



Stone Art

By Dana Martin

Artist Kay Minto sees much more than a pile of lava rocks in her backyard. Under her skilled touch, these rocks will be transformed into thought-provoking sculptures, some humorous, some serious.

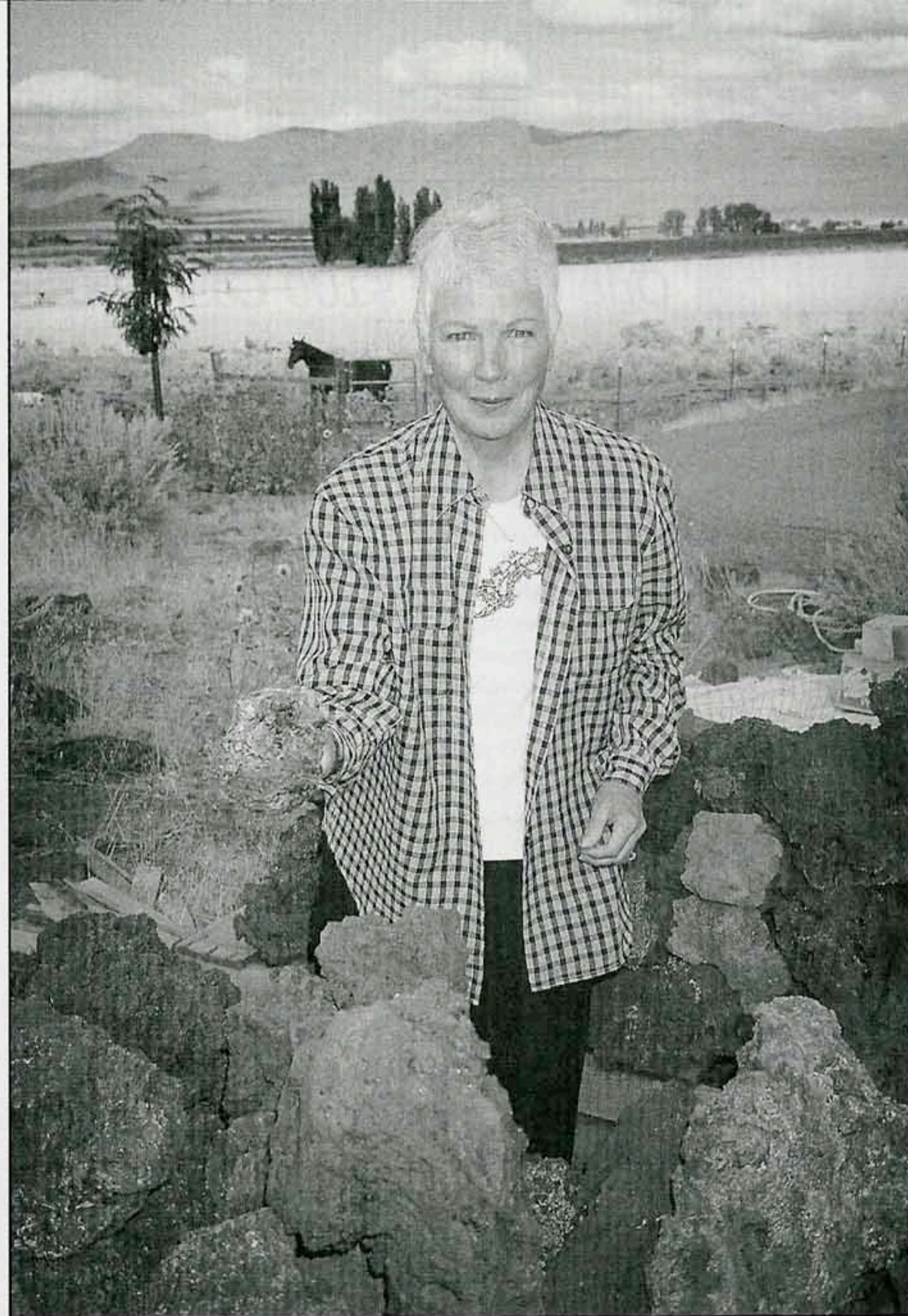
"Art is much deeper than decoration," Kay says, noting her serious work is usually inspired by some philosophical struggle she is facing.

