

Courage, fortitude needed to face the year ahead

by Mark Pavilons

January 1 was like any other Wednesday, other than it was a day off. It was a day to reflect, ponder and look ahead, because looking back was no longer an option.

Like a ?bridge over troubled water,? I had been weary, feeling small, with tears in my eyes. There were multiple times in the past year when I simply had ?to lay me down.?

Life, like music, apparently wants to go where it wants to go.

They say every year ? in fact every day ? is a new beginning. Every minute we spend on this planet is a journey into the unknown.

It can be exciting, mysterious, uneventful, even sad and solemn.

But we humans are equipped to handle all of those emotions, those things that tease us, that make up our DNA.

I?feel like the world is moving really fast, much quicker than it has in previous decades. In the past year, we've seen so much in terms of conflict, space exploration, archaeological discoveries, advances in medicine and technology. Along with the best?that we're capable of, we've also witnessed some of the worst.

Political unrest, natural disasters, war, economic stressors and the cost of living weigh heavy on our minds. Fresh out of an expensive holiday season, and we're faced with some financial realities.

Grocery prices show no sign of decreasing, and the new year brought a gas hike, just as we're spending more time warming up our vehicles. Some new federal taxes are on the horizon and while Canadians are given some token rebates and refunds, it's still quite expensive to live here in the Great White North.

According to Made in CA, Canadians aged 46-55 owe the most money and have an average household debt of \$72,482, excluding mortgage.

Almost six out of ten Canadian households are in debt.

Average Canadian credit score is between 600 and 650 with anything above 650 considered a good credit score.

Only 34% of Canadians live in mortgage-free homes.

Canadian household debt remained under \$200 billion in the 1960s and 1970s but then began to rise exponentially, reaching over \$1,000 billion at the turn of the millennium.

The grim outlook was echoed by a recent survey that indicated some 20% of Canadians plan to take on more debt in 2025.

TransUnion Canada's Consumer Pulse study revealed that 82 per cent of those asked worry about inflation and 44 per cent expect their finances to be worse in the year ahead. The study surveyed 1,000 Canadian adults between September 25 and October 6, 2024. The survey also found one in five Canadians plan to take on more debt in 2025, with 43 per cent saying they plan to apply for a new credit card.

This survey also found that 25% said they might not be able to pay all their bills in 2025. And, Credit Canada saw one of its largest

increases in clients seeking help last month in more than a decade.

The MNP Consumer Debt Index, a broad gauge of how Canadians feel about their ability to pay down debt, reported that 50 per cent of those polled now feel they're \$200 or less away from being unable to pay all their bills and debt obligations in a month.

I?relay these rather bleak stats, not to frighten or raise eyebrows. This is the reality for many of our fellow citizens ? our neighbours, the person sitting next to us on the bus, or the couple enjoying a coffee at the next table. We should all be concerned about the greater society and everyone in it.

Sure, many, particularly in this neck of the woods, enjoy a rather comfortable lifestyle. But no one is immune to stock market or real estate fluctuations. Even the well-to-do don't particularly enjoy paying more for insurance, gas, furniture and car repairs.

Not all residents are enjoying the sunshine.

The King Township Food?Bank sent out a call to action late last year, pointing to ?an alarming rise in demand for its services.?

Since its founding in 2004, the food bank has been a vital resource for residents struggling to put food on the table. Despite King Township's reputation as a wealthy area, food insecurity has long been a reality for many, particularly lower-income families, rural workers, and seniors on fixed incomes. This year, the need has skyrocketed, with the food bank reporting a 66% increase in individuals served since the beginning of 2023.

Now supporting over 500 people each month, the KTFB operates three distribution centres in King City, Nobleton, and Kettleby, all run entirely by volunteers. Many of those turning to the food bank are first-time users ? working families who, despite full-time employment, can no longer make ends meet as the cost of living continues to rise. The Food Bank urgently needs a larger location with fridges, freezers, and a loading dock to handle more food donations and ease the strain on volunteers, many of whom are seniors. Without these improvements, the organization risks falling short of its mission to provide food for everyone in need. This is reality. This is what our friends and neighbours are going through. Not only should we shake our collective heads, but it should lead us to action and support in any way we can.

That community has demonstrated, time and again, how it rallies together to meet challenges. Residents and volunteers have banded together to make things happen.

A new location for the Food Bank should be well within our grasp. Let's make it happen.

And let's show more compassion out there ? on the roads, waiting in line and in retail outlets. You never know what the person next to you is going through.