

SILENCE

By Juanita Preston Sparks 11-01-02

A poem by Robert Service contains a line: -With a silence you almost can hear," I have heard that silence, a deathly silence. I heard it in New York City at Ground Zero, the site where the mammoth World Trade Towers once stood. There in the midst of Manhattan, amid the many canyons of skyscrapers of that city, there is an enormous vacant space.

Tourists, townspeople, and mourners file by this void in the canyons, and they do not speak. There is no motor traffic in the area, only foot traffic, that sounds as if each pedestrian is wearing soft soled slippers and walking on tiptoe. Silence; utter silence is what one hears in that gigantic city.

There is an odor in the air- the odor of burning material. Yes, more than one year after the tragedy, this unpleasant smell in the air is mute testimony that once a terrible fire raged in this now hallowed space.

St. Paul's Chapel, where once George Washington worshipped, is adjacent to Ground Zero. Miraculously, that building was left unscathed, yet, the fence surrounding the churchyard is covered with flowers and notes and t-shirts and teddy bears, tributes to those whose lives were lost in this holocaust.

Seeing this sight is an experience I will cherish, but pray that I will never have the opportunity to experience anything of this magnitude again.

Silence, in this case, is not golden; it is sobering and frightening, and eerie.