

Cancer victim lives on in film

Maire Kent's memorial service in Howell part of PBS documentary

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Documentary filmmaker Keith Famie films tributes to Maire Kent during Friday services at Borek Jennings Funeral Home in Howell. Kent died last month of cancer at age 24. / ALAN WARD/DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

It's unusual to film a memorial service, but the late Maire Kent had an unusual story to tell.

The story of Kent, who died Sept. 27 at age 24 after battling a rare form of cancer, will be part of an upcoming end-of-life documentary series designed for PBS television stations.

Filmmaker Keith Famie says Kent's tribute and outlook need to be shared.

"She really went through some very difficult stuff, and she never complained, never whined," Famie said.

And, yes, he's that Keith Famie.

"I've been a chef, I'm the guy from 'Survivor,' but I am also a documentarian," he said.

Famie's work included a Friday visit to Borek Jennings Funeral Home in Howell, where he filmed portions of Kent's memorial service.

There, an overflow crowd of family members and friends remembered a "tall, beautiful spitfire." They also told how, in her battle with cancer, the nursing student and former Army private found — and gave — the love and support often missing from other parts of her life.

Growing up with nine siblings brought special challenges, relatives said.

"Her freedom didn't really begin until she became ill," said her brother, Geoff Kent of Fenton.

Noted Detroit-area artist Jill Jack, a friend, performed songs and hymns, while mourners reflected on Kent's 11-month fight against the malignant heart tumor that would claim her life.

Previous work on a PBS series on aging, as well as a heart scare of his own, helped bring Famie into contact with Kent, a Southfield native and former Milford resident.

The pair shared a doctor who handled the initial introductions.

They bonded quickly, especially after learning they shared the same ring tone — the spaghetti Western theme from "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly."

'Very close to all of us'

"She became very close to all of us," Famie said, referring to his own family and crew.

Footage of Kent is expected to include her trip to an afterlife-awareness conference in St. Louis, where she carried the wishes of other patients expressed in flower petals and wrapped in a blanket.

Family members hope the film will also allow viewers to share a little of her Irish spirit and grace.

“It’s about greeting whatever you’re facing with a smile,” brother Geoff Kent said.

After Friday’s service, Maire Kent’s ashes were to be placed in a hand-carved toy boat and set sail from northern Michigan on a journey to the Atlantic Ocean. The trip, Famie said, is a tribute to her favorite childhood book, “Paddle-to-the-Sea.”

Her name, pronounced “Mary,” is also close to the Latin word for sea, family members noted.

The boat will include a card stating that, should it go astray, Maire Kent will “bless ... from Heaven” those who find it and set it back on its way.

Family members have established a fund for cardiac tumor research. Information about the fund is available by visiting <http://victors.us/maire-kent>.

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<http://www.livingstondaily.com/article/20131006/NEWS01/310060018/Cancer-victim-lives-film>