

My friends,

Tomorrow, on Monday January 19<sup>th</sup> the final curtain will fall for the Ground Zero Peace Vigil that has held steady since March 20, 2003, the day the bombs started to fall on Baghdad. As has always been the case, our appointed round will begin at 5:30pm on Church street between Vesey and Fulton. Then at 6:30pm we will give the last high five and fold up the huge vinyl banner which has served us well as our proud emblem of resistance and dissent. Like us it too shows signs of age but it has endured the bitterest and varied of elements with its bright red background and bold white and black lettering remaining clear and distinct: PEACE VIGIL @ GROUND ZERO.

We made this decision in the hope that this new administration will in fact end the war in Iraq and bring a fresh new look at American foreign policy. So far, as many have commented on and are well aware of, the signs do not point in the direction of any dramatic breakthrough in the root assumptions that determine the main thrust of U.S. policy. Still we feel it appropriate to at least give Obama a chance. We are not throwing the banner in the trash but will store it in a safe place, ready to be unfurled should events on the ground compel us once again to stand up and be counted.

Personally, I am not an optimist. This does not mean I am a fatalist. What it means is that I see in our government, irrespective of both major political parties, deep rooted and disturbing contradictions between its professed democratic ideals and its vision of a world economic order. Add to that the deadly combination of a military establishment that sustains itself through huge economic incentives and a culture which finds a perverse exhilaration in the raw exercise of military power. We are not out of the woods yet by any means. In fact, this may just be the beginning of a new dimension of citizen activism and participation.

I've written before that I do believe in peace vigils. I've learned many things about the public, about the peace movement, and about myself by just standing there week after week, year after year. Standing there, staring across the street at the site of a huge historical event and certainly the world's most significant event of this century, has given us a chance to engage people from all over the world, from all walks of life, of every age, race, ethnicity and political persuasion. We've had more than our share of hatred, hostility, and anger as well as the warm support and appreciation from so many wonderful people who saw us as a small beacon of hope. More than anything else it was that simple "thank you for being here" from people that meant so much and nourished our souls.

We may be back to commemorate the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this dreadful war in March or we may be back to celebrate its end. We don't know, we haven't made up our minds yet. Who can say what will happen next? Twenty one days of one of the most ruthless and barbaric bombing campaigns in history has just concluded in a cease fire in Gaza. Why did this happen? How could the world let it happen? What is our government's responsibility in this? What is our responsibility? We haven't even begun to address those questions.

"ciao" , see you around,  
Russell