Kay has faced many ordeals in her life. Within a brief period, her mother and brother died and her marriage ended.

All this was followed by breast cancer—which Kay believes, in her case, was a metaphysical disease.

"It was a sickness of the heart," she says. "I had drained my immune system with stress after stress after stress. But I learned that from every problem comes a gift."

Kay started carving stones after 15 years spent rearing her family.



Above, Kay Minto, sculptor, with a pile of the lava stones she uses to create her stone and metal sculptures. Left, "The Lava Couple."

After working with stone for several years, she began exploring the idea of combining stone and metal.

She shared her idea with John Mulcahy, an instructor for Lassen Community College's Welding Department, and he agreed to teach her how to weld.

Kay developed a process for gas tungsten arc welding directly onto lava rock—a technique so unique people often ask her if she worries about someone "stealing" her idea.

"I'm not worried about it, because it's not fast, it's not cheap and

it's not easy," she says.

In 1990, Kay was honored with the first "Rock Welding" award from the Lassen Community College Welding Guild. Since then, her work has been recognized at art shows and galleries throughout the nation.

When Kay handles a rock, she usually has some idea of what she wants to create, but is never surprised if it takes on a different form before she is finished.

She points to the owl on a shelf as an example.



Above, "Which Came First—the Chicken or the Egg?" Below, a stubborn owl. Below right, Kay and her son, Tyler, with one of her sculptures.

"That owl was supposed to be a power animal, but he refused. He has an attitude," she says. "I've discovered with sculpture—especially when working with rocks—that they have an energy that wants to be expressed. I tried and tried to make the owl serious by adding big brows and various features, but he wanted to be fun.

"The difference between my work and a lot of others is that I'm not imposing my will on something. I find out what direction it is going to go, and that's where we go."

Kay enjoys the humor in many of her pieces—such as the lava rock shaped like a nest, with chicken legs welded beneath. In the nest is a broken metal egg. The piece is titled, "Which Came First—the Chicken or the Egg?"

Denizens of her "Extinct and Endangered Lava Creatures" collection roam freely around her home in Eagleville.

The "Lava Couple" that greets visitors at her door is sometimes

dressed up for special occasions.

One of Kay's most exhibited pieces, "The Nike of Mastectomy," was part of a collection of art and writing by women with breast cancer. It was first exhibited at the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.

Kay created that sculpture after a lump she discovered in her left breast led to a modified radical mastectomy.

While in the hospital, she remembered the ancient Greek sculpture, the Nike of Samothrace. Nike means "winged victory." From this, she was inspired to create the Nike of Mastectomy.

Kay chose to do herbal therapy rather than chemotherapy or radiation treatments following her surgery. She proudly notes she is a breast cancer survivor for 10 years.

She practices tai chi, an ancient Chinese system of exercise and relaxation, and adheres to her philosophy of staying as close to nature as possible through diet and exercise.

From her tragic experiences, Kay has created a sculpture series she calls "Elements of Change." One piece, "Self Confrontation," represents what she experienced while looking in the mirror after being diagnosed with cancer.

"I would wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, and I wouldn't know who I was looking at," Kay recalls.

"It felt like I was losing my history and sense of who I am. At first it was scary, and then it got to be intriguing, because I could be someone new every day."

Kay now regards this experience as a gift.

"It's very powerful to be able to look in the mirror and be totally honest with yourself—to see yourself as you are and have the opportunity

to recreate yourself," she says.

Now settled on property near Eagleville, Kay and her son, Tyler, have been busy building her studio, planting trees and clearing sagebrush. Kay is developing a sagebrush-sculpture garden as a unique setting for some of her creations.

With so many ideas in her head and a pile of rocks out back, Kay is anxious to complete her building projects so she can commit more time to her artwork.

Her goal is to have enough pieces to display at art shows, and to buy an enclosed van in which to haul them.

"It's a real production to transport the pieces," Kay says, noting people often look twice when she hauls sculptures in her car.

"What I envision is eventually having an open studio once or twice a year, so people who collect my work can come here," she says. "My problem is that it takes so long to complete something, it's not very prolific. As an artist, you have to produce something before you can sell it." ■

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