

FLORIDA WEST
Fourth of July anxieties
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When I went out to fetch the paper the other day, I found three small American flags stuck in the ground next to my mailbox.

Attached to this patriotic salute was a business card from a local real estate agent. In her photo, the real estate agent bore the contented expression of a woman who had just emerged from a spa session in which her body had been wrapped with pre-warmed \$100 bills and her toenails painted with gold leaf.

What an inspirational sentiment for the Fourth of July, I said to myself, as tears welled in my eyes. This must have been what the Founding Fathers were thinking about when they wrote in the Declaration of Independence about "life, liberty and the pursuit of ungodly real estate profits to the point that you can make enough money off the sale of your 3/2 home in Sarasota to purchase the entire state of North Dakota, assuming you want to purchase the state of North Dakota, which we frankly can't imagine why you would."

Of course, there is nothing new or unusual about this. The American flag is used to sell many things besides real estate, including used cars, fast food and poorly conceived military invasions of foreign countries.

(I failed to mention that the business card was stapled to another little card that said "never forget." It was unclear whether the real estate agent was encouraging me to "never forget 9/11" or "never forget to give me a call when you're ready to sell your house.")

I am as patriotic as the next guy (or at least the guy next to him), but these little American flags cause me some needless anxiety. When I take my pug dog, Satan II, for a walk, he seems drawn as if by a tractor beam to these little red, white and blue flags.

While he is "saluting" them, in his own way, I fear that a neighbor wearing nothing more than pajamas and a V.F.W. cap will come charging out of his house and punch me in the nose for allowing my dog to do a lifty on these little plastic symbols of our freedom.

(A freedom which apparently does not extend to small brown dogs with bladder issues and a shaky knowledge of history.)

I have imagined several ways that I might handle this unpleasant confrontation:

- 1) "I am sorry, sir, but you see my dog is Islamic and there's just no reasoning with him."
- 2) "The flags looked dirty and he is simply washing them off."
- 3) "I don't wish to interrupt you, sir, but it appears that my dog is currently mistaking your ankle for Old Glory."

What with barbecues, trips to the beach and the very real possibility that errant fireworks will set your roof on fire (thereby reducing the profit from the sale of your house to 200 percent), the Fourth of July is stressful enough without having to figure out the proper etiquette for small, plastic American flags that come with real-estate cards attached.

Personally, I think I'll stay inside and watch baseball.

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