast to coast with Rick Hansen, working on the Canadian leg of his Man in Motion world tour. I had never been more proud to be a Canadian. I had experienced first-hand what a vibrant, beautiful, diversified and fantastically free country Canada is. From the East to the West, Canadians passionately backed Rick Hansen, and through their generosity, compassion and enthusiasm I believe they collectively displayed some of our country's best qualities. I had never loved my country more than in that magical spring in 1987 when Rick rolled back to Vancouver.

The experience on the road reinforced what I already knew. Canada is the best country in the world to live in. Every year the United Nations even ranks Canada number one according to their Human Development Index. Many people don't know this, but the United Nations annually conducts an international survey among 174 different countries. They look at factors such as life expectancy, number of educational institutions, Gross National Product per capita, literacy, infant mortality, health care and a country's human rights record, to name a few. Based on a formula, Canada consistently comes out on top. By "on top", I mean in the number one position. Numero Uno! I know this because I am the geek who hangs up a flag and looks forward to the survey coming out each year.

So, based on empirical data from the United Nations survey, everyone on this planet must accept the fact that Canada is the best place in the world to live. The ranking comes from a credible source. Having established that, I think most Canadians will agree that Vancouver is the best place in Canada to live. And I believed that the best place to live in Vancouver was right there at Second and Arbutus. So, by means of my logical deduction, I figured God had somehow plunked me down to live on the greatest spot in the whole world. How did I win the global residential sweepstakes?

Ah yes, Second and Arbutus was paradise. From Second and Arbutus I had a bird's eye view of the North Shore Mountains. During half the year they were snowcapped and stunning to look at everyday. The beach was only two blocks away. It was a beautiful beach with soft sand and crashing waves. And all of this beauty, a mere seven minute drive away from downtown. But I couldn't stay. My neighbours banded together, mounted a conspiracy and had me evicted from the neighbourhood. All over a flag.

First of all, I'll tell you how the flag got put up in the first place. After that fabulous year on the road with Rick, I returned to my apartment, a small one-bedroom unit I had owned for five years prior to leaving on the tour. One day during the spring of '87 I walked down to the Flag Shop on Fourth and Burrard and innocently purchased a four-foot by eight-foot Canadian flag. I had been contemplating displaying a flag for a long time and finally got around to it. It cost me \$43.73. I brought it back home with me and carefully nailed the four corners onto the wall next to my balcony. There was no place to install a flagpole on the narrow balcony, so pinning it to the wall was my only option. After putting it up I went outside and surveyed it from across the street. It looked great. It was properly centred, neat and very presentable. I immediately knew I had done the right thing and that every Prime Minister from John A. MacDonald to John Diefenbaker, Lester Pearson and Pierre Trudeau and all the rest before and after would have been damn proud of me. When I travel to America I see flags everywhere. I see them on office towers, flying on car aerials and on the front porches of big old houses. Why couldn't we be more patriotic in Canada?

And so for three or four months it just hung there. Once the wind blew a corner of it off and I had to go out with my hammer and re-hang it. Other than that, it was maintenance-free and I received no comments from anyone about, it, good or bad. Sometimes when I drove home after work I would look up and notice it. I was glad I had done it. It was like so many things in life that you take you forever to get around to doing, and once you've done it you wonder why it took you so long. Having it up there made me feel good.

Then one day after getting home from work, I had a letter waiting for me from the co-op Council. The letter was actually from a property management company, Belson Properties, that acted on behalf of the co-op. It stated that I was contravening co-op bylaw 11-C by hanging an object on the side of the building. The outside wall was considered a common area and nothing could be adhered, hung or placed on common areas. A photocopy of the section of the building's bylaws was attached to the letter with bylaw 11-C clearly highlighted in yellow marker. The letter went on to say that the matter

was on the agenda of the last co-op meeting and it was unanimously voted by the co-op to have the flag removed.

