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Working title

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This column has no working title, in part because the task of beginning a new year is daunting.

This is especially true in the current economic environment, but I think the phrase “put your money where your mouth is” might somehow have been prescient advice from a soothsayer.

I never realized that the full quote was “put your money where your mouth is ... not in a hedge fund, particularly Bernie Madoff’s fund.”

Although I’m trying to make light of it, there are a few recently departed people who have decided that their own financial well-being supersedes and is of more importance than their worth as a human being. In addition to the suicides on Wall Street, a man in Germany, who was one of the 100 richest people in the world, took his life about 10 days ago. The unbelievable part is that he was still worth several billion dollars, even after the meltdown.

I recently saw the British film “Slumdog Millionaire,” which reveals how some children in India live in what is politely called a “ghetto.” Those children would likely give everything and anything to be able to move into what Americans consider to be a ghetto.

Compare those two perspectives — the children who keep smiling and persevering while scavenging for food at the dump, and their willingness to continue on in life to see what lies ahead of them, with the apparent hopelessness of a billionaire who would rather end his own life than exist merely owning billions of dollars.



A few columns ago — perhaps more than that, come to think of it — I wrote about the fact that some of us merely procrastinate through our adolescent identity crises. Those crises, I mentioned, seem to resurface when thoughts of retirement are dealt with in earnest.

We are what we do. We are what our job title is. We are what we want the world to perceive us as being. Or, as must have happened with the gentleman in Germany, we are what we own.

I remember hearing stories about people jumping out the windows of Wall Street during the Great Depression. With the current state of the world’s economy drawing many analogies to that time, it seems as though everyone I know is in fear of the future.

The truth is, we are not what we own. We are not merely a job title.

We must allow ourselves to contemplate the worst, but I can’t help but think that the fellow in Germany might have changed his mind if he’d merely thought about those little boys and girls depicted in “Slumdog Millionaire.” He was not merely a working title.

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