



Alan Kent

February 11, 2008

IRON MOUNTAIN - Alan John "A.J." Kent, 60, of Iron Mountain died Monday afternoon, Feb. 11, 2008, following a lengthy and valiant battle with cancer.

He was born May, 27, 1947, in Hancock and graduated from Hancock High School in 1965. He then enrolled in the United States Navy and went on to become a Marine combat medic, thus beginning his long and storied medical career.

On Sept. 16, 1989, he married Mary Ellen Kuenstler, who survives him in death.

A.J. served his country with honor and distinction in Vietnam. While half of his combat company was killed or wounded, A.J. refused to leave the line, eventually suffering a serious hip wound. He left the military with a Purple Heart, Bronze Star and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. His efforts to bring medical care to his fellow Marines were the subject of Pulitzer Prize winning articles by renowned front-line journalist, William Touhy, who later included A.J. in his memoir "Dangerous Company." A.J.'s gritty and moving first-hand account of the Battle of Hue City is part of this country's permanent history of combat medicine in the Archives of Naval Medical History.

A.J. lived and died as a patriot. In his final days, he refused to pass on the

opportunity to vote in the January primary election. In a weakened state and bound to a wheelchair, he ventured to the voting booth with the aid of his son to cast one last ballot.

Like many Vietnam veterans, A.J. faced hard times after returning from war, but through the help of friends and family, he found his life's calling in continuing his care of the wounded. A.J. put his medical expertise to use by enrolling in the physician assistant program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He received further medical education from the Montefiore Medical Center in New York City, the University of Michigan Medical Center, the Chicago Medical School and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

In 1975, A.J. joined the staff at the V.A. hospital in Iron Mountain, where he continued to serve until retiring in February 2006. Throughout his career, A.J. has been a tireless national proponent for PAs. He helped organize the VA Physician Assistant Association, which he served as a board member, vice president and treasurer.

On his own time and money, A.J. regularly visited Washington to lobby Congress on behalf of his fellow PAs, leading to PAs earning the right to issue prescriptions, and ensuring salary and benefits for those PAs working for the VA. He was instrumental in achieving the first professional guidelines for PAs in 1974 and 1975, which many states later used to draft their own guidelines. While battling cancer, A.J. continued to lobby the federal government to create a PA advisor position to the U.S. Undersecretary of Health.

His vast professional triumphs received proper credit in 2006 when the American Academy of Physician Assistants named him PA of the year. Throughout his long career, A.J. received recognition from local and national organizations, including the United Way, the Red Cross and numerous veterans' organizations. He also received the prestigious Hands and Heart

award from the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, given to those who provide exemplary medical care as well as emotional support and guidance to patients and their families.

A.J. was a member of the St. Mary Queen of Peace Church and has served on the Dickinson Area Catholic School Board. He was a lifetime member of the Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart and the American Legion.

Though he stood all of five-foot-six, A.J. embodied a larger-than-life persona. Whether serving in combat, hunting bears or lifting his young nephews off the ground by his biceps, he was the epitome of human strength - in mind, body and spirit.

A.J. was an avid skier, fisherman and hunter, and loved to share those passions with his family. It was on the ski slopes that he met and fell in love with his wife, who would later have the Great Lakes' grandest boat named for her. Numerous authorities will also attest that no one grilled up a better beef tenderloin.

His love for helping the sick and wounded was only surpassed by his love for his family. A.J. left this world confident that his strength will continue to live on in the family he leaves behind.

In addition to his wife, A.J. is survived by his son, Adam; daughter, Laura; mother, Laura Kent of Hancock; sister, Roberta (Robert) Johns of Massillon, Ohio; brother, David Kent of Hancock; Daniel (Mindy) Baralt of Whitewater, Wis., who was like a son to A.J.; as well as numerous nieces, nephews, cousins and other extended family members, especially Marie, Audra, and Emily Pera and Joe Lerschen.

He was preceded in death by his father, Robert Kent. Last year, A.J. also lost his lifelong and dearest friend, Jim (Fonzie) Petroff.