I laughed out loud to myself, crumpled up the letter and threw it away. Having attended a few co-op meetings, I was not surprised. After I first bought the apartment I participated in some of those meetings. The condo was my biggest purchase ever, representing my total life savings. I figured I should take an active interest in how the building was maintained and managed, I needed to protect my investment. But the meetings seemed so petty and always dealt with such trivial, unimportant issues that I just lost interest after a short while.

The third Thursday evening of each month was reserved for the co-op meetings, and they were held in the recreation room in the building's basement. Shirley in apartment 403 was the Chairman of the co-op. She looked like Aunt Bea from the Andy of Mayberry TV show, only she was a grumpy Aunt Bea. She was a terrible chairman but she made great Rice Krispie? squares for each meeting.

Almost everyone who attended the meetings was old. The building had an even mixture of young and old residents, but mainly the old people attended these meetings. It was because most of the young people who owned apartments in the building were busy with careers and young families and had better things to do. Furthermore, the old people seemed to really dig the meetings. I think that for many of them it was the highlight of their month. They had nothing better to do and it gave them a great sense of importance to debate issues like whether or not to renew our elevator servicing contract with the Acme Elevator Company, or if we should rust-proof paint the new eaves drop on the south-east corner of the building, or if there really was the odour of a dog emanating from Mrs. Rupert's apartment 201, or if apartment 111 should get a noise violation warning for the party they threw last month. Most of these oldsters, sadly enough, were forgotten people who rarely had a chance to express their opinions, let alone have them count for something.

I'm sure that these monthly co-op meetings must have felt like sessions of Parliament to some of those pensioners. Roberts Rules of Order prevailed, we stuck to our agenda and each issue was carefully reviewed. Minutes were taken that recorded precisely what was said; motions were tabled, motions were passed and when it was all said and done, the tray of Rice Krispie? squares was always emptied before the meeting was adjourned.

After attending my fourth meeting I was bored stiff; I couldn't take it and never went again. Besides, I didn't even like Rice Krispie? squares. I figured whatever I missed I could review in the official minutes of the meeting that were slipped under my apartment door after the meetings. I soon learned that attending the meetings was dull enough, but reading about what you missed was even duller. In the end I rarely even opened the monthly envelope containing the minutes that Chairman Shirley dropped off like clockwork on the last day of each month.

I justified my lack of interest by knowing that the building had a healthy contingency fund. Each month every apartment owner in the building was required to pay a couple hundred dollars in maintenance fees. Over the years we had built up a surplus of over thirty thousand dollars. Rather than attending those sleep-inducing meetings or reading through the monotonous minutes, I would simply once a year quickly review the financial statement the co-op was required to issue annually to each apartment owner. As long as the bottom line in our contingency fund remained at around thirty thousand dollars, we were in good shape and I'd let that geriatric brain trust worry about all the small stuff.

After that first written notice to remove my flag, they just kept on coming. At the end of each month, always around the same time that I received the co-op minutes slipped under my door, a second envelope came by mail from Belson Property Management demanding that I take down the flag. I always just threw them both away without even opening the envelopes. I suppose I was living in a bit of denial, but I had better things to worry about. This went on for at least a year. Then one day, I don't know why, maybe I was looking for something to write on the back of, I decided to open the monthly property management letter. It had two pieces of paper in it: a modified and more strongly worded version of the original letter from a year ago, demanding that the flag come down, and also a separate invoice. The invoice had 12 monthly entries of \$50 each on it, totalling \$600. I was being fined \$50 a month for leaving the flag up.

