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nation's economic and international crises and an attendant atmosphere of uncertainty and unrest. Tough times have a way of creating meaner streets.

"It's a whole different morality, you know," Clay says, adding that the sort of brutality he encountered is often indiscriminating when it comes to its choice of victims. "This shit is happening all the time to people, and color only happens to be part of the description," he says.

Certainly, the blessing and the curse of any fair-sized liberal city with a halfway decent social services network — Berkeley, San Francisco, Seattle, Eugene — is that homeless and wayward youth tend to flock to that area's civic hubs, seeking companionship and Dumpsters and drugs and fun and handouts. Lefties tend to be more tolerant and generally looser with their spare change, and they aren't so quick to shoo away the ragged clans of kids that flock like leatherbound peacocks to the town's bus terminals.

The flip side of this is that when the streets start to resemble *A Clockwork Orange*, everyone throws their hands in the air in paralyzed frustration while social workers exhaust themselves trying to save the ones they can. Many turn a blind eye. Or so says Michael Clay.

"I'd like to see something come into this neighborhood that would help the kids," says Clay. "Because if things go like this, I don't know where it's going. Until this, I was quite proud of Eugene."

The attack, and recuperating from the attack, has left Clay's life in an uncomfortable limbo, as he deals with the financial and

physical toll the beating exacted on his life. The attack has changed him as a person, he says. "It made me all of a sudden old," Clay says. "I wasn't tired until this happened. It's hard to be old now."

According to Clay, recovering from the attack has been a slow but steady progress, though not without its expected and unexpected trials. "For three weeks I couldn't walk without getting dizzy," he says. Mornings can be trying, he adds, and it can take an hour to an hour and a half "to get unfuzzy." A few weeks back, he noticed that some of his teeth were sitting a bit wonky in his mouth — an after-effect of the trauma sustained by his skull.

Aside from his physical ailments, there are the daily reminders of his present predicament, including endless phone calls from doctors and doctors' secretaries, some of them asking after his health and some wanting to talk money. "This is the way life has been for me," Clay says when his cell phone rings yet again.

Playing fiscal triage with his own compromised health — wondering which medical follow-ups he can afford and which he might have to forego — has allowed Clay little time simply to rest up and recuperate. "How in the hell is somebody supposed to get well?" he wonders.

Still, Clay says he's ever thankful for the care and concern he's received. "My friends have been beyond belief," he says. "That's what has saved me — the neighborhood, the people I know. I want to thank everyone who has and hopefully will continue to help my recovery — physically, mentally and financially."

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