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SPORTS, SECTION B

'MAIRE'S JOURNEY' COMING TO AN END

Filmmaker Famie nearing completion of movie about a dying woman's last wish

By Lonnie Huhman
Staff Writer

Local filmmaker Keith Famie's journey to capture the real life story of one young woman's battle with a terminal cancer diagnosis is nearing its end and he hopes the final results will positively impact many lives – just like Maire Kent did.

Famie, whose filmmaking company Visionalist Entertainment Productions is based in Wixom, along with award-winning producer/director John Feist and their crew will complete production in the next few months on *Maire's Journey* and release it this spring.

The movie captures the last months of a young woman's life, the journey she would undertake following her death and the impact it had on others. It's Famie's hope that anyone who sees the film gains a clear understanding of what a cancer patient goes through, both physically as well as emotionally.

"I also hope that this will open the door for end-of-life discussions for families. We are all going to die someday," he said. "Some of us will have the ability to plan our exit and what we would like to see happen afterward in memory of our existence. For those of us



In his Wixom office, documentary filmmaker Keith Famie shows the small sailboat that carried the ashes of Maire Kent from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean.

who will leave our earthly world abruptly, I hope that we understand just how precious life is and every day is a gift."

Meeting Maire

Famie met 24-year-old Maire (pronounced Mary) Kent after she had been diag-

nosed with cardiac sarcoma. They quickly became friends. He realized as he spent more time with her that she was special and her will to live – while eventually facing the reality that she would lose the battle with this rare cancer – told a unique story.

Famie said as her story unfolds, "we witness how Maire is forced to think about her end-of life after a short nine months. She reflects on a book she learned to read from that would inspire her after-

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life journey to the ocean of her ashes in a small three-foot sailboat built by a blind carpenter."

This journey, Famie noted, would bring together random strangers who felt a deep desire to help Maire get to the sea

"In the end, we learn that cancer is everyone's story at some point in our lives," he said in reflection.

A dying wish

Maire's dying wish was to be cremated and have her ashes placed in a small, wooden sailboat set in Lake Michigan, in the hope it would ultimately find its way to the Atlantic Ocean. It did, getting help along the way by people with their own stories.

"Maire's journey was viewed by so many as impossible," Famie said. "I heard so often before we set out on this production this past summer that no one would help this vessel containing Maire's ashes get to the ocean. I am sure many who I told Maire's story to thought I lost it. I just believed that humanity is good and, if given the chance, they would be there for Maire."

He said so many things could have gone wrong during the weeks while Maire's ashes made their way some 1,400 miles to New York City, but they didn't.

"We experienced some very moving moments that brought our crew of six to say to ourselves more than once, 'Maire is guiding this journey.' So quite possibly when we are gone, just maybe we are not really ever gone," Famie said.

What's next?

They are now finishing the movie and preparing for a two-month edit session. During this time, Famie will film a few follow-up interviews with Maire's doctors, singer-songwriter Jill Jack, blind carpenter George Wurtzel and friends. These interviews will help them narrate Maire's long battle with cancer, as well as the journey she took in her afterlife. The interviews will also allow for these people to reflect on Maire as a person.

It's Famie's plan to host a large premiere in Michigan before taking the movie to New York. The premiere will benefit Gilda's Club of Metro Detroit (named after Gilda Radner, former *Saturday Night Live* television show cast

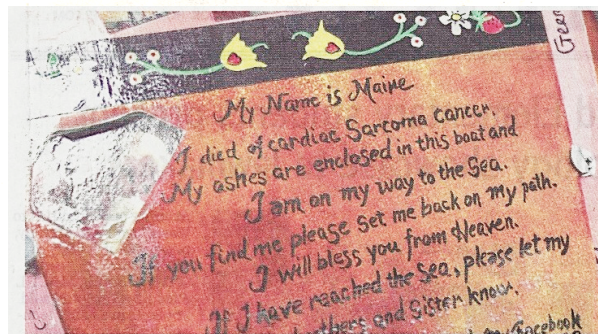
member and native Detroit) as well as the Maire Kent Memorial Fund for Sarcoma and Cardiac Tumor Research at the University of Michigan. Famie is hoping to attract through a formal invite one of the original cast members of *Saturday Night Live*, such as Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd or Jane Curtin, who were close to Radner.

In addition to Gilda's Club, the film's other primary support has been through executive producers Tom Rau, who has been supporting this story from day one, and Anthony Schimizzi, recently added to the team. Both are businessmen who have been successful.

"I am certain there will be so many lessons that will come from this wonderful spirited lady's story, more than can be written at this point in time," Famie said. "We are all very fortunate to have had Maire Kent in our lives. And come spring, we hope her story and the others who helped her along her way will touch possibly hundreds of thousands the same way."

To learn more, go to <https://www.facebook.com/mairesjourney> or <http://mairesjourney.com>.

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Maire Kent asked that these words be written on her sailboat.