Friends may call from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday at St. Mary & St. Joseph Catholic Church. Funeral services will be held at 6 p.m. at the church. Fr. Michael Woempner and Fr. Daniel Zaloga will offer the Mass of Christian Burial.

Burial will be in Cemetery Park.

The family asks that any donations be made to the Iron Mountain High School Student Activity Fund for sports camps. Donations can be sent to the Iron Mountain High School at 300 West B St.

Condolences to the family of A. J. Kent may be expressed online at www.ernashfuneralhomes.com.

The family has entrusted the Erickson-Rochon and Nash Funeral Home of Iron Mountain with the arrangements.

Tribute Wall

SK

“ Dear Mary LN and family,
So saddened to hear about A.J. I worked with both of you way back in 1985. I was a nurse tech on the 5th floor. (I was still in nursing school). I recall both of you beeing so nice to me and teaching me so much. I think I may have also been there on the ski hill when A.J. fell in love with you. I read about his passing and all that he did for the PA profession in one of my PA journals. After I finished nursing school and became a nurse I always felt there was something more I could do. I remembered working with him at the VA and decided to go the PA route. I am so glad I did. He was a true voice for our profession, but from the sounds of it an even better husband and father. My thoughts are with you and your family and I hope you can remember those times at Pine Mountain and Fontana with a smile and remember that he is looking down on you smiling too!!!
Sandy Kraemer Keeker PA-C

sandy kraemer-keeker - March 18, 2008 at 12:00 AM

SH

“ *Mary Ellen*

Although we never met you I feel like we know you. We were so sorry to read of AJ's Passing and we send our condolences. Peg and I were classmates with AJ in Alabama. Peg and I were married the day before graduation and we saw AJ several times over the years. I became less involved in the AAPA because of family and other "life commitments" and Iron Mountain is out of the way like Cooperstown is.

AJ was a great friend and we had many good times together.

Peg & I met at UAB and were avid skiers. Somehow we never got to the slopes with AJ & you.

Our sympathy to you and your family and may you know you were blessed to have AJ in your lives as we were.

Sincerely

Sam & Peg Hoskins

Fly Creek New York

Sam Hoskins - March 15, 2008 at 12:00 AM

NK

“ *Condolences from the entire Kiani family. You are in our thoughts and prayers, and we wish you strength during this difficult time.*

Naveed Kiani - February 20, 2008 at 12:00 AM

BO

“ *Mary Ellen and family So sorry to hear about AJ. He will be missed by all who knew him. Brian Oikarinen*

Brian Oikarinen - February 20, 2008 at 12:00 AM

MF

“ *Mary Ellen, Adam, and Laura,
Our deepest sympathy to your family. I met A.J. many years ago when he was married to my cousin. He was quiet back then. It wasn't until a few years ago when I got reacquainted with him up at the Triple P camp that I got to know the great man he was. Fonzie talked about him often. I'll never forget the candid conversation he had with my son Jake about girls. He will be missed but will live on in our memories!*

Mike Major & family - February 18, 2008 at 12:00 AM

TB

“ *Dear Mary Ellen and Family,

We were so saddened to hear of A.J.'s passing. He will surely be missed by our community. Our deepest sympathy to you and your family. Sincerely, Tom and Gloria Burlo*

Tom and Gloria Burlo - February 17, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JH

“ *To everyone who knew and loved A.J my friend and cousin. He was always a fun and gentle person with a heart like a soft flower and the strength of a warrior. I will continue to love him in spirit and thought for the rest of my life as I know many of you will also. He was a family man with an ability to make fun of any situation and keep it real most of the time.

We had so much fun growing up together along with Bobbie Jane and Jimmy. It seemed that we never got bored or ran out of adventures to live out on the canal road farm or the near by creek.
Much Love, Judy Villanelli Heintz*

Judy Heintz - February 16, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JM

“ A.J. is in a much better place and is resting with God. You will miss him, but rest assured that he is still with you. Jim Moore ex HM1/USN (VietNam 1966)

Jim Moore - February 16, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JS

“ A.J. Kent--A Man for All Seasons! And a man to emulate in all ways and always. We had a blast two years running at the Madison Football Camp. It was my good fortune that I was able to get to know A.J. on a personal level during these trips and came to know him not only as an excellent football referee but as a warm, compassionate, totally dedicated family man. I really grew to know him and admire him at the football camps. Do you know that every check he received from the Youth Football League games he donated right back to the organization? That's the kind of man he was--thinking of others, not himself. I am so much the richer for his befriending me. A life well-lived--an example for all!

