Ever wonder where the beautiful headstones and monuments in our cemeteries come from? We did – so we asked Effie Sfikas of Monuments by Effie to tell us a little about her business. Effie Sfikas was born and raised in the Bronx, a first-generation Greek American. She said, “I have a degree in education. My first job was in retail. Soon after, I became an elementary school teacher. Monuments by Effie came about after the death of my grandmother; and a friend who needed help in monument sales. I felt I was helping grieving families to memorialize their loved ones. I soon left teaching and opened our first location – which is still open – in Manhattan, in 2009 (2240 1st Ave, New York, NY 10029).

“In 2012, with the encouragement of my father-in-law, the search began for our Astoria location, but with no luck. It wasn’t until November 2014 that our search was over. During my father-in-law’s viewing, at Farenga Funeral, I looked out the window of the funeral home. Unfortunately, he wasn’t here to see it. I feel this location was a dream that he and I accomplished together.

QG: What about Astoria inspired you to open a second Monuments by Effie location here?
ES: I noticed that in Astoria there wasn’t a monument retail store. I wanted to open our second location here, but we couldn’t find the right location. My father-in-law really encouraged me to keep looking. I found our location the day of his wake, while looking out the window of the funeral home. Unfortunately, he wasn’t here to see it. I feel this location was a dream that he and I accomplished together.

QG: What has been the most rewarding part of owning a business, and what has been the most challenging?
ES: The most rewarding part of owning this business is knowing that I am helping families during the most difficult time of their lives.

The most challenging part would be the weather. Sometimes the rain and snow make it extremely difficult to install the stones.

QG: Do you have a favorite headstone or monument currently?
ES: I can’t say just one in particular is my favorite, because they are all unique. I design most stones with the family. For example, a family will describe a dream they had of their loved one that has passed. I try to incorporate those images of the dream into the design of stone.

QG: What are your favorite things to do in Queens?
ES: I enjoy having dinner in Astoria, mostly Greek restaurants and of course, having a frappe at one of the local cafes.

This column was originated in July, 2013 by Nicollette Barsamian.