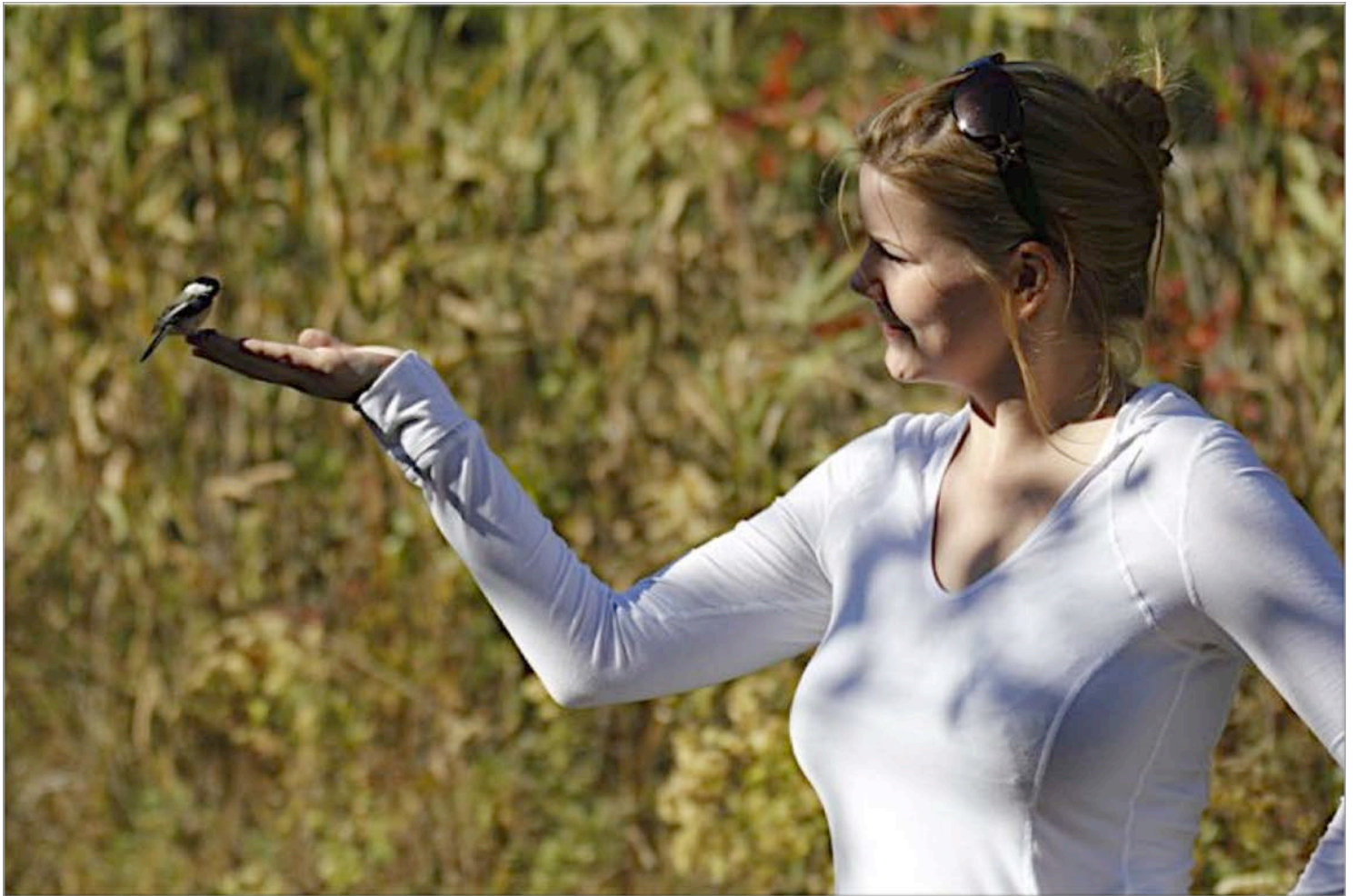


# Something About Maire

Written by Keith Famie  
Edited by Thomas Fladung



*One young woman's fight with cancer.  
One journey to the sea.  
And the thousands who traveled with her.*



## Synopsis

*During a chance meeting via their common physician, award-winning filmmaker Keith Famie meets a woman who allows him to share the last months of her life. For Famie, the relationship becomes not only a privilege, but a responsibility as he explores the notion that dying can be companionable with courage and grace. Beyond support and friendship, Famie makes a promise to extend and enlarge this young woman's life after she is gone. Simply put, through their connection we see the determination to honor a life that by reaching out universally honors life itself. Honest and unflinching, Famie gathers experts from scientists to spiritualists to illuminate the path of this journey.*

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## Foreword

Maire Kent changed my life.

