Taking Stock: Haven't we been here before?

by Malcolm_Berko

Dear Mr. Berko: I'm 56 and really concerned about the state of the economy, our high national debt, the subprime crisis, falling home prices, high cost of oil and gas, falling stock market and the falling dollar - and of course, my future in this country. I work for a large bank that is now in the process of laying off more employees. I've been here 24 years, earn a fair salary, have a decent relationship with my supervisors but I'm scared to death that I may also get a surprise pink slip next month or in the next few months to come. I have a husband and four grown children and we have been able to save some money but not as much as we think we will need. It's just impossible to do on what it costs to put food on the table and make payments on our credit cards and mortgage. And making matters worse, my 401(k) is down by almost 22 percent in 2007. In the past six months everything seems to be headed for trouble. My husband and I have a son who is a career officer in Iraq who keeps telling us that Iran is going to go nuclear and intends to bomb Israel and convert the Europe and entire Mideast into an Islamic state. Two of my co-workers are (seriously) considering taking their families to a commune in Washington state where members grow their own foods and are self-sufficient. And my wonderful husband of 29 years recently lost his job; he's in the wholesale carpet sales business, hasn't been able to find a job in his kind of work for two months and his 401(k) is lower last year by 27 percent. I've been asked to learn Spanish to become a more effective manager. What is this world coming to? Why can't our citizens get their heads together and make this country a better place to live? Thank you Mr. Berko for reading my letter and letting me get all this off my mind. I actually feel better and I don't expect a response. And thank you for writing a wonderful column that my husband and I really enjoy.

B.R.

Oklahoma City

Dear B.R.: Whoa! What a letter! I hope you don't mind if I shortened it by two pages to share with readers. I think you're hanging with the wrong bowling crowd. Turn off the TV, find new friends, rent "Love Story," go to the movies, buy a big bag of popcorn and watch a romantic comedy.

Nothing is ever as bad as it seems. What goes up always comes down and vice versa. The sun shines some place every day and people still smile and mean it when they say "good morning." Read some poetry by Robert Frost and Ogden Nash. Volunteer at the Humane Society. Plan a picnic and a weekend camping trip. Get a hobby - consider selling your home to join the Peace Corps. Audit some interesting college courses. Become active in a local or state political campaign. Learn to play the piano. Get a dog or two cats.

Finally I'd like you to read the following.

"It is a gloomy moment in history. Not in the lifetime of any man who reads this paper has there been so much grave and deep apprehension; never has the future seemed so dark and incalculable.

"In France, the political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty. England and the English Empire is being sorely tired and exhausted in social and economic struggle.

"The United State is beset with racial, industrial and commercial chaos - drifting we know not where.

"Russia hangs like a storm cloud on the horizon of Europe - dark and silent. It is a solemn moment and no man can feel indifference, which happily no man pretends to feel in the issue of events.

"Of our own troubles, no man can see the end."

It's important to note that this was written over 160 years ago and appeared in the Harper's issue dated Oct. 10, 1857. Like the French philosopher said, "the more things change, the more they remain insane ... I mean the same."

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