

THE WORDS

Written by Carl Wake in September 1999

"Maybe I won't be here tomorrow."

The words snap staff into action.

The chaplain double-checks their meaning.

The C/O nearby leaves to get the O/M and the nurse.

The nurse comes and puts the resident on suicide watch.

The O/M speaks with the resident.

Two C/O's put him into "babydolls."

All involved write occurrence reports and memos.

The psychologist, who just left for the day, is summoned to return.

The deister signals the ten-minute clock rounds, which have begun.

The chaplain sits with the resident until the psychologist arrives.

The resident eats up the attention.

His plan is working.

"Emergency, 4 Wing."

The words cause gates to leap open.

Feet pound down corridors.

Keys drop into the module.

Yelling.

Nursing is paged.

The blue button is re-set.

The emergency is cancelled.

C/O's return to their posts.

Things quiet down,

As occurrence reports are written,

And wounds are treated.

"Carl, are you busy?"

The words come at the end of a hectic day.

Summoned to a pastor's study.

Two other pastors are there as well.

A local minister just got a "deuce less" for sexual assault.

Plans are made to visit.

Business cards are exchanged.

Fervent prayers are offered.

The Deputy Super is consulted.

The inmate is visited.

Any outside contact is refused.

Shame and loneliness fill the eyes.

Telephone calls are made to prevent a needless journey.

*"My wife was turned away on Tuesday.
She's not on the Rolodex."*

The words spark anger and rapid pulse.

He's done it again.

A memo is written assuring that she is cleared.

The C/O is consulted for his story.

It's true: No Rolodex or blue card.

The Volunteer Coordinator has not removed them.

The memo is dropped off.

The C/O is informed.

Peace only comes

When the benefit of the doubt is freely given.

Maybe he is not responsible.

Maybe he was only doing his job.

But where are those cards?

New ones have to be made.

I ponder the power of *the words*.

How they can bring so much action

On the part of so many.

Amazing!

Lord, grant me your wisdom

To know how to respond

The next time I hear *the words*.