It prompted me to open the monthly co-op minutes envelope that was slipped under my door the next day by Adolf Hitler's assistant, Frau Shirley. Sure enough, I was item number one on the previous meeting's agenda. The minutes read: Regrettably, actions taken by the co-op to have Mr. Doroghy, in Apartment 306, remove the flag outside of his balcony have gone unheeded. Dr. Sawat in Apartment 409 pointed out that it has been a year since the matter was brought to the co-op's attention. Mrs. Shadwick in Apartment 102 asked that Belson Property Management look into the legalities surrounding the offence and asked if it would be possible to have Mr. Doroghy evicted from the building. Mrs. Thompson in Apartment 204 suggested that the co-op would have the right to simply remove the banner themselves and suggested that a representative from Belson Property Management gain access to Mr. Doroghy's apartment balcony while he is at work and simply remove the flag. Dr. Sawat pointed out that while this was a good idea, we could be trespassing and pointed out that the co-op could not put itself into a litigious position. Chairman Shirley tabled a motion that Belson Property Management come back with a report next month outlining the building's options, including evicting Mr. Doroghy from the building.

The rest of the minutes contained a diatribe of minutia: was Mrs. Rupert harbouring an illegal pet, who was leaving the door in the laundry room open and was it time to replace one of the worn-out recycling bins?

When I received the letter and bill that I just described, I had just gotten back from a five-week trip to China and had a stack of mail waiting for me, including the previous month's minutes. Just for fun I opened them too. Once again I was at the top of the agenda. And once again there was half a page of notes dealing with ousting me. All my friendly neighbours were offering comments and suggestions on how to turf me. I wanted to go back to China, where I felt I would have more rights.

Oh well, I thought to myself, there is no way they can kick me out. After all, I owned the place. And as far as the \$600 fine went, forget it, I just wasn't going to pay. Three more months passed, and the letters and fines just kept on coming. The only difference was that now I was starting to open them and read them. I was always first on the co-op meeting's agenda, and the issue of my flag and bylaw II-C was really heating up. Belson Property Management had reported back to the co-op on different legal interpretations of what could be done. Apparently, in order to evict me, the co-op would have to sue me in court over my breach of my co-op agreement and that could be a costly procedure. Other half-baked ideas to get rid of me that were carefully outlined in the minutes included having the building painted and temporarily removing my flag under the guise of painting preparation, and then not giving it back to me. Someone suggested that the co-op offer to buy my apartment in order to oust me. Another brilliant idea involved shutting off my power until the flag came down.

Over the last year and three months, almost totally unbeknownst to me, I had created a great deal of acrimony among all of my neighbours. I was public enemy number one. And the strange thing was that not once had anyone in the building come up to speak to me about the conflict. All of the gesturing, posturing and communications were done indirectly through meeting minutes and letters from the property management company. If I hadn't opened those letters and invoices, I wouldn't even have known what an irresponsible, inconsiderate clod I had become.

Although I was beginning to take a bit more interest in the whole situation, I still wasn't worried. But I must admit, the controversy that I was in the middle of was taking a psychological toll on me. Call it a persecution complex or whatever, but I became overly self-conscious. Before this all began, I thought I had a friendly and good relationship with all the people in the building. I rarely saw them over the years, but when I did in the halls or entrance, I tried to be friendly and greeted them with a warm "hi" or "how are you?". They would always respond in a pleasant manner and it was all fine and social. But I developed a bit of paranoia over this whole flag issue that resulted in my over-analyzing everything. Passing neighbours in the hallways became a painful experience. I began imagining that people were ignoring me and, even worse, talking behind my back. When I entered the building's elevator full of neighbours, I brought the conversation to a halt and the uncomfortable three-floor descent would take forever. Everybody hated me. Still, I was proud that the flag was flying and I had no intention of removing it. Ostracize me all you want, the flag is staying up.

Then one day on the street downtown, I ran into my old friend Vic. Vic was a lawyer with the prestigious firm Boughton Yang and Anderson, and I knew he would get a real kick out of the whole flag story. When I told him what was happening, he did get a laugh out of it, but when I asked him for his legal opinion I didn't get a laugh out of what he told me. Vic didn't think they could evict me, but he said that although I could go on refusing to pay the monthly fines (they were now up to over a thousand dollars), eventually the co-op would collect. He told me that they would put a lien on my property once I put it up for sale, essentially preventing the sale from completing until the lien was removed. In the end they would win. They had me by the short and curlies. I began taking the letters more seriously.

