

Flag Waving

by SHERALYN ROMAN

For years, putting a pin of the Canadian flag on your knapsack as you travelled, hauling out your Canadian passport at border crossings, or proudly hanging the Canadian flag outside your home all year long, or loudly and proudly on Canada Day, actually meant something.

It meant people automatically assumed you were nice. It meant one might expect to hear the words 'I'm sorry?' while simply passing by another customer in the grocery aisle. For many nations around the world it meant the peacekeepers had arrived. These days, it's being featured on Fox News, upside down and sometimes with hate messages scrawled across it. It's going to take awhile before we feel proud to raise our flag again.

How ironic that the nonsense recently displayed in our nation's Capital took place in the same month we once celebrated the first raising of our Canadian flag in that very same location.

It was noon on the day after Valentine's Day, February 15, 1965 that Canada showed itself some love, respectfully lowering the Red Ensign and raising in its place, for the first time, our very own Canadian flag.

To be fair, it was not without controversy then too. A committee was formed, art was commissioned and eventually three designs were shortlisted with our current flag clearly the winner when an eventual vote by the House of Commons (163-78) approved the single, red maple leaf on a white background and bordered by red on either side. With Senate and the Queen's approval, it was finally raised with then Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson declaring; 'May the land over which this new flag flies remain united in freedom and justice - sensitive, tolerant and compassionate towards all.'

Clearly, you know where I'm going with this. It may be some time before any of us feel proud to wave, raise or wear our flag again because at the moment, it has come to represent anything but sensitivity, tolerance and compassion. Instead, like so many other elements of the recent 'freedom' convoy, our flag (however briefly) represented a noisy, intolerant fringe element of 'freedom fighters' seeking only their own version of freedom - one that very clearly did not include all fellow Canadians.

With the maple leaf appearing upside down, various hate symbols and/or language scrawled across it and even when not defaced but hanging from the back of a truck, suddenly the flag took on new meaning, one that many Canadians don't wish to be aligned with. Now, Canadians across the country are reluctant to fly the flag outside their homes, or on their vehicles lest they be confused as (or accused of) being a convoy participant. What a sad time for Canada.

In yet another feat of irony, this all came at a time when we should be doubly proud to raise, wear and display our flag as our Canadian athletes excelled at the Winter Olympics in Beijing.

Winning a total of 26 medals, including 4 gold, this is a time when we should all feel proud to display our patriotism, supporting our athletes and waving our flag madly up and down the aisles (like Canadian figure skater Keegan Messing) did in support of his fellow athletes.

In a double display of our uniqueness as Canadians, Keegan was also the young skater who, with a podium placing bronze medal of his own, assisted fellow Olympian, gold medal winner Yuzuru Hanyu, at the podium by holding out the Japanese flag while his anthem played. THAT'S what people around the world have come to expect of Canadians and what we, as Canadians, have come to expect of ourselves. Keegan's was a perfect example of what our flag represents, not the hate, vitriol, foul language and truck horns of the flag adorned big rigs blocking our nation's capital.

My Canadian flag doesn't include grown men playing with trucks in hot tubs on city streets blockaded by real trucks as they

?protest.? My Canadian flag doesn't protect adults who choose to harass and push and even spit on journalists as they attempt to cover the news in Ottawa over these past three long weeks. My Canadian flag certainly never appears upside down, in conjunction with other hate symbols or with foul language scrawled across it. And yet, irony is not yet done with us because living in Canada, under this very same flag, is exactly what gives these protestors the very freedom to do what they did ? for as long as they did. Even the measured and controlled response of the police (itself a controversy) was so very ?Canadian.? So it would appear that ?my? Canadian flag does in fact include everyone, even protestors and that's what is so wonderful about it.

It will be a while, however, before I wave at another car or truck bearing the Canadian flag because frankly, I'm not sure of their motivations. It has been a surprise for many to discover that underneath the flag of ?nice? there exists an underbelly of racism, hurt, anger and frustration. We have work to do. Canada isn't perfect, as any marginalized or Indigenous person will attest to.

But Canada IS a country whose flag represents the exact freedoms these ?freedom fighters? relied upon to get away with their nonsense. I want my flag back. I want to proudly display the flag outside my home without being mistaken for a convoy participant. I'll be ready to fly it again when it truly means what Pearson said it should mean, sensitivity, tolerance and compassion towards all.