

# Inspiration comes from strange fate that led to studio

By Caroline Mallan  
Town Crier

It was fate or divine intervention that brought her to Thornhill, says sculptor Ruth Devor.

How else to explain the chain of events that brought her to work in the studio of Betty Beckerman, a local artist who died recently?

"Years ago we met and had a little friendship going and she invited me to work with her in her studio space," Devor recounted. "But it was too far (from her Toronto home) for me and we lost touch after a while."

More than five years later, Devor sold her house in Toronto, complete with basement studio, and began searching for new studio space, not realizing how difficult it would be to find a suitable place.

"My sculpting is very loud and very dirty work," she said. After weeks of looking in Toronto, it occurred to her to call Beckerman for advice.

"I called and found out Betty had died just two days earlier. It was almost as if she was giving me these vibes."

Devor said she did not want to leave her name when she called while the family was in mourning.

"But the housekeeper insisted. She was very persuasive and told me to leave my name and number. A half hour later, Betty's daughter called and we talked and they were relieved that someone might be interested in the studio space."

Devor said her first reaction was to walk away from the studio offer.

"I was in such shock.

(Beckerman) was a very healthy, very vibrant woman. I felt very strongly that maybe I couldn't work in this woman's space," she said. "But then I twisted it around and looked at it the other way — it was almost like she left all this for me."

Devor moved into her new studio in the Bayview Ave. and Highway 7 area last month. She has joined the Markham crafts guild and hopes to put down roots in the community.

"I'm excited about this. I'm hoping this works out," she said.

Beckerman's surroundings are proving inspirational and Devor hopes to take on students soon.

"It's taken me some time to psych myself up to teach," she said. "But I've sculpted for 30 years and I know I'd be a great teacher."

She is also making her studio available for class field trips, so young art students can see what goes into a stone carving.

The workspace is in an industrial complex and has machinery to filter the dust out of the air as Devor carves on an island in the middle of her studio. Around her stand huge chunks of marble and alabaster from around the world waiting, to be transformed.

Devor points out that she often tries to preserve a small portion of the raw stone in each work to provide contrast.

Devor studied in an area of Italy known for its stone carving and has exhibited in Toronto for more than 20 years. She also has carvings on display in Florida and Pennsylvania and has exhibited in New York and Vancouver.