As a follow-up to our roadside chat, Vic and I had lunch a week later, and before our meal he reviewed my co-op agreement and the letters and invoices I had been receiving. I lost my appetite for dessert. It was clear to him that the co-op rules stated that nothing could be affixed to the outside common wall of the building. Forget about patriotism, free speech and the constitution. A rule is a rule. And I was in direct violation of this rule or co-op bylaw, any way you looked at it. There were no loopholes, and no ways around it. The letters and the fines were all perfectly in order and legitimate. The only good news that Vic had for me that afternoon was his reiterating that, although they could keep on fining me, it would be tough for them to evict me.

So I did what I have done with so many problems and uncomfortable situations in my life. I avoided it, did nothing and hoped it would go away.

A year went by and nothing much happened. The flag stayed up. By the summer of 1989 my bill was up to \$1,350 for the flag violation, plus \$134 for accumulated interest, for a grand total of \$1,484 that I owed them. Also that summer I had inadvertently contravened a number of other bylaws too. (Had I really contravened them or were they trying to get rid of me? There's that nasty complex coming back.)

I received a letter from Belson Property Management stating that it had been brought to the co-op's attention that three times in the past month my car had been parked in a way that encroached on my neighbour's parking spot. In other words, my tire was on the white dividing line. Then another letter pointed out that waterbeds were not allowed in the building, due to the possibility of flooding the suite below. I had a waterbed and they asked that it be removed. Next I received a warning for a dinner party that they claimed had "created excessive noise." My flag freedom bill was mounting monthly, and at the same time everyone in the building was ganging up on poor little old me. One of those crazy oldsters in the co-op might lose his marbles and try to kill me. I told you that paranoia was starting to set in. Something had to be done, so I decided to attend the next co-op meeting.

At this point in the story I have to pause and explain that I have always been a reasonable person who has believed in compromise over confrontation. We are here for a good time, not a long time, so let's all just get along. There have even been countless instances in my life where I have compromised in order to avoid confrontation. Even when I am right, I still want to avoid an argument if at all possible. By way of example, I'll tell you a short story about cutting the lawn at the house where I live now one Sunday morning at 11 a.m. I remember it was 11 a.m. because I had made a point of waiting till 11 a.m. to begin the noisy lawn-cutting chore with my old orange electric power mower. Before starting the job, I considered the fact that some of my neighbours may like to sleep in on Sundays. Furthermore, I felt that cutting the grass at 9 a.m. was unreasonable, even if I was wide awake and itching to get on with it, which I was. It might wake someone up. Ten a.m. was reasonable. But to be on the safe side, I waited till 11 a.m.. So there I am, minding my own business, beautifying the neighbourhood on a lovely sunny Sunday morning. Next thing I know, I look up and my next-door neighbour is walking down the street in his pajamas. I knew that he couldn't be going to work, because he doesn't work on Sundays. Besides he usually left for work at eight, and never in his pajamas. I realized there must be something wrong, and by the determined look in his eye and his angry gait, I knew that he wanted to have a word with me.

Hmmm, I wonder what he wants? You guessed it. He asked if I could stop mowing the lawn, because he was trying to sleep in. I was so proud of myself. It just wasn't worth an argument. I kept my cool and simply smiled and said that I thought that it was a totally unreasonable request. I pointed out that I had deliberately waited till 11 o'clock to avoid waking up sleepy-heads like him. Then, which I am sure caught him totally by surprise, I told him that I would be happy to wait till the afternoon to mow the lawn if it meant that much to him. I ended by restating that I still considered it an unreasonable request, as I walked away winding up the electric cord. However, in the spirit of neighbourly co-operation I was happy to cease my mowing at once, allowing him to sleep off his hang-over. I relate this story mainly to establish in your mind what a reasonable person I am. I wanted to do what was right for the neighbourhood. A reasonable team player all the way! You would love to have me as a neighbour.

