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## *We Have Not Forgotten*

Last September my brother John and I visited Washington, D.C. John spent five years in the U. S. Army flying helicopters. I spent four years in the U.S. Navy on board ships. We served in the early 1980s and feel lucky to have survived some dangerous situations. It was therefore with reverence that we stood in front of the Vietnam Memorial on a warm Sunday afternoon. As we milled about, we remembered a young man from our hometown who had been killed in action. We used to see his mother every Sunday at Mass. Eventually, our small town named a street after him: he was James J. O'Shaughnessy. We searched the directory, and found his name. When he was killed he was in his early 20s.

Our town, Closter, N.J., outside New York City, was where Mrs. O'Shaughnessy continued to attend Mass every Sunday after her son's death; it was where a new generation of kids grew up on O'Shaughnessy Lane; it was where a family, a town, and a

parish were forever changed by the Vietnam War. A town where the war was no longer a million miles away.

A park ranger made each of us an etching of James O'Shaughnessy's name. As he did the etching, strangers began to assemble and quietly observe. John and I stood united with strangers paying homage to a young man who died in battle 24 years ago.

There is a school of thought today that by honoring those killed in war, we glorify war itself. Those who believe that this is why Americans observe Memorial Day ought to spend an afternoon at the Vietnam Memorial and learn how the spirit of a human life lives on, and how by honoring our dead we glorify life, not war.

On this and every Memorial Day we all should remember that those who died in both the defense of America and in the defense of other nations are small-town heroes. In their youth, they went to war in fear, but with courage, in a faraway land. In do-

ing so, they joined the ultimate protest of war and paid the ultimate price. They were our flesh and blood, our loved ones, our neighbors, our friends, our young men and women who left us never to return. By bringing their spirits back home in quiet communion, we place value on each of their lives.

The moment my brother and I stood with strangers before our local hero's name, he was with us in our collective spirit. For that moment, James J. O'Shaughnessy was home. As Americans, we embraced him on that beautiful September day and silently said to him,

"We have not forgotten."

JAMES H. RODGERS JR. New York

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