

Maire's Journey begins on the shores of Lake Michigan

Posted: Monday, July 21, 2014 11:15 am | Updated: 11:28 am, Mon Jul 21, 2014.
Jordan Spence

The start of Maire Kent's end began on the shores of Lake Michigan.

Kent, of Goodrich, had one final request after the 24-year-old died of cardiac sarcoma in September 2013; to send her ashes to the ocean.

Her ashes were attached to a boat with GPS in Cross Village with the hope to reach the ocean one day.

The inspiration for this idea began with a beloved childhood book, "Paddle-to-the-sea."

The book follows a Native American as he travels from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean in a wooden boat he carved.

Maire also wanted to see the world and she didn't want something like cancer or death to stop her.

A small sailboat was created by Michigan carpenter, George Wurtzel, to carry her ashes to New York. Placed in the hull of the boat were Maire's ashes and pictures of 12 people who died of cancer. Their names were also painted on the boat by Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians artist, Tom Teuthorn Sr. of Harbor Springs.

Throughout this process a documentary film crew has followed along with Maire on her journey.

Keith Famie, one of the film's executive producers began filming Maire's story after he met her through Dr. Monika Leja.





Jordan Spence

George Wurtzel (left), who is blind, built the boat which will hopefully carry Maire Kent's ashes to the sea. The vessel is carried down the Cross Village beach by the boat's painter, Tom Teuthorn Sr. of Harbor Springs.

Famie was working on another documentary series about death and dying when he began having severe chest pains. After a few weeks he was sent to a specialist in Livonia, Leja. They discussed Famie's recent project, and she suggested he speak to one of her patients, Maire.

He met with Maire to get to know her and to make her feel comfortable about discussing death and dying, he said. After he met with her, he noticed one thing was missing; the plaguing chest pains he had for weeks.

From then on Famie and his film crew followed Maire everywhere.

"I would go to the doctor's office with her, concerts, all of it was documenting her experience," Famie said. "I asked her, 'What can I do to help to broaden her world?' As she was going through hospice and going through her final stages of chemo, she said she wanted to be cremated. She said, 'Well let's be honest about this. I know I'm dying. I want to see the world and I want my brothers and sisters to put my ashes in Lake Michigan so I can travel to the ocean.'"

Her family was there Saturday, July 12, as they released the boat. A mixture of smiles and tears were expressed by Maire's family.

"The emotions today are mixed," said Maire's brother, Geoff Kent. "We're sad because she's gone. But, at the same time we know it's the start of her end."

Geoff said he's not surprised his sister asked to do this. She was always full of adventure and surprises, added her sister, Nora Hall.



Jordan Spence

Maire's family embraces producer, Keith Famie, Saturday, July 19 in Cross Village.

“Because cancer is a bad thing, it doesn’t mean it has to end in a bad way,” Geoff said. “She is an example of someone who can make the best of their situation. It doesn’t have to be all doom and gloom.”

Famie said there were so many different acts of fate that brought production together.

“I then knew we had to document this journey,” he said. “It’s really magical how everything fell together. Think about all these things that had to come together.”

To learn more about the film visit the website, www.mairesjourney.com. To follow along Maire’s path visit the Facebook page, www.facebook.com/mairesjourneytothesea.

http://www.petoskeynews.com/featured-pnr/maire-s-journey-begins-on-the-shores-of-lake-michigan/article_e815d0e2-10e9-11e4-a646-0017a43b2370.html