Joe Sobel - February 15, 2008 at 12:00 AM

WW

“ Mary Ellen, Adam, Laura, and family,
There are no words to express my gratitude for the good fortune I had in having AJ attend me...and how he extended his friendship in the halls of the VA to me. He took the fear out of my being ill. Our last chat was when he met my Great Dane "The Duke" out in the parking lot. We discussed living each day as if it were our last...and I know he did this long before he became ill. I'm glad for the fact that you have so many beautiful memories to draw from...to give you strength at this time of sorrow. AJ was one wonderful and genuine human being. One I will never forget as I keep you all in my prayers. God Bless and keep you always. HE'LL see you through.

Wendy Welty - February 15, 2008 at 12:00 AM

“ America lost a hero today. A loving and devoted wife lost a loving and devoted husband. Two children lost the “world’s greatest father”. The profession lost one of its founding fathers. Many veteran patients lost a compassionate caregiver. God lost a soldier in his earthly army for goodness. This man was indeed an enigma: He was the toughest, yet gentlest soul I have ever met. He railed against injustice, yet paused to pick up a fallen fighter. He could become quiet and thoughtful, yet passionate beyond words. There is nobody who ever met him who could ever forget him. He was the bedrock upon which the VAPAA and PAs in the VA were built. He was a marine’s marine; retreat and withdraw were not in his vocabulary. He could be the first to take the high and mighty down a notch and yet the first to pick-up the down and out. He remembered and lived the adage: “never forget from whence you came.” He was so many things to so many people and he did every role like it was his ONLY job. Yet, he would always pause to pull someone slower along with him. He was a great man, yet he never cast a shadow because he was never full of himself. He could (and often did) on your behalf squeeze a penny until it turned into a dime. He could have been anything, gone anywhere, achieved any fame he sought; and yet he was humble and was happy to be our Treasurer and dedicated servant. As I have said, he was many things to many people (all of them good).

But, MOST OF ALL ? To me and I know to many of you, he was simply: BROTHER AND FRIEND!

The earthly world has lost a kind, gentle and loving spirit. The time we had with him was a blessing to us all and this world will be a much darker and lonelier place without him. But, I guess God needed somebody to help keep the books straight and he was called home. God’s Corps has gained a great spirit and while we grieve this loss of our loving friend, in his humble and so understated way he would simply say to us all: PEACE

We will (and already do) miss you our brother, but I for one am glad that God has him watching “the books”. Guess I’d better stay squeaky clean, because AJ won’t miss a penny (or heaven’s equivalent): The books will be right and we’d better be. Semper Fi,

AJ, you will live on in our hearts and our organization forever. Mary Ellen, Adam and Laura: Thank you so very much for sharing this great man with us. You will be in our thoughts and prayers.

WE LOVE YOU BROTHER!

John Fields, President, Veterans Affairs Physician Assistant As - February 15, 2008 at 12:00 AM

AL

“*Dear Mary Ellen, Adam and Laura, We were saddened with the news of A.J's death. Just know that all of you have been in our thoughts and prayers for a long time. He made a DIFFERENCE in the lives he touched at the VA. He will be REMEMBERED by many. Love and our prayers at this difficult time. Alice Lemieux and Susie Slining*

Alice Lemieux - February 15, 2008 at 12:00 AM

MW

“*Mary Ellen and Family:
I met A.J. back in 1975 when he moved to Crystal Falls to take a position at th VA. He needed a rental that would allow dogs. As we were about the same age and had similar interests we became casual friends and had some great times. He was a great cook and we enjoyed many fine meals and great conversations. When he moved to Iron Mountain we lost touch and from time to time I would see his name in the paper and always think of what a great person he was, caring and thoughtful with a sharp wit. I ran into A.J. several years ago and in a few minutes he told me what a great family he had. I hope you can find comfort in the fact that A.J. touched so many lives in a positive way.*

Mike Webb - February 15, 2008 at 12:00 AM

AB

“ Dear Mary Ellen,

We were saddened to hear of AJ's passing. AJ was truly an honorable, kind, thoughtful person.

