



Under the Sea: Innovative Memorials That Celebrate Life on the Water

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Under the Sea: Innovative Memorials That Celebrate Life on the Water

by Susan Cushing

FROM INTIMATE BOAT CHARTERS TO SATELLITE-TRACKED DRIFTERS, two companies are transforming how families honor their loved ones, offering solace, beauty, and connection through the majesty of the ocean.

The sea has always held a mysterious power over humanity. Its vastness evokes reflection, its rhythms mirror life's ebb and flow, and its horizons promise continuity beyond what the eye can see. For centuries, human cultures have looked to the ocean for meaning, solace, and passage. Today, as cremation becomes more common and families seek alternatives to traditional cemeteries, the ocean is emerging as a profound canvas for remembrance.

Two companies, each distinct in mission and method, are pioneering ways for families to honor loved ones amid waves, wind, and the eternal horizon. **GetMyBoat** provides accessible, global opportunities for families to scatter ashes at sea on vessels of their choice, while **Return To Sea**, guided by a father-and-son team with a lifetime of ocean experience, offers a patent-pending "Drifter" that merges memorialization with science, environmental stewardship, and family connection. Together, they illustrate how the water can carry grief into beauty, and loss into reflection.

The Growing Tide of Ocean Memorials

In recent years, water-based memorials have seen a significant rise in popularity. As the popularity of cremation increases, families seek personal, meaningful ways to honor the lives of their loved ones. The appeal is clear: the ocean is alive, ever-changing, and universal. Unlike a static grave or dusty, forgotten spot on the mantel, a memorial on the water is dynamic—a literal journey that mirrors the ongoing flow of life.

While **GetMyBoat's** unique memorial services were inspired by requests from interested parties, **Return To Sea** seems to be the culmination of a lifelong love affair with the ocean.

Most recently, **Return To Sea** founder **Scott McDowell** reported the most recent launch of one of his prized Drifters: "I deployed another Drifter yesterday, to disperse ashes of a lifelong friend from Massachusetts," he says. "We deployed about 18 miles east of Jupiter, FL. It's cruising north in the Gulf Stream nicely."

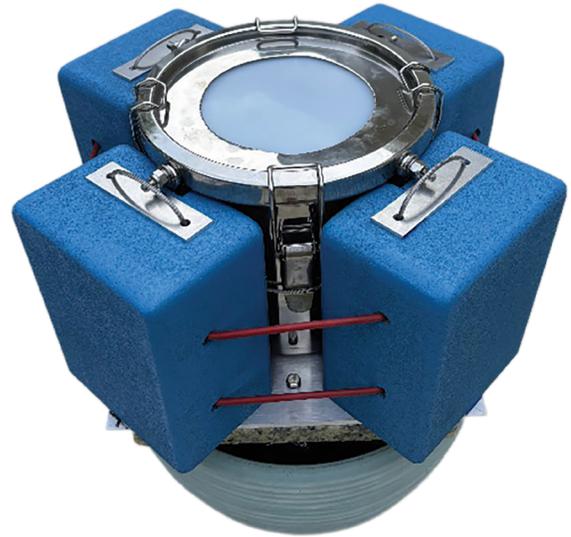
For funeral professionals, this shift opens opportunities to offer families something intimate, symbolic, and unforgettable. From small, chartered vessels to high-tech drifting memorials, these options allow participation without travel, connection without confinement, and remembrance without restriction. In short, the sea offers both space and perspective, a tangible medium for honoring memory in motion.

GetMyBoat: A World of Access

Founded with the vision of connecting people to boats worldwide, **GetMyBoat** has become the go-to platform for families seeking to hold memorials on the water. The company operates much like Airbnb[®] for vessels, allowing users to select boats across oceans, lakes, and rivers—from intimate sailboats to larger yachts—and arrange a scattering ceremony guided by professional captains.

For families, the process is both simple and meaningful. A funeral service on land can be complemented by a subsequent memorial voyage, where loved ones gather in a smaller, intimate group to honor the deceased amid the open water. As **Val Streif**, marketing manager for **GetMyBoat**, explains, "Offering sea-based memorialization options like boat charters for scattering ashes at sea is wonderful for grieving families who have a special connection to the water."

Whether their deceased loved ones enjoyed a certain coastal destination or loved boating themselves, Streif adds that scattering ashes at sea with a licensed professional captain can be a meaningful memorial option and something to look forward to as a family after the initial funeral is over. "Funeral professionals would still have control over the funeral experience and wouldn't be losing potential clients by offering sea memorialization options. Cremation services will still need to be



provided, and families will likely want a larger service or ceremony with more attendees on land, but would look forward to spreading ashes with their smaller, more intimate family unit on the water.”

This approach ensures accessibility and control, giving families a sense of agency in a deeply personal moment. Whether in Miami, London, or Sydney, the ocean becomes a canvas for memory, turning a scattering into an experience of both closure and continuity.

The emotional resonance of the water is central to the experience. As Streif notes, “For families, I would hope they take away the feeling of calm and peace that comes with being on the water. Death is a part of life, and it can be extremely painful, but by scattering ashes at sea, people are able to let their loved ones go in a beautiful setting and will be able to always remember them fondly when they are enjoying a body of water themselves.”