But for some reason, when it came to that flag hanging outside of apartment 306 at 2120 West Second, I wasn't willing to compromise. Not even budge. I am not sure if it was national pride or just being fed up with all the damned stupid, narrow-minded rules you have to put up with living in a co-op apartment building. But that flag was staying up.

So, acting in a composed, reasonable, adult manner, I went to visit Chairman Shirley. She had rudely ignored me in the building for over a year now and was shocked to see me at her doorstep. She plastered on a fake, nervous smile and invited me into her apartment. She was frightened and even shaking a bit as she offered me some tea. We were alone together standing in her spotless two-bedroom apartment. No one had seen me enter the apartment. No one even knew I was there. You could have cut the nervous tension with a knife. I declined the tea offer and told her that I wanted to discuss my flag with her. Then in a sarcastic, snarly and condescending tone of voice she barked, "Well finally, it's only

taken two years to get you to wake up and pay some attention to your neighbours' concerns!" I picked up a vase and smashed it over her head. No, I didn't. I only put that in to make sure you were still paying attention.

What actually happened is that we agreed there was no sense in us discussing the flag and that I should attend the next co-op meeting to discuss the matter with the group.

So, on the third Thursday of that June I was again on the top of the co-op's agenda, only this time I was there in person. I thought about the meeting all day at work and about what I would say, and how I would feel. Would there be unanimous disapproval of me and my flag? Reading through the past minutes, I couldn't find any evidence of a sympathetic neighbour. Would people be polite and civil or would loud arguments ensue? Would my neighbours throw their uneaten Rice Krispie? squares at me when I got up to speak? I considered arriving late and making a grand entrance. Then I decided it would be best to play it safe, arrive on time, judge the room for myself and fine-tune my approach.

Four people were seated in the rec room when I showed up. I shook hands with an elderly gentleman whom I barely recognized. He explained that he lived directly below me in 206 and was hard of hearing and was there with his daughter, who would help him along. I politely nodded to two other women who were there. One of them was a suite owner from the main floor and the other was a representative from Belson Property Management. It was just before seven o'clock and within the next ten minutes 17 or 18 others entered. I sensed that none of them was surprised to see me, and that was later confirmed when Mrs. Ashcroft from suite 209 looked at me and said, "Oh good, you are here. This should be one of our more interesting meetings." Chairman Shirley had done a good job getting the word out that the building's chief antagonist would be there. At prior meetings that I had attended years ago, we never broke an attendance of 10 people. At this meeting we had over 20 people. At least I was a real draw.

At 7:10 we got down to business. Shirley called the assembled group to order and began by reviewing the previous meeting's minutes. Then, when she started to introduce me, she re-plastered that horrible fake smile on her face and said, "Well, well, ladies and gentlemen, we have a very special guest at this evening's meeting. Mr. Doroghy from suite 306 recently asked me if he could attend the meeting to discuss the matter of his flag." In her insincere introduction she had brutally mispronounced my last name. I decided not to correct her.

I stood up (always stand when you present). I slowly began my carefully-thought-out speech by explaining that I have always considered myself to be a reasonable person. I let them know I usually don't set out on purpose to cause a ruckus. I went on to explain how much I enjoyed living in this building and how it was my intention to stay. I even remember saying, "Look, I'm not a trouble-maker, I just want to resolve this and be a good neighbour."

After that attention-getting opening, I thought I'd play the Canadian patriotism card. I told them that the Rick Hansen Tour had initially inspired me to put the flag up and that at the time I was unaware of bylaw 11-C. Don't blame me, blame Rick. He is a Canadian hero; who is going to be the first one to take a cheap shot at him? Yeah, blame Rick. When I could see that tactic going nowhere fast, I went into a long, boring, technical explanation of the United Nations Human Development Index and how Canada consistently is in the number one spot: "A track record that each and every one of us in this room should be proud of." Strike two. I was losing them fast. Then I told them about how, whenever I travel abroad, I always proudly display a Canadian flag. As a nation we are well liked worldwide. Tell anybody overseas you are a Canadian and the general reaction is a warm smile and a welcoming attitude. All of my backpacks, hand baggage and jackets have Canadian flags sewn on them for just that reason. Since most of the people in the room had never travelled beyond New Westminster, this approach was also falling flat. I wrapped up by telling them how the flag was a strong symbol of a universally respected nation and hanging it on the outside of my apartment was a natural extension of my true feelings. As that guy Joe proclaimed much later in those Molson Beer commercials , I AM CANADIAN!!!!

