

Cancer victim left seaworthy message

Film will document journey of Maire Kent's ashes

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Maire Kent, who died of cancer last year, is filmed for a documentary produced by local filmmaker Keith Famie. / SUBMITTED PHOTO

More than nine months after her filmed funeral in Howell, Maire Kent's final journey is beginning.

Kent, a 24-year-old cancer patient, provided a chapter in an end-of-life documentary series by Michigan filmmaker Keith Famie, with her October funeral serving as its centerpiece.

"She was a bright, articulate young woman who was given a really (bad) deal," said Famie, who befriended Kent while filming her as part of a documentary series he was preparing for airing on PBS stations.

But the story didn't end there.

Famie is now filming a 90-minute documentary on the journey of Kent's ashes from Michigan to the sea.

Her ashes will be placed inside a 3-foot wooden boat, along with photos of others who lost their lives to cancer and a personal, posthumous message printed on its sail encouraging those who find it to help send it back on its way.

"I think almost everyone has been touched by cancer, has lost someone to cancer," Famie said. "And eventually, all of us will die. But we rarely think about what we like our lives to mean."

Kent's message, he said, was simple and direct: to bring people together.

Famie said he intends to share Kent's statement in the documentary, to be called "Maire's Journey." (Her first name is pronounced "Mary.")

"In a sense, despite what she went through, she had that luxury — she had the time to think about the kind of statement she'd like to make."



This small boat will carry the ashes of Maire Kent into the Atlantic Ocean. Kent, a 24-year-old who died of cardiac sarcoma cancer, was filmed in her last days by local documentary filmmaker Keith Famie. / SUBMITTED PHOTO

remembered as a “tall, beautiful spitfire” who rarely complained during her battle with a malignant tumor that began in her heart.

The nursing student and former Army private was also remembered for the love and support she gave to others, especially during her own illness.

The journey of her ashes is a tribute to her favorite childhood book, “Paddle-to-the-Sea.”

Though perhaps best known as a local chef, as well as a former “Survivor” contestant, Famie is a 10-time Emmy-winning filmmaker.

Gilda’s Club Metro Detroit is also supporting the film project.

“Maire’s story and her friendship with producer Keith Famie shine a bright and important light on the need for support when a cancer diagnosis turns your world upside-down,” said Laura Varon Brown, Gilda’s Club Metro Detroit executive director and CEO.

The University of Michigan has also set up a cancer fund in Kent’s name.

For more information about the Maire Kent Memorial Fund for Cardiac Sarcoma Tumor Research or to make a donation, visit <http://www.maires-journey.com>.

Those touched by the message included Brighton-area businessman Tom Rau, who is the film’s lead financial backer.

A Goodrich resident at the time of her death, Kent also lived in Milford and Southfield.

A rough 34-minute cut is to be previewed at a private special showing for family and friends Sunday in Ann Arbor. When the full documentary will be available for the public is not yet known.

During her funeral, held at Borek Jennings Funeral Home in Howell, Kent was