

“Remembrance”

In 1967-68, I was a scrawny sophomore at Oneonta Senior High School, 15 going on 16, navigating my way through the intimidating presence of upperclassmen, where I teetered uncomfortably between childhood and looming adulthood. One of the faces I remembered from the busy and crowded hallways was that of one James Wheeler, an ordinary looking guy who didn't distinguish himself in any exceptional way at OHS. Just another face that I would never talk to or befriend, but I remembered the face.

Two years later, James Wheeler died in Vietnam as a U.S. Army soldier; I never learned the circumstances of his death, but it stuck with me for years. There were other people from Oneonta who died in Vietnam, but I only remembered James Wheeler, for some curious and inexplicable reason.

In 2004, I finally had the opportunity to visit The Wall while in DC for a convention. I found my way there and was overwhelmed by the names - the sheer number of names - on The Wall. I wanted to pay tribute to the man whose name I had kept safe in my head all those years, but had no idea where he resided on The Wall. There was a way to find where he was in that sea of names, but I had no interest in doing that.....James Wheeler would tell me where he was.

So I began walking the long, descending slope to the apex of The Wall, scanning the names randomly, hoping that, somehow, I would spy his name, and trying not to feel overwhelmed by the task. Without some sense of where he lay on that wall, my quest was surely doomed to failure, but I kept those discouraging thoughts at bay. Reaching the apex, I turned around and started to walk back up the way I had come, haphazardly scanning The Wall as I did. Suddenly, and inexplicably, my head turned and my eyes drew up and fell on the name "James Wheeler". It defied explanation that his name, out of 58,000, had revealed itself to me with so little effort.

— *James, Mechanicville*