

Film Maker Keith Famie Inspired by the Death of a Cancer Patient

By [Sarah Thomas](#) | July 31, 2014 9:53 AM EST



A 24-year-old [cancer patient](#) Maire Kent inspired the [Michigan](#) filmmaker Keith Famie for his documentary. Her October funeral served as its centerpiece. Famie is a 10-time Emmy-winning filmmaker.

Famie said, "I met her by chance, actually. I went to the hospital because I was having some chest pains and we ended up having the same doctor. Our conversations took off from there."

Kent was diagnosed with cancer in November 2012. She passed away by the end of September 2013. Famie was working on a documentary about the way

in which people deal with the end of their life, as a part of that he along with Kent decided to document the last part of her life and her final wishes.

The filming did not end. After the documentary he decided to shoot a 90-minute film on the journey on Kent's ashes from [Michigan](#) to [the Atlantic](#) sea. Kent, inspired by a children's book, "[Paddle to Sea](#)", in which a boy shapes a boat and lets it free in [the Great Lakes](#) wanted her ashes to go through a similar journey. Twenty four [year old](#) Kent wanted the ashes of her body to be taken from Lake Michigan to the Atlantic Ocean. "Cremate me and put my ashes in a boat. I want to go from Lake Michigan to the Atlantic Ocean," she told her family.

Her ashes, Famie said is placed in a 3-foot wooden boat, which is carved by George Wurtzel, a blind carpenter, as she wished, with all the other people's photos who have lost their lives to cancer in the boat. Kent's family also printed a personal message on its sail, as per her wishes. "My name is Maire. I died of cardiac sarcoma cancer. My ashes are enclosed in this boat and I am on my way to the ocean. If you find me, please send me back on my path. I'll bless you from Heaven."

Famie said, "The hope was that, with the help of strangers, she would have her dream come true. As it turns out, it was kind of like the Olympic torch. People wanted to be part of this journey." He said that almost everyone has been touched by cancer and has lost someone to cancer. It is certain that we all would die too, but rarely do we think what we want our lives to mean. The boat is on a 1,400 mile journey.



Famie explained that Maire knew that everyone was touched in some way or the other by cancer. Once the journey started, it was incredible watching people engage the boat. "It created a dialogue of life after death. We knew it would resonate with people but we had no idea it would be this strong," he said.



Maire Kent's final journey began nine months after her funeral was filmed. She was diagnosed with cardiac sarcoma, which is heart cancer and is a rare and aggressive form of cancer.

Dr. Monika Leja, a cardiologist in Ann Arbor, Michigan, who treated Kent said that it could grow from any part of the body and usually happens to very healthy, young, individuals. "A purely genetic disease that's rapid growing. It's kind of like having a ticking time bomb in your body and no one is recognizing it."

The boat that set sail in Lake Michigan would travel by [water](#) and over land, riding on everything from planes to trains to the sidecars of motorcycles, Famie said.

The [University of Michigan](#) has also set up a cancer [fund](#) in Kent's name called the Maire Kent Fund for Sarcoma and Cardiac Tumor Research.