

# TODAY

*Written by Carl Wake in June 1999*

I visited an inmate on suicide watch today.  
Charged with murdering his wife and children.  
Huddled shackled and handcuffed to the foot of his bed,  
On the concrete floor, "For his own protection."  
The rip and fire-proof blanket placed over him kept slipping off his naked body.  
I tried in vain to put it back over his shoulders.  
When I tried to speak to him,  
He started to smash his head against the concrete wall.  
He never spoke or made a sound.  
Except that repeated muffled thud of his skull on the wall.  
I called the officers, who came and put a hockey helmet on him.  
This was done with unexpected compassion.  
I walked away feeling helpless, useless, today.

I talked with an ex-inmate's mother today.  
He had not paid her rent or bought her food  
As he promised he would the day he got released.  
Reportedly he is back into drugs and crime.  
Do I feel angry? No. More a deep aching sadness  
For a life that could count for so much.  
But he chooses not to, today.

A friend of mine, an ex-inmate, phoned today.  
He told me that he has leukemia. He is a Christian.  
I know that one day I will see him heaven.  
But it hurts so deeply, today.

I did a memorial service today.  
Two inmates, a husband and wife,  
Wanting to remember her recently-deceased father.  
Heart-wrenching tears at being inside when he died,  
And at leaving two young teens at home alone out west.  
"We're not bad people," I was repeatedly assured.  
The sermon and service struck home.  
Their lingering hugs and thanks were heartwarming, today.

I met an adult in on old Young Offender charges today.  
He had turned his life around in two years: job, family, no drugs, no crime.  
But his past caught up with him in another province.  
Humiliation at being scooped up in front of where he had just found work.  
"Why does this have to happen to me?" He had no answers.

I read the sermon prepared for the above-mentioned memorial service.  
He was deeply touched as we prayed together.  
What a blessing to be in the right place at the right time, today.

I think I saved a life today.  
An ex-inmate, whose only brother had just died, phoned me.  
With slurred speech, he told me life was not worth living.  
As I kept him talking, I checked his address and phone number.  
I waited for a gunshot that never came. He hung up unexpectedly.  
Calling police, I was patched through to the responding officer.  
Four units were sent. All is well. He is alive.  
I sit shaking at my desk as it hits me what I did, today.