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Finance

Fri, Oct 26, 01

## Burning chips replaces burning cash

The struggle continues for former tech millionaires and wannabe millionaires who have had to make one too many lifestyle changes recently

By NIALL MCKAY

It's 6.30 am. I have been watching CNN for 23 hours. I am keeping tabs on America's war against terror. I haven't washed, shaved or eaten in four days. There's just no time for such trivialities. The world is ending.

Unemployment is up, stock markets are down, companies closing, hundreds of thousands put out of work because of September 11th.

At 9 a.m. there's a knock at the door. It's the postman. Oh. God. "Just leave it there and step away from the door I tell him." Then I make my way across the carnage of empty microbrewery beer bottles, cartons of organic tobacco super light cigarettes, used husks of soy latte's, empty curried pizza boxes. I put on a dust mask, a motorbike helmet and latex gloves, and carefully open the mail. No Anthrax. Just unpaid bills.

I am Joe Nineteen-Ninety. I am a liberal arts graduate, a world traveller and a high-tech worker. I am spiritual rather than religious. My apartment is filled with wood, glass and bamboo furniture.

A year ago I thought that I was going to be a millionaire, now I am returning the palm pilots, the super-slim laptops, the wide-screen TV, and the Bang and Olufsen stereo.

A year ago, high-tech recruitment firms plagued me. Now they won't return my call. A year ago, I was burnt out. I had been working too hard.

Now I picture myself pushing a shopping cart along the side of the street shouting. "Buy, buy, buy. Sell, sell, sell. No. no, let's take that off-line. I'll action that strategy as soon as I get back from Asia. Hey buddy can you spare some change for a cup of tea."

I got downsized, my company went bankrupt or I just decided to quit and left because I wanted to find more meaning in life. I went to Thailand, Cambodia, or Tibet.

I meditated, tried to get in touch with my inner-child, spent all my savings, was mugged and had my laptop stolen, and returned home to find that there were no jobs. That my apartment had lost \$200,000 in equity and my stockbroker was calling in my margin calls.

Perhaps I should take a job in McDonalds. You know, just until the recession thing blows over.

Ten years ago the world seemed like a huge place, but my high-tech colleagues and I made it smaller with technology, with the internet, and with our always-connected global wireless networks.

Now somebody does something in a country I have never heard of and my pension plan drops to such an extent that I will be living on cans of dog food in my old age. It's the end of the world, I tell you.

But hang on. Isn't the world always ending? In Shakespeare it was ending because the king was murdered, or his daughters took over his empire or a prince was gay.

It's time to fight back I tell you. Stop watching TV, don't read the newspapers, and forget about terror. Though I surf through the channels of death and CNN I shall fear no evil.

Fly on airplanes. Open the mail. Ignore the stock market. Don't worry about the future.

Sure they'll take your home but go talk to the 1980s yuppies. They survived to listen to Dire Straits in their 40s. And what are we going to do? Give up?

"Would you like fries with that, sir?"

Niall McKay is a freelance writer hiding out in Silicon Valley, California

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