This philosophy—of facilitating reflection, connection, and beauty—has positioned *GetMyBoat* as more than a service; it is a bridge between grief and the healing qualities of the sea.

Return To Sea: Science, Stewardship, and Legacy

Where *GetMyBoat* offers accessibility and choice, *Return To Sea* elevates memorialization through innovation, environmental consciousness, and personal engagement. Founded by **Scott McDowell, Ph.D.**, a retired oceanographer and lifelong thalassophyte, the company merges deep scientific understanding with a commitment to honoring life.

McDowell’s relationship with the ocean began in his youth on Cape Cod. By age 13, he was working on the fishing boat, *Albatross*, later guiding Bluefin Tuna expeditions while acquiring degrees in chemical engineering, oceanography, and ocean physics. His 30-year foundation of sea-going oceanographic experience inspired the creation of the **Return To Sea Drifter**, a patent-pending, environmentally conscious device that carries cremated remains safely and beautifully into the North Atlantic.

Each Drifter is constructed from durable, non-toxic materials—stainless steel, aluminum, cork, and granite. A tiny satellite transmitter weighing less than one percent of the Drifter weight has plastic components, but a key design criterion was assurance that the Drifter did not contribute significantly to plastic debris in the ocean.

Once deployed, the ashes are gradually released, merging with the deep-ocean environment, while families can track the journey in real time via a private website. The Drifter is carefully designed to withstand rough seas, self-right if overturned, and travel safely through currents such as the Gulf Stream, which provides a direct, natural pathway into the open Atlantic.

The **Return To Sea** process allows families to participate meaningfully without traveling.

“There are hundreds of thousands of persons with strong ties to the ocean, many of whom spent their final days far inland,” McDowell explains. “Consider employees of the Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, commercial captains, fishermen, etc. They had wished to be ‘buried at sea’ but the opportunity was not possible for family to accomplish. Now it is easy, by having family or a crematory mail their urn to **Return to Sea** via the priority protocol of the USPS. We do everything thereafter, by facilitating family viewing of the memorial journey.”

Beyond logistics, the Drifter offers a deeply personal experience. Families can monitor its path across the Atlantic, post messages and tributes in a private Remembrance Blog, and receive a certificate

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—Val Streif

commemorating the journey. This unique combination of science, technology, and remembrance transforms the ritual of scattering ashes into an intimate, ongoing engagement with both memory and nature.

McDowell reflects on the family experience:

“Using their mobile phone or computer, family can view the trajectory of the deceased’s memorial drifting buoy along its journey in the North Atlantic. A private Remembrance Blog allows family and friends to post their tributes for the loved one. Family involvement with no need for travel.”

In addition to honoring individual lives, **Return To Sea** contributes to broader understanding of ocean currents, circulation, and environmental patterns, sharing anonymized trajectory data with scientists and students. In this way, each memorial journey becomes a contribution to knowledge, bridging the personal and the universal.

There’s another special aspect to **Return To Sea**, a father/son enterprise with Scott and his son Zachery at the helm.

“My son and I formed this LLC just this year,” he explains. “Because Zachery is a service-disabled veteran, we will be establishing with the VA as a veteran-owned small business which could help with government contracting.

“His career has been as a fireman, first in the Air Force and now he’s a contracted fireman working for the federal government in San Diego.”



The Shared Current

While **GetMyBoat** and **Return To Sea** differ in scale, method, and style, their work is united by a shared vision: transforming grief into experience, and memorialization into connection. One emphasizes accessibility and global reach, offering families a way to step onto any waterway and commemorate life. The other emphasizes precision, environmental stewardship, and ongoing participation, allowing families to witness a loved one’s journey through both technology and tide.

Both reflect the ocean’s dual nature—intimate and expansive, reflective, and alive, personal yet universal. The water carries not only ashes but the emotions, memories,

and legacies of those who have passed. In its flow, the sorrow of loss is tempered by the rhythm of life, the horizon offering a promise of continuity and perspective.

The broader lesson is clear: the sea, in its majesty, can be a place of solace, ritual, and remembrance. Whether through a private charter, a high-tech Drifter, or a family gathering at the shore, these innovative memorial options invite us to reconsider the ways we honor life—to move beyond stone and soil, embracing instead a medium that reflects both the beauty of nature and the depth of human connection.

For families seeking alternatives to traditional burial, the ocean presents possibilities that are simultaneously grounding and liberating. **GetMyBoat** (<https://www.getmyboat.com>) allows loved ones to scatter ashes anywhere, facilitating intimacy and global access, while **Return To Sea** (<https://www.returntosea.com>) elevates memorials into journeys of science, spirituality, and environmental care. Together, they embody the enduring allure of the ocean—a final resting place that is as dynamic, vast, and beautiful as life itself.

The waves may carry ashes, but they also carry memory, love, and reflection—a reminder that even in death, the journey continues, fluid and eternal. ☑

Susan Cushing is a regular contributor to *Memento Mori* magazine.

