

The Last Journey

By Marjorie Bridges, FEF President
With Gary Trovinger, President of
Scatterings

What happens when you ask for your ashes to be scattered from an airplane over a scenic area? I was curious enough to take Gary Trovinger up on his offer to accompany him on such a mission. The remains to be scattered were those of a Funeral Consumers Alliance member, and Trovinger was selected with guidance from Byrgan and Company, funeral directors.

We met at Palo Alto airport where Trovinger keeps his Piper single-engine plane. He got us both seated securely and then confirmed the box of cremated remains to double-check the instructions and destination. This woman had asked to be scattered in the water off Santa Cruz. Then he went through the take-off ritual of instructions, got clearance from the control tower, and we were off over the Baylands. Soon we turned westward over Palo Alto and Stanford, heading for Rt.17 and the Lexington Reservoir. It was interesting to see the hundreds of big estates with swimming pools and tennis courts situated in the foothills. The cement plant stood out, as well as a huge pit being dug out in layers. I never knew that a sand mining pit was in the hills.

In short order we were over Santa Cruz. Gary explained that he wanted to release the remains beyond the lighthouse, to give her relatives a recognizable point of reference. However, a boat was passing by, and we circled until it moved on.

Then Gary was in motion. He carefully removed the inner plastic sack from the brown plastic urn box, and emptied the ashes into a clear plastic container leading to a tube under the plane. The ashes were immediately drawn down and

out. I was surprised, since I thought that he would empty them out the window. Gary explained that he devised this method to avoid any ash residue from coming back into the cabin.

He then got out a jug of water and rinsed down the clear plastic container to ensure all the cremated remains went through. He noted the longitude and latitude (from an instrument panel) to put on the three official certificates that will be sent to next of kin, Registrar of the county nearest the shoreline where the remains were scattered, and Registrar of the county where the person died. Gary telephones or emails the family following the scattering flight, to be followed by a mailed certificate with copies of the forms required by the state.

If desired, flower petals could be scattered before or after the cremains are distributed.

Other popular scattering sites are off Marin or San Francisco shorelines near the Golden Gate Bridge, Open Space District in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Sierra Nevada, Monterey Bay, and by the Pigeon Point Lighthouse. In returning to Palo Alto we flew over Año Nuevo island and Pigeon Point lighthouse and across San Mateo County.

Gary's main job is as an Alaskan Airlines 737 Captain. He has long flown his

Piper plane for recreation and began thinking of modifying and using it for cremains scattering when his mother made a request for him to scatter her ashes off Catalina Island. (She is still going strong at age 72.)

He is the registered owner of Scatterings, P.O. Box 490, Los Gatos, which has a helpful website that may answer your questions at www.scatteringbyair.com. The phone is 408-858-1205 and email is gary@scatteringbyair.com. He is a Certified Remains Disposer #685 in the state of California.

For your convenience, we are listing two scattering firms on our Mortuary Price List this year. Both offer discounts to FCA members. In addition of Scatterings, we list A Wing and A Prayer, which is owned by Arthur L. Adams, CRD license #384. They fly out of Petaluma, San Carlos, and Truckee, and will do coastal or Sierra mountain flights. Adams has 25 years flying experience, 15 as a scatterer. Check the firm out at www.wingandaprayer.net or phone 1-888-568-9464. Mailing address is 2153 Caulfield Lane, Petaluma, CA 94954.

As a Funeral Consumer Alliance member you have chosen your funeral plans to clarify your wishes for your family. It is also appropriate to specify where you want your remains to finally rest.

The airborne release of cremated remains offers closure in a dignified manner, over a location that is scenic or holds special significance. This is a popular option among local FCA members.

Images of the California coast, a lighthouse, the golf courses of Pebble Beach, or the Golden Gate Bridge invoke memories of the person who was scattered nearby. Each sunset becomes an ongoing memorial, no matter where you are when the sunset is observed, the pilot pointed out.



Gary Trovinger, pilot, with brown urn. Note the tube under the plane, where ashes are released.