

## Bell rings for 88 crash victims

By Michelle Volkmann  
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They come to remember them with love.

About 60 people held hands in a circle while looking out to the Pacific Ocean in silence. The waves at Port Hueneme Beach crashed against the shore. An airplane flew overhead. White balloons marked with messages like "We miss your smiling face" waved in the wind.

They waited until 4:22 p.m. At that moment, a bell rang. Silently, the balloons were released. Then everyone walked to the beach, where they placed flowers on the sand.

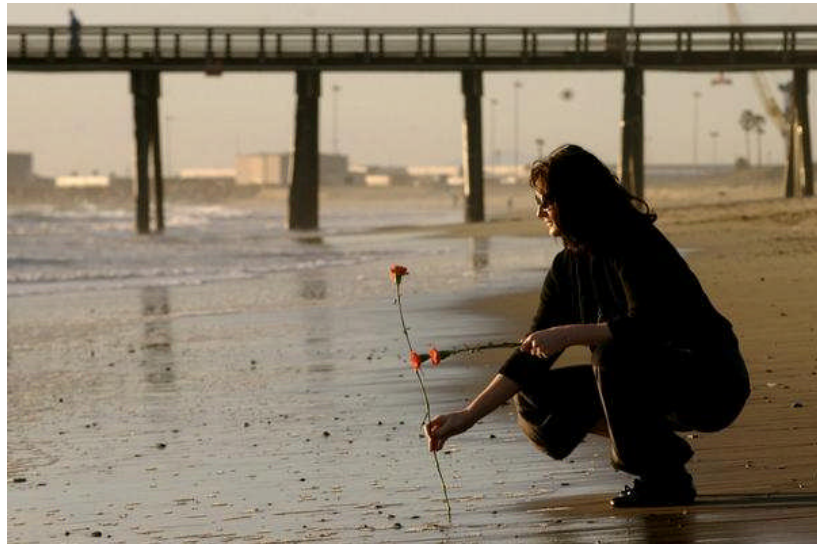
Each person came Thursday to remember the 88 passengers and crew who died in the crash of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 near Anacapa Island off the Ventura County coast Jan. 31, 2000. The plane was en route from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, to San Francisco and Seattle when it fell from the sky at 4:22 p.m.

"Jan. 31 means a lot to us. It changed our lives forever. It's nice to have the support and to be around family on this day," Anarudh Prasad told the crowd. His 19-year-old brother and two cousins were on the flight.

Prasad is one of many Seattle residents who return to Port Hueneme each year on Jan. 31.

The memorial ceremony is to honor those who died and to grieve with other people who also lost loved ones in the crash.

At the ceremony marking the eighth anniversary of the crash, each victim's name was read, a bell was rung and a single white rose was placed at the square bearing his or her name at the Alaska Flight 261 Monument. Candles encircled the sundial on the memorial, built with donations from the community, family members and Alaska Airlines.



Amanda Lanigan of North Bend, Wash., places a flower in the sand at Port Hueneme Beach after a memorial ceremony for the victims of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 on Thursday. Lanigan lost her sister, Sheri Christiansen. (Photos by Rob Varela / Star staff )



Relatives and friends of the Flight 261's passengers and crew release balloons at 4:22 p.m. at the Sundial Memorial at Port Huenene Beach. The crash occurred off the Ventura County coast eight years ago at 4:22 p.m.

Amanda Lanigan of North Bend, Wash., lost her sister, Sheri Christiansen, in the crash.

Lanigan had not attended the memorial service for the past two years. She came to Port Hueneme for Thursday's ceremony.

"This time it was the time to be out here. I had the urge to be here," Lanigan said.

Joan Margiotta of Huntington, N.Y., lost her daughter Carolyn, son-in-law, two grandchildren and two step grandchildren in the crash. Margiotta first came to Port Hueneme when the monument was dedicated at the third anniversary. She plans to come back annually for the ceremony.

Many of those who live in Seattle and were not able to travel to Port Hueneme attended a candle lighting ceremony at Claire Barnett's home. Barnett lost her two daughters, Corey and Blake, in the crash.

At Barnett's house, she has 88 hand-painted dishes, each with a victim's name on it. As a name is read, Barnett lights a candle.

After the ceremony, Barnett melts the candles and puts them into votive candles. These candles are sent to 250 family members of the crash victims.

<http://www.venturacountystar.com/news/2008/feb/01/remembering-flight-261-8-years-later-bell-rings/>