

The start of a new year usually inspires feelings of eager anticipation.

This year, our prevailing emotion seems to be one of fearful anticipation.

Our President-Elect has told us that the future will be painful.

Conversations over the recent holidays made it clear to me that some of us are experiencing setbacks and hardships already:

- A man told me that his lakeside house is in the process of foreclosure.
- Two women revealed that their husbands' work schedules have been cut, resulting in substantial reductions to their paychecks.
- A couple worried that a planned addition to their house will have to be canceled; their home equity has dropped so much, they are no longer confident they can obtain a home equity loan to finance renovations.
- A relative confided that if unemployment benefits are not extended soon by the new administration, he will have to leave his apartment.

Reliable media sources reported in late December:

- Over 500,000 people have filed first-time claims for unemployment benefits each week since Thanksgiving (Bloomberg.com).
- Job losses have been accelerating; job loss totals for 2008 are expected to exceed two million (Bloomberg.com).
- In November, U. S. home foreclosure filings increased twenty-eight per cent from 2007 (Bloomberg News); over two million additional home foreclosures are expected in the coming year (MSNBC.com).
- Consumer confidence is at an all time low (MSNBC.com).
- Bank robberies have increased substantially (CNN-TV).
- The Dow Jones industrial average and S&P 500 indices are on track for their biggest annual drops since 1931 (CNBC-TV).

As we move into the New Year, many of us need to prepare for a very different financial future from the prosperity we have for so long enjoyed.

We will all be challenged to practice the qualities inherent in our national character that helped us to establish and to build our nation.

These qualities include a strong work ethic, perseverance, determination, courage, the ability to work together and a commitment to helping others.

The British have long been excellent role models for coping with adversity.

Queen Elizabeth's recent Christmas message reflected the steely resolve and stoic determination that are deeply rooted in the British national character.

The Queen characterized Christmas this year as "somber" for many and said "When life seems hard, the courageous do not lie down and accept defeat. Instead, they are all the more determined to struggle for a better future."

She encouraged those with means "to use their prosperity or good fortune for the benefit of others" and noted that the people who seem most contented in life are "the people who have lived the most outgoing and unselfish lives."

This is what I am doing - without charge - to help others:

- In November, I wrote an article for this newspaper entitled "Coping in Difficult Times" which outlines the steps a person or family can take to cope with adversity. It is available at www.emo-ed.com/archives.
- In December, I set up the **Francis Fund** to help a homeless veteran and wrote an article entitled "Holidazed" on coping with the holidays.
- This article, focusing on performing a careful reality check, is the first in a three part monthly series on maintaining good and sound mental and emotional health. Next two topics: managing anger and letting go.
- I respond to all discussion board comments at www.emo-ed.com.

Please join the discussion online to share reflections on coping during these difficult times and to post your own suggestions for helping others.