



Family: Anne Harrison

Artist: Rana Schmitz

During the months artist Rana Schmitz met with Anne Harrison to develop the content for her *Stories of Home* sculpture, she came to believe that “home” for Anne was more than a single place. It was, instead, a series of punctuations along her life’s journey.

Anne was brought to the New York Foundling Hospital at just over one week of age, then, at two, she traveled on the Orphan Train to Colorado Springs to meet her new family, the Grueles. Her childhood was happy and sheltered until her eighth year, when her mother’s tuberculosis, dormant for many years, returned, forcing the family to move to a warmer climate. When her mother died three years later, her father was left with a broken heart and mountains of medical debt.

Anne’s adult life was also sprinkled with highlights— a bachelor’s degree in voice performance, marriage and two children, a master’s degree in audiology and several interesting careers— along with challenges, including the loss of her husband.

“Over several months, I met with Anne in her newest home where she was candid and joyous about her stories even though it wasn’t an easy life,” Rana says. “I could not escape a portrait of the person when I thought of the stories. Anne’s inflection and tone, her style and mannerisms, her passion, as well as her amazing outlook, had to be incorporated in the piece. . . . Many of the incorporated materials came from different locations: the steamer trunk came from Illinois; the ceramic one was made in California and flew back with me on the plane. Many of the fabrics and beads were from small town Nebraska thrift stores. I also engaged myself with all kinds of skills: welding, iron bending/turning, sewing, beading, hand building clay, glazing, drawing, painting and refurbishing. The listening, responding, reacting, reflecting and creating were all to bring forward a piece of art that hopefully creates a bridge and a view into a different world, a different home.”

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At 27, Anne Harrison learned that she had been adopted. But it was not until after her 80th birthday, that she learned the identity of her birth parents and how her birth mother had taken her to the New York Foundling Hospital when she was just 10 days old. She learned that at two-years-four-months, she had ridden the Orphan Train from New York to her new family, Anna and John Joseph Gruele, in Colorado Springs. Mrs. Harrison says the contentment of her childhood was interrupted when she was eight. Her mother's tuberculosis, dormant for many years, returned, forcing the family to move to warmer climates. When her mother died three years later, her father was left with a broken heart and mountains of medical debt. During the rest of my schools years, we lived very frugally, Mrs. Harrison says, just managing to keep a roof over our heads. Despite all that, I've led an interesting and, to me, an exciting life.

Photo: Rana Schmitz, Anne Harrison

Photo Credit: Judy Ruffo

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