By the time I met Maire, I had already lived a life I could scarcely have imagined. I'd walked the villages of Maisa, dove the waters of the Great Barrier Reef, bicycled through small villages of Vietnam, cooked for presidents -- visited amazing people in fascinating places.

So, why was I so drawn to this one young woman's life in a small, nondescript Michigan town -- her struggles, her humor and, especially, how she touched other lives?

It became my mission. Anyone I met needed to know Maire. That her name was pronounced "Mary." How she had overcome so much, been let down so many times -- by family, boyfriends, the military. People needed to know about her sarcastic sense of humor. That at 24 years old, she was battling a rare form of cancer. That she knew she would die.

I felt a deep passion to tell this story. I felt helpless in the telling of it. It was so apparent she was going to die. For the first time, I really understood how deeply distressing life is for a terminally ill cancer patient.

At some age, I think, we all start questioning our relevance. In my mid-50s when I met Maire, those questions were ringing loudly for me. What have we done with this time we call life? Who have we impacted? Who have we helped? Will anything we have done matter? And does karma really exist? I've always preached to my kids, "Do good and good will come." I've always believed that if you get a chance to help someone, help them.

I'm not a wealthy guy. I've come to the conclusion that I never will be. I've also concluded that I will take these life encounters, these journeys and experiences, over money any day of the week.

I decided that I would be Marie's storyteller. And that I would keep a promise to Maire -- even after her death -- that she make it to the sea, sailing some 1,400 miles in a small, wooden sailboat, built by a blind carpenter and containing her ashes. What I didn't know is how powerfully emotional this journey would be for all the people who would encounter Maire. And how, in the end, through so many very clear signs, Maire still was with us.

All leading to the biggest question: When we are gone, are we really gone?

This is Maire's journey. Please join me on it.

## Chapter 3

## Our First Filming Session

April 1, 2013 I texted Maire:

*"Maire, I wanted to see if you were still interested in having me film with you today around 1pm. Please let me know, thank you. Keith. "*

*"Yes, I'm still a go. I'm nervous, though."*

*"You will be great, I promise. I'll see you at 1. Thank you. Keith"*

My son, Josh, has seen quite a bit while working with me on my documentary productions, helping set up lights, monitoring sound and taking production photos. He's helped film neuroscientists and he's been in the operating room for a carotid artery procedure – an experience I can assure you he'll never forget.

But this experience, I knew, would be different. Josh, who was 19 at the time, was coming with me to the convalescent nursing home, to see Maire. For this first filming session with Maire, I chose to keep it to the two of us, rather than a four- or five-person crew.

As I explained to Josh, he would be meeting a young woman, basically his age, in the fight of her life, with a cancerous tumor in her heart.

I could have enlisted someone else to come with me, but I wanted Josh to experience this. I wanted him to really understand how precious life is. I also felt Maire would be comfortable with Josh; he has a calming way about him.

I knew this would be the first time he would see a cancer patient, one who had lost all her hair, legs swollen, and twice her size from all the poison we call "medicine."

So when we arrived, I asked him again as I did when we left the office.  
"You OK?"

"Yes, I'm OK, stop asking me!" he responded, the irritation in his voice quite clear.

We walked in carrying camera, lights, mics -- all the equipment needed to conduct a sit-down interview. The property manager expected me and walked us back to Maire's room. Wally, the boyfriend, was once again with Maire. The tension was palpable, but not something I could really put my finger on.

Maire was wearing gray sweat pants, skintight because of the swelling, a purple top with a long-sleeved shirt underneath and on her bald head, a longhaired wig. She was in her U-M colored wheelchair she seemed so proud of. In a chair sitting next to her was a teddy bear and a bunny. Maire was still a kid at heart.

It's funny -- my first visit I really didn't remember some of the items I saw when I came to film. I think I was far more observant now.

I made my usual small talk, trying to make sure Maire was OK with this filming and didn't want to change her mind, and at the same time I was watching Josh, making sure he was OK. As I expected, he and Maire hit it off and started up a conversation that immediately made the old guy in the room feel like he was not cool enough to be in the same club.

Once we had the lights and camera set up, I asked Maire if she was ready. I could tell this was the first time she was in front of a camera. I did the basic warm-up. *"Count to 10. Who are you? How old are you? Tell us your name."*

I like to build up a sense of ease and comfort, so the person I am interviewing can try to forget the camera.

