

From Earth to Turf

(The Process of Making a Granite Memorial from Start to Finish)

Ever wondered how a Memorial is made from its raw materials into the custom everlasting commemoration of your loved one? Well the first step in this lengthy, dangerous and expensive process is to excavate the granite from the ground, or quarry as the digging site is called; that is once a particular area has been identified as having the granite. These quarries are often hundreds of feet deep with jagged razor sharp edges of solid rock everywhere. Water drains into these massive holes in the ground creating a large pool at the bottom.

Different types of granite are quarried differently and in different parts of the world but the main process is essentially the same. High magnitude explosives are placed in drilled holes in order to break apart the granite strategically so that it can be preserved for good use. These immense slabs of granite are then hauled out of the quarry and sent to the manufacturing plants where they are then cut using precision machines and diamond tip blades. Many improvements and innovations have been made in tools and machinery over the years for shaping and sizing of the stone.

The next step is smoothing or polishing the stone. This process consists of buffing and grinding the stone with large machinery and water but requires many stages before it shows the glossy shine that we see on many memorials. Generally an unpolished (stepped) stone needs to be taken through this same process in order to smooth it down but it would not go through as many levels of the grinding and buffing process as it would if it were to be polished. The last step in this stage is to have the stone cut into the shape it needs to be.

Next, they add the designs and engraving to the stones. A drawing needs to be made beforehand of where everything will go on the stone which is often done on computers now, but some are still done using architectural tools. Usually this is approved by the customer to guarantee accuracy. The design can then be put on the stone using sandblasters, lasers or hand carving tools depending on the design. Some designs are too intricate to use sandblasters and therefore must be hand-carved by quality craftsmen. These sculptures can take many man hours depending on the intricacy of the design. For the designs that are able to use a sandblaster, a rubber stencil is made of the design. This stencil is then attached to the stone using a light adhesive much like the back of a bumper sticker. A sandblaster is used to penetrate the stone and create the depth and shadowing of the letters and design.

So now the stone is made but the process is not over yet. The immense and heavy product still needs to be washed, crated transported and delivered to the area in which it is to be placed in the cemetery. Since the granite weighs hundreds and even thousands of pounds sometimes, it must be handled using cranes and dollies. Unfortunately even though it is heavy, it is also delicate and needs to be handled with care. The monument is now ready to be installed, but before it can be installed, a foundation must be dug and built days in advance so that the cement is solid to eliminate sinking and tipping. This is generally done by the cemetery. It is at this point of setting the stone in place where porcelain portraits and any other additional features like display cases, vases and vigil lights may be installed if not done already.

The process is a long one that starts with a raw material and ends in a beautiful creation and work of art. It is also a dangerous process that includes jagged rocks and deep quarries as well as heavy lifting and hazardous dusts from polishing and sandblasting. But in the end, your family and friends are left with a beautiful memorial to commemorate your loved one that will last forever.