I wondered before dialing whether I would be throwing the choice of majors, whether to go the practical route or the passionate route. I recommended the latter, and hope she will follow through with a Fine Arts degree. After all, I realized during the tour that Kari was not only a fourth generation artist. In that sandy, dusty office and shop is a family load of artisans, their skills and talents emerging in what many believe to be a dying and moribund business.

Kari's grandfather, Harley Fouts, moved out of Idaho from Nebraska after the second world war. His father had been a stone mason and so it was only natural that Harley took a job with a local stone masonry, the Jelosen Brothers in Boise. Eventually, he struck out on his own, opening the Boise Valley Monument Company in 1963. What began as a business of mostly hand-carving and some sandblasting has transformed into a computerized process involving specially designed plotting software and mechanized sandblasters. Now in his seventies, Harley and his wife, Mary, are still in the business, along with their two sons, Steve and Phil, and their granddaughter, Kari. According to Kari, people who order headstones don't tend to follow any prescribed timing or etiquette. Orders are placed sometimes within the week of a death and sometimes years later. She described how some older couples place their order for a headstone before death. These they call "Pre-Needs." There are generally two routes Pre-Needs requests take: the order is either placed on hold until one of the couple calls, or the week is completed, excepting the death date, and held until needed.

The stones arrive pre-cut from the quarry, inside the office was a photograph of one of the quarries in Elberon, Georgia. From there come the light gray granite. Royal Melrose, another popular granite and rose in hue, comes from Coldspring, Minnesota. Kari, and later her father, Steve, were emphatic about working with granite. Not only does it last longer than the traditional marble, the stone accepts an easier and cleaner cut. Granite durability varies though. On display was a speckled kind called Carrathum. When light reflects off its surface, it appears pocked. The pocking is caused by its high durability and life-span that granite eventually won our and became the stone of choice.

"A type, being eternal, is an especially had thing on a headstone." Blasting has transformed into a computerized process involving specially designed plotting software and mechanized sandblasters. Now in his seventies, Harley and his wife, Mary, are still in the business, along with their two sons, Steve and Phil, and their granddaughter, Kari.

I wondered before dialing whether I would be throwing a party. After all, how would it sound? I was writing a research paper on cemeteries for a book-making class. Even to me, it seemed a little strange.

Instead, my phone call didn't feel so weird after all. Kari Fouts was my guide and ambassador at Boise Valley Monument Company.

The office and shop sit on the north side of Cascade, Idaho, a small community roughly one hundred and twenty miles north of Boise, the state capital. Outside, in front of the office, are rows of blank headstones on display. The office building is a modest, cinder block structure with tinted windows and a cedar shingle roof. A horseshoe driveway separates it from Illinois Street, which ascends the nearby hill and leaves town. The shop is a separate building behind the office: it's now, is built of Cinder block. Later as I left, I noticed that the mailbox on front is lettered with what can only be described as a "cemetery" typeface of those elegant, '40s-esque faces usually seen on older headstones.

Beneath a south facing window inside the office sat a large jade plant. It was curvy and tangled, and I couldn't help but ask how long they'd had it. Kari laughed, answering the question that needed to be answered. But instead of saying "not very long," I simply said that I was researching the history of Boise's Dry Creek Cemetery. Somehow, it seemed less morbid.

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managed to stay out of cemeteries until I was nineteen. My parents had a house on Boise's Bench near Morris Hill Cemetery, and I made trips to memorialize my daughter's grave, a place in line. I said no. The grave was too close to the funeral home cake care of it. To me, the cemetery, and for good reason, children's crooked cedar tree five years ago. When I had to choose her grave, I met Diane Angoni.

Diane holds the title of Senior Department Specialist. Her department is the Boise Park Department. She is responsible for retrieving a large, ledger-like book with a decades-old, green cloth cover. Section book number seventeen. Its sections include those buried in sections "M" and "I" of Morris Hill. There are twenty-six section books in all.

Diane did not bother to explain, just asked me to go with her to the office where I paid for the grave. She showed me the next available grave in the row. Unlike the rest of the cemetery, and for good reason, children's smaller lots are marked by paper markers. They were graves. Diane told me who was buried in them. Many were named children called Baby Boy or Infant Girl. Some with beautiful names, like Violet or Franklin, probably had parents who could not afford a granite or marble memorial. Finally, at section "I", block number thirty-eight, lot five, the seemingly untouched earth corresponded with the name Crown in the ledger.