With Maire at that first filming session, I remember even jetting off on some story that, as expected, would cause Josh to look at me like, "What are you talking about?" But I knew what I was doing; this works for me.

I wanted Maire to feel empowered and sense that I was the vulnerable one seeking her important thoughts. I never wanted to come off like I knew what she or anyone else was feeling, especially as it relates to cancer. This approach, I knew, was very important to Maire since she obviously had a strained relationship with her parents. I surely did not want to remind her of them in any way. I am sure her watching me with Josh and how we work together as father/son was helpful. So I started with the questions.

Something I had to quickly learn about Maire was how she answered questions. I often did not know in the beginning if she heard me or was checking out or was just not sure what I was asking. She would take a long time to answer the question, sometimes as much as 60 seconds, which in a silent room with a terminally ill cancer patient really seemed like an hour. She would answer only after she was ready and had collected her thoughts. This is when I began to realize that Maire was not an ordinary young lady. Here was a woman dealt one crummy deck of cards who was very intelligent -- more so than most.

Our interview, which was really more of a conversation, would go to places you would expect... *"Tell us about your cancer. Where are you staying? Are you scared?"*

About this time, Wally left the room. I think Maire kind of gave him that look that said she was fine. We talked for about 30 minutes. Here is part of the interview as I recorded Maire:

*My name is Maire Catherine Kent. I'm 23, and I have a birthday in a few weeks. I don't know where this road is going to take me. You can't predict your own future like I could predict I'd have cancer.*

*"Last November, I was diagnosed with cancer sarcoma of the heart. It was a complete surprise to me and how I expected my life to be. I never expected to be 23, in a nursing home and in a wheelchair at the beginning of 2013. I thought this year would be my golden year or I would rock out on my job, get straight A's in school.*

*I would be knocking out all my dreams and plans for myself, but the cancer set me back a lot. But I think it had taught me a valuable life lesson: life is important and don't just blow through it for a career or someone you like. Take the time to enjoy it; don't waste your time constantly searching for something. I mean, you'll always be searching for something but it could lead to a new question.*

*I never predicted where I would be today. Where you might be doesn't mean you'll always be there. Sometimes it's a good thing, sometimes it's a bad thing. It's hard to accept but after a while, you can learn something from the change. I'm the type of person I believe I'll always be the continual student. I always want to be learning something. I don't think anyone ever stops learning, doesn't matter how old you are.*

*If anything, having this disease has taught me I can't rely on what I think I want. There's always a road that can pop up out of nowhere and that's why life is a journey."*

Maire went on to tell me that Dr. Monika had told her to start preparing her bucket list.

*"It shocked me a little bit, but I had heard the same thing the day before from my oncologist. It set it in stone hearing it from another person, like that second opinion. At first I was very scared and terrified. I wasn't sure how to accept it. It has taken me a couple of weeks to accept it. I've stayed awake at night and I thought about what would happen to me. How much longer I would have. Will the next six months be my last six months and what would I do with that time? What was my bucket list? I've never had one. I never anticipated I would need one and after a while, I became more and more accustomed to it that you will lead a short life. Not everyone can beat their enemy; mine is cancer."*

Before we left, I asked her if I could film her putting on one of her many wigs. I felt it was important that people watching this film, learning her story, know she was in the middle of the fight and had lost all of her hair. I filmed her through her dressing mirror as she placed the wig onto her bald head and carefully combed her hair -- hair that belonged to someone else. It was that moment that I knew this would not be the last time I would see Maire.

I felt so sorry for her that I felt I just had to help her in some way. But I really did not know how.

My ride home with Josh was quiet. I was both emotionally touched by Maire and at the same time I wanted to know how Josh felt, but I just wasn't sure how to talk about her. I do remember Josh saying what a fucked-up situation for her and why is she alone there ... why isn't she at home with family?



The best answer I could come up with was, "I really don't know."

As we drove, I made a commitment to myself that Maire would not go on this journey alone. With Maire's approval, I would become her friend, her storyteller, her producer. I would ensure she had as many adventures as I and my network of friends and associates could make happen.

When I got back to my office, I texted Maire: "You did an outstanding interview, thank you."

I was excited to introduce this amazing, brave woman to the world.





## Chapter 15

## Angel Dust

It's 9 p.m., on a cold December night in Michigan, and I've decided it's time to sit down and talk about why I think this young woman came into my life. I received news earlier this day that a wonderful lady, my daughter's future mother-in-law, was just diagnosed with stage 4 cancer.

