

**Hard Times**

We face hard times these days. The economy is poor. Jobs are hard to find. Many people are getting laid off. Gasoline prices are through the ceiling. But my mom says we don't know what hard times are. She lived through the depression. She said no one had any money then, even for food. People that were out of work would knock on their door and ask to do some chores for a meal. There was no money for new clothes or school supplies. The kids handed down their clothes from the oldest to the youngest. Shoes, too. My mom had to wear her brother's shoes because she was the next child in line and they couldn't afford to buy a pair of girl's shoes. My grandmother made their clothes out of flour sacks. In those days, flour came in cotton sacks. She took the sacks apart and made dresses and shirts from them. Mom learned to save and re-use everything during this time. To this day, my mom won't throw aluminum foil away. She cleans it, folds it up and puts it back in the box to use again. Now that's frugality. I guess she's right. We don't have it so bad after all.

**Discuss:**

- 1) Are times harder now or in the past in your country?
- 2) Do you remember times that were better than now?
- 3) What stories have your parents or grandparents told about hard times?
- 4) Do you think hard times are good for people?
- 5) What keeps you going during hard times?
- 6) In the past, when times were hard, people buckled down and worked harder. They saved everything they could. Do you think people are prepared to buckle down now or are they too selfish?
- 7) Do you think we'll see more or less hard times in the future?
- 8) Are you optimistic about good times in your future? How about your children's future?

**Idioms:**

**between a rock and a hard place:** in a very difficult position; facing a hard decision EX: Lee is between a rock and a hard place. If he takes the job in Shanghai he'll make a lot of money, but he'll seldom get to see his family.

**drive a hard bargain:** to negotiate a very low price EX: You drive a hard bargain sir. I guess I'll have to sell it to you for the price you ask or lose the deal.

**hard of hearing:** partially deaf EX: Cathy frequently asks me to repeat things. I think she is hard of hearing.

**hard on his heels:** following someone very close EX: Sara came running in crying and hard on her heels was Jack explaining that he didn't do it.

**hard up:** greatly in need EX: Can you loan me some money. I'm a little hard up right now.

**TOEFL Vocabulary**

**abridge-**to shorten EX: He abridged his lengthy speech. The copy of that novel in the library is an abridged version.

**accolade-**an award or tribute EX: He won many accolades for his work on behalf of the poor.

**adversary-**opponent or antagonist EX: The lawyers were adversaries in court, but friends when they left the courtroom.

**TOEFL Listening Quiz**

- 1-What does the man suggest that the woman do?
- a) buy dinner
  - b) pay for part of the dinner
  - c) tip the waiter after dinner
  - d) prepare the dinner.

2-What does the man suggest that the woman do?

- a) return later
- b) telephone the security guard
- c) stay at the dorm
- d) look for the key

3-What does the woman suggest that the man do?

- a) find another bathroom
- b) use the bathroom in the main lobby
- c) ask the custodian to unlock the bathroom
- d) go to another building to locate a bathroom

4-What does the man suggest that the woman do?

- a) get in line behind him.
- b) take a number
- c) come back later
- d) go to the end of the line

5-What does the woman suggest that the man do?

- a) go to another bank
- b) open an account with the bank
- c) cash his check
- d) make out the check for twenty dollars

**Discussion:**

- 1) In the U.S. places where you may access toilets and sinks are called bathrooms or restrooms. What are they called in your country?
- 2) Are same sex restrooms common in your country?
- 3) Is it OK to ask to use the restroom in a store where you are not buying something?
- 4) Is cutting in line considered very bad manners in your country?
- 5) What would you do if you had been standing in line a long time and someone cut in front of you?
- 6) Are there many bank branches in your country?
- 7) Is it easier to cash a check or change currency in your country, or in the U.S.?
- 8) How much tip would you leave for a restaurant bill of \$60.00?
- 9) Do you think 20% is too much to tip?