After my long and drawn-out 10-minute Canadiana lecture, I finally got down from my pulpit and surveyed the degree to which I had struck a patriotic chord within them and stoked the flames of their nationalistic pride.

One of my points must have resonated? But they just sat there like a bunch of sea plankton. Nothing. Not even a spark , not even close. Were they all brain-dead? I might as well have been talking to that cold outside common wall behind my flag on the third-floor balcony.

Then I sat down. It was embarrassing. There was no discussion; no one backed me. There was just silence. Then Shirley, without even acknowledging my passionate performance, just said, "So, Mr. Doroghy," (mispronounced again). "When will you be taking the flag down?"

I told her I wouldn't be taking the flag down. The flag stays up! I pointed out that it is a Canadian flag and I am proud to have it hanging outside my apartment. It wasn't the Jolly Roger skull and cross-bones flag or the flag of some subversive nation. It was our flag. The Maple Leaf! And it was staying up. I told her that this group didn't have a patriotic bone in its collective body. I lost it a bit at that point and ended by explaining that I was ashamed to live in a building with such a bunch of apathetic nit-pickers.

Then Mrs. Cosgrove from suite 310 said, "But no other apartment buildings in the neighbourhood have flags up. Why should we?"

I quickly rebutted with, "Well, maybe they should all have flags up. Just 'cause they don't have flags up doesn't mean we shouldn't." I concluded by asking, "Wouldn't it be great if every building in Kits displayed a Canadian flag?"

My argument brought on an onslaught of petty negativity that could only come from a group of narrow-minded shut-ins like these people: "It just doesn't fit in. It's not the flag we are against, the flag is fine, but if we make one exception then we will have other owners wanting to post other things so we can't allow the flag. When you bought the place you knew perfectly well that you were not allowed to hang objects on the exterior of the building. Blah, blah, blah."

While they were ganging up and arguing, it gave me time to think. In the heat of the battle I came up with something that just might work. My popularity had sunk so low by now, anything was worth a try. I said, "Look, I'm sorry, the flag is just not coming down and I'm not leaving the building either. You are stuck with both me and the flag. But I have an idea. I sense that most of you are not against the flag itself; it is just having it on the side of the building that creates the problem." I went on to say, "Why don't we put up a real metal flagpole in the garden in front of the building and properly raise a Canadian flag on it? That way the flag stays up, we don't contravene any bylaws and everybody is happy. If we can agree on it tonight, maybe we can get it up in time for Canada Day, raise it then and have a barbecue or something to celebrate."

To further convince them, I explained that it probably wouldn't cost more than a thousand dollars. Heck, we had a healthy building contingency fund and could certainly afford it. In reaction to this, more of the intellectual bottom-feeders in the room expressed their pea-brained observations that no other buildings had flagpoles. I countered with, "So what, let's be the first."

Slowly a few people warmed up to the idea. One of the oldsters was a war vet and he liked the idea. A woman on the first floor, whom I sort of knew because I worked with her daughter, supported the flagpole idea more out of a slight family allegiance to me. Then another pensioner who was friends with the war vet came out in favour of the idea. For ten minutes the idea was debated and my side was slowly picking up steam. I was starting to feel that I had a chance.

After almost everyone had voiced their opinion and the issue had been thoroughly debated, Chairman Shirley called for a vote. I had closely monitored where the pro-flag support was coming from and felt my idea to fund a flagpole was going to be narrowly passed. Shirley said, "I would like all of those in favour in principle of the co-op funding a flagpole for our building to raise their hands."

