



Larry L. Maxam - In Memoriam

Recently, in my home town of Burbank, California, the city council voted unanimously to [re-name Pacific Park](#) in honor and memory of United States Marine Corporal Larry, a posthumous recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor. Corporal Maxam died February 2, 1968, at Cam Lo District, Quang Tri Province, Vietnam.

The [Burbank Veterans Commemorative Committee](#) will dedicate the park in memory of Larry L. Maxam on Memorial Day, Monday, May 25, 2009. Larry Maxam attended Emerson Elementary, John Muir Junior High and Burbank High School.

Dateline - Burbank, California 1963 – [John Muir Junior High School](#)

In the ninth grade at John Muir, boys took Metal Shop. Inside, the shop class was like a Gulag factory, with dark, grease-stained windows. There were many obscure and dangerous machines placed around the room. In the middle of the shop, there was a gas-fired forge, roaring away at an unsafe temperature. At one end of the shop, there were long, shared workbenches, where we “slaves to the state” fashioned metalwork of questionable quality and value.

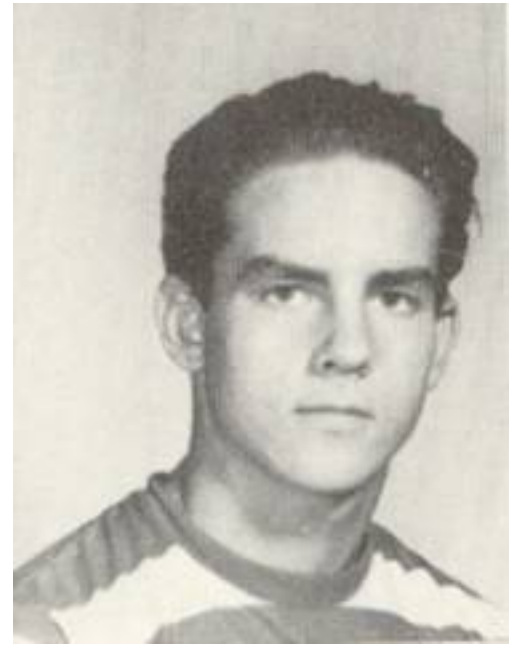


Our major project for the semester was to saw, forge, grind and buff a metal chisel out of steel bar stock. Wearing heavy gloves, we held the red-hot metal with huge tongs. Then we hammered the glowing bar against an anvil until an unknown alchemy was supposed to change it from a slug into metal-art. As they say in the commercials, “Don’t try this at home”. With my fear of the forge showing through, my chisel looked like a misshapen metal lollipop.

Sitting next to me at my workbench that year was Larry Maxam. Larry was a handsome young man, with sweptback, dark hair and a movie star face that was mature beyond his years. Soon after Mr. Bins, our shop teacher, had told

me I was heading for a failing grade, Larry handed me his perfectly formed chisel. He had ground, beveled and polished it into an object of metallic perfection.

"I already got an 'A' on this one", he said to me with a smile. "Go ahead. You can use it". While my eyes widened in astonishment, I realized that Larry was the angel I had been hoping for. I too received an 'A' grade for Larry's chisel. At the end of the semester, I was not sure if the chisel was a gift, or if Larry had only lent it to me. Secretly, I kept it as a souvenir. Almost twenty years later, I misused the chisel and damaged it beyond repair. Angry with myself for again dishonoring Larry's gift, I tossed it away.



I remember encountering Larry only once during our time together at [Burbank High](#). As we passed each other, Larry's unassuming aura of self-confidence almost bowled me over. My complicity in the "chisel incident" and the fact that I had secretly kept it made me shy. After he had passed by without seeing me, I blurted out his name. Larry stopped on the landing of the Main Stairway. Frozen in the north light from the window above, he turned, looked up at me, then smiled and nodded. After that, I lost track of Larry Maxam, until two years ago, when I discovered his fate.

As soon as he was eighteen, Larry dropped out of Burbank High and joined the Marines. At age nineteen, Larry saw military action in Viet Nam. During one major battle, [North Vietnamese Army](#) regulars threatened to overrun the position of Larry's unit. Despite taking several direct hits from enemy fire, Larry continued to maintain his position and fire a machine gun until reinforcements arrived. One week after his twentieth birthday, Larry Maxam died on the battlefield.



Larry Maxam became the only alumnus of a Burbank public school to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, as awarded posthumously by then President Richard M. Nixon.

[Larry Maxam](#) will always be my friend and my hero.

BHS, Class of '66

Jim McGillis

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