

THE SILENCE CONTINUES

Written by Carl Wake in July 2001

A volunteer reports an inmate
Only being fed once a day.
The inmate spoke up, but was told,
"My staff can treat you any way they want.
There is nothing you can do about it."
The inmate is just passing through.
Why "stir the pot." He'll be free in days.
He won't put pen to paper.
The volunteer and chaplain are powerless.
The silence continues.

A badly beaten inmate is making allegations of staff brutality.
On the day that he is to sign the affidavit before a lawyer
He is transferred out, miles and miles away.
"Problem solved."
No one can put pen to paper.
The silence continues.

Rumours of beatings come my way.
Only the inmates and officers know for sure.
No officer will talk for fear of being a "rat."
No inmate will talk for fear of reprisal.
They have heard the O/M say,
"Call the Ombudsman again and you'll get a beating."
So no one puts pen to paper.
The silence continues.

A correctional officer sits nervously in my office.
He feels he should be "man enough" to handle
The violence and the angry, negative words.
But it is getting to him again.
His wife looks up as he returns home.
She sees "the look" and wonders where
The emotional roller coaster will take them this time.
Bail out? Talk it out? Tough it out?
The indecision is excruciating.
He bails out finally, and moves on.
The silence continues.

The eggshell walk is frustrating.
Volunteers, inmates and staff
Secretly talk to me of the violence.
All wanting it to stop,
But none willing, or perhaps able,
To put pen to paper.
I have not seen it personally, so
The silence continues.

Are all correctional officers knuckle-dragging goons?
Is management in collusion, or at least turning a blind eye?
Are all inmates innocent and to be believed?
No, no, and no.
I know so many outstanding officers
In whom I put my trust each day.
The management I know struggle with this issue,
But need someone to put pen to paper
So action can be taken.
Some inmates do act out, do have hidden agendas, and do tell stories.
But there are just too many rumours coming my way
For nothing to be happening.

What if I DID see staff beating an inmate?
Would I put my job on the line?
CPE taught me to choose my battles.
When to speak up
And when to shut up.
Lord, help me when the time comes,
To say and do the right thing,
So the silence won't continue.