Then it happened. The old man who was partially deaf slowly began to stand up. While his daughter was whispering into his ear, he sluggishly straightened his tired old bones and raised himself out of his chair. In a raspy, barely audible old voice that was half-whisper and hard to hear, he said, "I have been carefully listening back here and haven't

said a word yet. With great interest I have listened to this brash young man and considered his side of the argument. He seems sincere in his intentions, but what he is doing to us is nothing more than sheer blackmail. It's blackmail, there is no other word for it."

As he shouted out the word "blackmail," he banged his cane on the floor to emphasize his point. He continued, "I have been attending these meetings for three years and not once has the group ever even considered a flagpole. It's ridiculous. Then this young man, who never bothers attending our meetings, and who has been violating our co-op's bylaws for the past two years, comes to us tonight with an ultimatum. Well, I'm sorry, I don't react well to ultimatums and being told what to do." Then he pointed his cane at me and said, "Don't you put my back up against the wall with an ultimatum, young man! I can't believe that the group would even consider such a ridiculous proposal. It is nothing more than plain and simple blackmail."

With that he banged his cane twice on the floor and slowly struggled to sit down. When he was finally completely seated, his daughter gently patted him on the knee. I must admit, it was a real show-stopper. It reminded me of the crucial turning point in a political debate. This eloquent old statesman had just dealt me a deadly body blow.

Shirley asked for a show of hands and my proposal was unanimously rejected. Every single person in the room voted against me. Even the old vet who was initially on my side raised his hand in opposition to the motion that the co-op fund a flagpole.

I was crestfallen, totally crushed. It was an ignominious defeat. I didn't even know what to do. I just said, "Look, I'm sorry, the flag is not coming down," and then I got up and left the room, totally humiliated.

I allowed myself a couple of days to cool down before planning my next move. Then, sadly enough, I realized that my next move was to move. I couldn't justify the \$50 per month I was being fined to leave the flag up, and I certainly couldn't capitulate and take the flag down. My only option was to leave the place. So I carefully crafted a letter addressed to the co-op that, in a nutshell, stated that if they would waive the \$1,484 in fines, I would sell my apartment and leave. I ended the letter by saying, "The residents of this building have far too many rules, not enough imagination and absolutely no appreciation of what a great country we live in. A country where all citizens from coast to coast, with the exception of citizens who live in this building, are able to express their opinions." I signed the letter, slipped it under Shirley's door and wondered what type of response it would bring.

A month later a letter arrived from Belson Property Management. It stated in legalese that the co-op had reviewed my letter and that upon the completion of the sale of my unit they would be willing to waive all past fines and interest accrued in connection with the ongoing two-year violation of bylaw 11-C.

So at the end of 1989 I put my one-bedroom apartment in Kits on the market, and moved out shortly after. With property prices on the West Side of Vancouver sky-high, I still couldn't afford a house, but I found a half-duplex that suited me perfectly. I bought the top half of a big old character home built in 1911. I owned the upper half of the building and my neighbour Dwight and his wife Jean owned the lower floor. On the weekend that I moved in, one of the first things I did was to install not one, but two big flagpoles on my balcony and then I proudly draped two huge Canadian flags on them.

For twelve years the flags gloriously flew, day in, day out, proudly expressing my deep love of this country of ours, without anyone so much as uttering a dissenting peep. Then one day I was downstairs in my neighbour Dwight's kitchen, having a coffee and discussing issues like our insurance, getting the place painted and yard work. I've always liked Dwight and our relationship as co-homeowners has been based on mutual co-operation. He said, "Dave, there is something I have been meaning to bring up for years. It's about your flags. Like, I mean, there is nothing wrong with flying one flag. One flag is OK, but don't you think that flying two is like a fricking parade?"

He didn't realize that he had just hit a raw nerve and a very touchy subject. I just laughed and told him I would take one of them down. See, I told you I am a reasonable guy.