

# Child's book prompts 'Paddle to the Sea' for ashes of young woman, others

## Burial at sea wish becoming a reality for Mich. woman who lost cancer battle



Maire Kent was only 24 when she lost her battle with cancer.

Maire Kent, a former U.S. Army private first class who wanted to be a nurse, lost her battle with cancer in 2013 at age 24. She had fought cardiac sarcoma, a rare cancer of the heart.

Kent's dying wish was to be buried at sea, based on her childhood love of the story *Paddle to the Sea* by Holling C. Holling. She wanted her ashes to go into a wooden sailboat handcrafted by blind carpenter George Wurtzel.

That's happening, with her ashes joined by those of 12 others lost to cancer. Brendan Kent, 38, of Flint, Maire's brother, said, "When we were little kids, that was one of the first books our dad read to us. We actually learned to read from that book," he added of *Paddle to the Sea*.

Her message on the boat reads, "My name is Maire. I died of cardiac sarcoma cancer. This boat has my ashes in it and I'm making 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, please let my brothers and sisters know. You can reach them on my Facebook page Maire's Journey."

Kent lived in Milford from 2012 until her diagnosis the following year. Her story will be part of a feature documentary by producers/directors Keith Famie and John Feist. Her story is also online at [www.mairesjourney.com](http://www.mairesjourney.com), including following the wooden boat from Michigan to New Jersey via GPS on its journey.

### Fighting the good fight

Maire Kent met filmmaker Famie through a University of Michigan physician, Dr. Monika Leja. Famie was in production on a film series on death and dying. He asked to interview Kent about her fight with cancer. The one-time interview session turned out to become an eight-month storytelling of Kent's fight with cancer.

"She was actually in school to be a registered nurse," Breandan Kent said of his younger sister, who died Sept. 27, 2013. They grew up in Detroit.

Carpenter Wurtzel began with a model boat of Styrofoam to show Maire. "My sister loved it and said, 'Go for it,'" her brother recalled. "He built this all out of feel," with minimal assistance.

The others whose ashes are included were also interviewed by Famie. When the wooden boat was recently launched in the Mackinac area, headed for New Jersey and the ocean, Brendan was joined by brother Geoff Kent and sister Nora Hall, as well as an uncle, his wife and their son. Three who helped care for Maire also were there.

“It’s hard to say” the length of the journey down the St. Lawrence Seaway, Brendan said. “She’s actually moving pretty quick. We’re expecting the end of the month” for arrival, depending on weather.

On July 15, some Girl Scouts found the boat on its journey to the sea. “They picked her up and took her to lunch at Applebee’s,” her brother said. “She loved Applebee’s.”

His loss has been hard on him, Brendan said, and even more so on his son, 6. “It’s hard to do, regardless. My sister was there when he was born,” and lived with them then.

## **Friend to all**

The documentary is due in 2015, he said, and will include the journey’s end.

“Her good nature,” is what he wants remembered of his sister. “She always had a smile on her face and never worried about herself.”

You could know Maire 20 years or 10 minutes, he said, and “She would make you feel like she was your best friend.”

She was living in Goodrich, Mich., with friends when she passed.

Visit [victors.us/mairekentfund](http://victors.us/mairekentfund) to donate to the Maire Kent Memorial Fund for Sarcoma and Cardiac Tumor Research.