Pilgrimage to Tahoe plane crash site 50 years later

By Dave Nordstrand, Salinas Californian

One morning when Salinas' Billy Harvey was a boy of 5 and still asleep, his parents arose.

Quietly as they could, they tiptoed to the front door and left the house.

"I never saw them again," Harvey said.

Billy Harvey's parents had put him and his two brothers in the care of an aunt. Then, they'd flown off to Lake Tahoe on what was supposed to be a fun-flight getaway, a day-long casino excursion. They planned to return home that night.

Only they, and many others, died in an airplane crash.

That was March 1, 1964, making this year the 50th anniversary of that disaster and its aftermath.

Billy Harvey is now 55. He drives a bus for special education children in the Salinas Union High School District.

In late July, Harvey, his wife and three children plus his brother, Jesse Harvey, and other family members headed for the Tahoe area.

First thing Harvey noticed was the crystal blue of the lake. He was stunned by the beauty of the setting. Harvey carried with him a wooden plaque, hand-painted and honoring his parents. "In Loving Memory of Billy and Patricia Harvey," it said. He planned to leave it posted at the site where his parents had died 50 years ago.

At that site, Harvey found bits and pieces of the wreckage

still scattered across the ground. “Shrapnel,” he called the fragments.

“I found pieces of the seat, pieces of the engine,” he said. “I took one piece back to Salinas. In a way, it was like bringing my mother and father home.

“Standing there on that site, I felt a peace that I hadn’t expected to feel,” Harvey said. “I cried. I would like to go again. It’s about keeping the memories alive now. It’s all about love.”

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