Five days before, it was Thanksgiving, a day we were all together enjoying the new family and laughing about the upcoming wedding next fall. Now, everyone is trying to find a way to help this woman wage the battle of her life, me included. It's clear that cancer is everyone's story.

What a very ugly word – “cancer” – derived from the Latin word meaning “crab” or “creeping ulcer.” A descriptive word, because the swollen veins so often result resemble the limbs of a crab. An ancient word, with origins credited to the Greek physician Hippocrates, who lived from 460 to 370 BC and who is considered the “Father of Medicine.”

### **A terrible word**

And, finally, a word that will f--- up your life and affect everyone around you. A loved one faced with the diagnosis of cancer will be tested, challenged and, in some cases, defeated. There will also be triumphs. And in Maire Kent’s case, ultimately, a succumbing to the crab-like tentacles that strangled her heart and robbed her of her life – at least life as we know it. I have never really shared these thoughts, until now.

When Maire was dying and in hospice care, I was filming everything that was happening around her at Crystal's home. I watched while an unconscious Maire made these sounds that a hospice clinician will say is a death rattle. I kept thinking that Maire was trying to say something like, “Hey I’m here! I can hear all of you!” But she just couldn't get the words out. I just wanted to yell, "Maire wake up!"

Where do we go? I mean, really, where do we go?

I know that Maire had to have dwelled on this. She was raised Catholic - or at least a form of that religion - but clearly, because of her upbringing, the comfort of everlasting life was not there for her. No priest was present, no spiritual leader praying over her body, only Maire with a vision of a journey that she wanted to take. Quite possibly, she knew that this would touch thousands of other people, others who may be facing the end of their lives. Maybe this was her last big message to her parents. She was going to do it her way, knowing they would not approve. So maybe we, as parents, should take a lesson here -- that we need not force our faith-based beliefs on our kids, but rather offer our passions and beliefs to them.

Don't try to shackle them with the thought that our way is the only way to salvation. And what is salvation, really? Maire fought an unbearable cancer that would have caused most

guys I know, including me, to moan and give up long before she did. So was salvation being DEAD, or was it more than that? Was her salvation that journey, in a small boat to the sea -- a journey during which Maire made her presence felt on so many occasions?

I still, to this day, have an issue with why I met Maire. Why me? Did I do right by her? If I could do it all over again, would I ask her different questions? It's very clear when someone is diagnosed with cancer every moment of life becomes precious. People in your life become far more special, loved ones are cherished. Maybe this is the lesson: Don't wait until you're sick.

Through Maire's experience and the experience she shared with me, I have learned to look at life with more intent and focus. I try to care for the ones I have in my life and have compassion and a sincere interest for those I am just now encountering. There is one great certainty for all of us: No one gets out of this game of life alive.

Who we are today will determine how we are thought of and remembered tomorrow.

On our way home, driving from New York with the guys on my crew, after Maire had completed her journey to the sea, we stopped in a small town in Pennsylvania. It was late in the afternoon, and it had just rained. I had decided that I should film final thoughts with all the crew members.

I took out my camera and pulled Jimmy, one of my producers, from the other truck. We had stopped to get gas. I took him around the back of this lonely gas station in the middle of the mountainous region of Pennsylvania. It was eerie, to say the least, but it just felt like the place I should hear Jimmy tell me what he was thinking. I had already filmed this same type of "tell me what you're thinking" piece with Randy, Jay and John.



I just needed to capture Jimmy and Chaz. It was Jimmy's turn. I pulled out the camera that I had been using the entire trip - camera B. I made sure Jimmy was set to talk about what this meant to him, the trip, the journey the production, Maire. As I started filming, he stopped me and said, "What's that on the camera?"

I looked at the front of my camera and around the inside ring of the lens protector was a thick coating of dust-like substance. I said "I don't know" and then it hit me as I ran my finger through it.

It was Maire; it was her ashes, her remains. I had to think for a minute how she got there, but at the same time, I knew. I was on the bottom back end of the sailboat when her brothers had released Maire's ashes into the sea. Maire had blown back onto me and my camera -- the same camera that had been used for so many months, weeks, days and hours, chronicling her fight with cancer.

All I could think of was angel dust.

It was my Maire, my friend, and at that moment I knew she was really gone and the journey we set out on was now really over. I did my part and held my promise to get her to the sea and she did her part and touched thousands of people along her journey.

Maire, I will always keep you with me in my thoughts. And, always, I will be so grateful for allowing me to be apart of this amazing journey.

For weeks after, I did not wipe Maire's ashes from my camera.