When she talks with those in the business, from the funeral homes and monument companies, she has a little. They are friends, I overheard her at the end of a telephone conversation with one of them. She told him one of her dreams. In the dream she realized she was dying. In the talk, she said she was not worried about money anymore. Then she laughed.

Diane has been with the department of Parks and Recreation for seven years, six of which she has held her present position of Senior Department Specialist. Previously, for eleven years, she worked as a junior trader then institutional broker at Merrill Lynch in New York. Before that, she helped people stay comfortable on transoceanic charter flights as a stewardess.

When we talked about my daughter, the words "Kensington Avenue Playground" floated into the conversation. I suggested she check it out, she addressed the subject. "That's where she is. In the front circle of the cemetery's information, a job which is many jobs, I associate these jobs with the four main kinds of books with which she works and the computer programs she created. These include plat, deed, burial index, and section books, and the computer's section and burial files.

Two of the book types, the plat and deed books, like civilization's earliest records on wood, leaves, or clay, contain real estate information and transactions. The twenty-six index books are yearly. Each holds engineers' drawings of Morris Hill's platted sections and its mausoleum as well as a plat map of Pioneer Cemetery. These look like the mental simplification of subdivisions one finds at City Hall. Newer plat maps are blueprint pages. One would not suspect that these maps, like historic neighborhoods, contain secret things as subdivisions, but this is what they are called, even at Morris Hill.

Diane walks me out to the infant section, section "I". She shows me the next available grave in the row. Unlike the rest of the cemetery, and for good reason, children's smaller lots are marked by paper markers. They were graves. Diane told me who was buried in them. Many were unnamed children called Baby Boy or Infant Girl. Some with beautiful names, like Violet or Franklin, probably had parents who could not afford a granite or marble memorial. Finally, at section "I", block number thirty-eight, lot five, the seemingly untouched earth corresponded with a blank in the book.

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Diane Angoni, the Morris Hill Cemetery "Keeper."

volumes never leave Morris Hill. All are unique. Her job requires her to interact with them and with the people who need their information. She translates and tells, has the information people need when they come to her. She directs people to graves, tells them what they can put inside caskets (anything that fits), comforts mourners, and offers words of counsel.

When we spoke, she continually utilized the cemetery's books as well as her computer programs to add her impressive memory. Many entries in the books set off strings of stories. Tales attach to each other in a sensible tangle. She tells the stories in a way connected intimately to those books.

Diane is a real estate agent. When people buy pre-owned, one of her favorite lines is, "Tell your friends you bought a couple of lots on the Bench today." However, she lacks the professional obsequiousness of a real estate agent. This is not just because she does not work on commission. One gets the sense that she cares. "You need a place," she says. She is sincere, not thinking really of you, but the generations after us who might come looking for their history, or to put flowers on the grave of someone, the nameless previous generation. Diane makes sure no one is left out.

Diane once told me about a family that lived on the Bench. The daughter had adopted one of the unnamed children. "I adopted," she said. "She was adopted. I walked with her through the rows of graves until she knew her place in line. I said no. The grave was too close to the funeral home cake care of it. To me, the cemetery, and for good reason, children's crooked cedar tree five years ago. When I had to choose her grave, I met Diane Angoni.

Diane tells the collective story of everyone buried at Morris Hill Cemetery. Her method of telling is systematic, cross-referenced, and respectful. When I spoke with her, she continually utilized the cemetery's books as well as her computer programs to add her impressive memory. Many entries in the books set off strings of stories. Tales attach to each other in a sensible tangle. She tells the stories in a way connected intimately to those books.

With each sentence she speaks it is obvious that she works in a little something, yet not out of secruity. It is a form of generosity. She believes she has given sufficient explanation, adequate to understanding and exploration. Perhaps because those discoveries meant so much to her, she allows them to be made by others again and again. She pulls the books out from under her counter in her office as a magician retrieves infinite scarves. These images are cut into the vinyl to make a stencil for sandblasting. This step, too, eliminates hours of work hand-cutting stickers for the headstones.

The vinyl sheet is then taken out to the shop where it is transferred to a headstone. The letters on the sheet are cut with adhesive that is applied to the face of the stone. Inside the shop were several waist-high tables on which the headstones are placed, each table with a LC Lodestar pullery hung from the ceiling for lifting the stones. Once the stone is carefully measured (squares and rulers were abundant) and applied, the sandblasting can begin.

To be continued next newsletter.