

CHEBOYGAN DAILY TRIBUNE

Setting sail on a voyage of destiny, cancer victim's remains touching lives



James Saoud

After traveling through the Straits of Mackinac and being brought aboard Shepler's Ferry, The Hope, Maire's remains became part of the Jack Pine Lumberjack evening show Saturday where her story was shared.

By MARY BARKER

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CHEBOYGAN

Cross Village and a Native American ceremony, Shepler's Ferry on the Straits of Mackinac, The Jack Pine Lumberjack Show, Mackinaw Mill Creek Camping and Cheboygan's Inland Waterways Wooden Boat Show recently were all part of the first leg of a 1,400-plus mile adventure known as Maire's Journey. The journey will carry the cremated remains of 24-year-old Michigan resident, Maire Kent, out to sea with the final destination being the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of New Jersey.

Some nine months after the former U.S. Army PFC lost her battle with cardiac sarcoma, Kent's final wish of having her ashes sail from the Great Lakes to the ocean is taking shape. The 3-foot, pine sailboat was crafted by George Wurtzel, a blind carpenter who is a member of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. It was launched Saturday, July 12 from Cross Village into Lake Michigan following a Native American ceremony conducted by the citizens of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians with Maire's siblings and close friends present.

The idea of Maire's Journey was born when the U.S. Army veteran, who was going to school to become a registered nurse, learned of her terminal diagnosis and had a fate-filled meeting with 10-time Emmy award winning producer and director, Keith Famie, who was producing a documentary about the real-life struggles cancer patients endure. Kent provided a chapter in the end-of-life documentary the Michigan filmmaker was producing with her funeral serving as its centerpiece. But the relationship continued.

The two became close friends with Famie accompanying Kent on her medical procedures and documenting her incredible story — one of a desire to fight to live and eventually of facing the reality she would lose the battle. After some 10 months of fighting, she lost the battle on September 27, 2013. A Goodrich resident at the time of her death, Kent also lived in Milford and Southfield. Her funeral was in Howell.

Her dying wish was to raise awareness about sarcoma cancer through the journey of her ashes from Michigan to the ocean, which Famie is filming for a 90-minute PBS documentary that will air in 2015. The journey is a tribute to her favorite childhood book, "Paddle-to-the-Sea."

The ashes, along with photos of others who lost their battle to sarcoma cancer, are now en route to their final destination. A personal, posthumous message is printed on the sail encouraging those who find the small boat on its way to help keep it on the path toward the sea. The message reads: "My name is Maire; I died of cardiac sarcoma. My ashes are enclosed in this boat and I am on my way to the ocean. If you find me, please set me back on my path. I will bless you from Heaven. If I have reached the ocean, let my brothers and sister know. You can reach them through my Facebook page Maire's Journey."

Famie said the purpose of the documentary and the journey is to bring Kent's story to people along the way and to film their personal reactions and interactions with Maire's remains as well as with the story of her life and battle with cancer.

"The whole idea is to reach as many people as possible and have them touch the boat and have their own experience with it. There's not one person here who hasn't been touched by cancer," said Famie, while on board Shepler's Ferry, The Hope, Saturday.

The Hope intercepted Maire's remains in the wooden sailboat Saturday afternoon when returning a group of visitors to Mackinaw City from Mackinac Island. Bobbing up and down in a choppy Straits of Mackinac surf, the wooden sailboat was brought aboard the ferry and taken to the upper deck where Famie shared the story with passengers while he and his crew filmed.

Once brought ashore in Mackinaw City, Ken McDonough, a lumberjack with the Jack Pine Lumberjack Show in Mackinaw City, found the boat's destiny in his hands. After walking around the city carrying it and sharing Maire's story, McDonough took the remains to the evening show where the wooden boat sailed in the pond while the lumberjacks performed for the audience and again shared Maire's story.

Sunday morning, the little wooden boat with Maire's remains set sail into Lake Huron from the shore at Mackinaw Mill Creek Camping. "We had an amazing experience at the campground," said Famie. "A woman who was camping was standing at the shore with her family when Dan released the boat, and she asked what we were doing. It turns out her brother died a year ago of the same rare cardiac sarcoma. She started crying and it was just so beautiful as the boat set sail, and then it got stuck in some weeds.

"We thought 'Oh no, what are we going to do now?' And the woman said her 17-year-old daughter was a certified lifeguard and she ran back to their campsite and her daughter came down and swam out to the weeds, freed it and set it out to sail," said Famie.

Later Sunday, Maire's remains were right at home at the Third Annual Inland Waterways Wooden Boat Show held at Pier M-33 on the Cheboygan, which was being held as part the Cheboygan Waterways Festival. The sailboat was on display and many boat show visitors learned of Maire's Journey as they interacted with Famie's film crew and with Tammy Raymus, the event chair for Cheboygan's Relay of Life, who was on hand to participate in Maire's Journey.

Maire's remains were towed during the entire Cheboygan wooden boat parade by Robert Butts, whose wooden boat took first place at the annual event. Onlookers applauded and had a chance to interact with Maire at the end of the show, according to Famie's field producer James Saoud.

Coincidentally, he said the boat that pulled Maire's remains out of the final film shot was named "Don't Tell Mary."

In a news release about Maire's Journey, Famie states, "As the filming of Maire's journey takes place, the story that will be documented will be how people react when they come across Maire's boat. ..."

To follow Maire, visit www.mairesjourney.com or her Facebook page Maire's Journey.

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<http://www.cheboygannews.com/article/20140716/News/140719431#ixzz37dWT0RaG>