

Antietam-2000

“Spake the Stone...”

I knelt down
to read the name, half-erased
on the rock.
Raining, drops fell on my glasses,
obscuring further
the hardened face.

Piece of granite chiseled by
forgotten hand.
Work dedicated, the earth
yet moist with
sacred blood.

Empty words politic,
spoken one rainy day,
like this one,
by old distinguished
men.

Century-and-a-half out
of collective memory, only today,
remembered, visited
the historic place, through casual
curiosity.

Stone, found among
others, square markers.
Unknown, numbered only,
“Two-thousand-fifty one”
with no name whatever.

Slowly revealing letters, one-by-one,
S-Y-L-V-E-S-T-E-R R-O-L-L-I-N-S
THREE-THOUSAND-ONE-HUNDRED-NINETY-FOUR

Ancient lettering,
only with difficulty,
decipherable.

Unknown the Regiment,
the state abbreviated,
only remaining
I-N-D
for Indiana.

Name; number; named state.
Nothing else identified him.
Hero? Coward?
No one knows.
They all rest, closely, side by side.

Equality perfected.
Only God to recognize them
and designate
their deeds by merit.

And, Who was Sylvester Rollins,
three-thousand-one-hundred-ninety-four,
Unknown Regiment,
State,
Indiana?

Face, hair, eyes,
nor character I know.
But soul.
By lightning struck, I !
Sylvester Rollins, you I recognize.

You were Son to some,
Brother to all, Fiancé to one,
Friend to many.
And
in death, Oh great
Sorrow of Sorrows.

Rain today, not only
fallen water in droplets.
Tears,
sorrows of the ages,
pains of uncounted battles,
run from my eyes.

Blood of centuries shed
on sacred ground,
now tears bless grass
at foot of a life, buried

Crescent of stones,
signaling lives lost
to causes not yet dead.
I stand Attention!

Salute sacrifice,
Brotherhood of Arms,
Comrade,
I thank you. I remember!

In gardens of memory,
spake the stone....

SYLVESTER ROLLINS
THREE-THOUSAND-ONE-HUNDRED-NINETY-FOUR
-IND-
...ETERNAL.

Written by Randy J. Young, 28 May 2000,
on occasion of a visit to
Antietam National Cemetery, Md.