

In 1979, Jan Scruggs, an honored Vietnam War veteran, had an idea. The idea was to build a memorial. Its purpose was to honor the soldiers who had died during this unpopular war.

The following year, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund held a national design contest. Maya Lin, a young, talented woman was studying structural design and sculpture at Yale. She entered the contest. Her entry was a polished, black-granite, v-shaped wall. It was inscribed with the names of the 58,000 who had perished. Maya won the competition.

Some people felt the design was not suitable. They wanted a different tribute to the fallen heroes. Critics were split into supporters and opponents. Both sides were eventually satisfied. The parties agreed to erect a statue of three soldiers with a flag at the entrance.

The wall was completely funded through private donations. It has become one of our most valued monuments. People visit it daily seeking the names of friends and relatives who died. Photographs, flowers, and mementos are tearfully placed on the sidewalk in front of the wall. These items are kept and cataloged in a building near the site. A scaled-down version of the wall travels throughout the country. This allows people unable to visit Washington D.C. to see the names of their loved ones.