AJ was one of the first people we met when we moved to Iron Mountain in July of 1986. AJ introduced us to others in Iron Mountain, and he made us feel welcome in the community.

We remember AJ's JOY and HAPPINESS when he married you, and when he became a father.

Take comfort in knowing that AJ's spirit will always be with you in your times of sorrow, and in your moments of joy.

Allan & Linda Basile, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Allan & Linda Basile - February 15, 2008 at 12:00 AM

GB

“ *Mary Ellen, Adam & Laura: Thank you for sharing A.J. with us. His love for his work and helping veterans will always live forever. I can still see the smile on his face and the love in his heart whenever he would talk about you and the kids. After Vietnam I could not have asked for a better friend. God will give you strength and peace, as he did for A.J. Keep the faith. Love, Gary & Mary*

Gary Bjorkquist - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JD

“*Mary Ellen, Adam and Laura: We were so sorry to hear about AJ. The four of you defined what a true family is all about. Your dedication to one another in the good times as well as the hard times is an inspiration to all. We are better for having known AJ. He embodied goodness and kindness.*

"Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you truly sing. And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb. And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance." KG

John and Brenda DeAmicis - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

TH

“*A.J. always made me feel good when ever i talked to him.I will miss bumping into him and having a spirited conversation. I feel he gave everyone the same feeling. You were truly blessed to have him in your life. He will be missed. God bless you and your family.*

Tim Hammill - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

SF

“*Dear Mary Ellen, Laura, Bobbie, Bob and David*

We are so sorry to hear of your loss and want you to know that AJ has very special memories to us. Wish we could be with you the next few days.

Love to you all.

Susie and Steve Fountain - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JW

“ *Mary Ellen, Adam, and Laura*
Words cannot express how I felt when hearing this. A.J. was one of the nicest guys I have ever met in my sixty years. Its been fourteen months since I was up there to see him, and I remember sitting on your deck, listening to him tell me how lucky he was to have you and how proud he was of the kids. We reminisced about trips downstate, snowplowing for beers, ski tournaments, etc. I will miss him, and I sincerely believe the world was a better place with A.J. in it. Wish I could be there Friday, but please know my prayers are with the three of you. Peace be with you always, John

John Wehrle - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JD

“ *Mary Ellen, Adam and Laura -- heartfelt sympathy in your loss of A.J. He has been an inspiration to us during his courageous long battle with cancer. We are especially grateful for everything A.J. has done for our sister Marie Pera and her family, Fonzie, Audra and Emily. Though the miles are long between our families, we had comfort in knowing that AJ and your family were there when and if she needed help. For that we are eternally grateful to AJ and to all of you as well. Our deepest sympathy - AJ was a great guy.*

Jim & Jan Dawson - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

KE

“ *Mary Ellen and Family: My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family. Sincerly, Karen @ Dr. B's office*

Karen Ellis - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

NP

“ Several years ago while working at SoundNorth my partner John and I had a day full of tv deliveries. Nothing that day went right. The last delivery of the day was to the family of A.J. Kent. We arrived hours late, tired, hungry and frustrated with the days events. A.J. met us at the door and instantly sensed our mood. He invited us in to relax a bit and enjoy pizza with the family. John and I got to know A.J. and the family a little bit over a slice of pizza and a beer. Although I met him just a few times at the store, his hospitality with his family that night is something I remember to this day. My prayers for a truly wonderful man and to his family. God Bless You.

Neal Peterson - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

GM

“ Dear Mary Ellen & Children: My sincere sympathy on the loss of your dear husband and father. I know he kept up the good fight and was valiant to the end. My thoughts and prayers are with you. I know he will be missed. Love, Gloria Mayra

Gloria Mayra - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

AC

“ Dearest Maryellen, Adam and Laura; It warms my heart when I think of AJ and how fortunate and blessed I was to have known such a unique, caring and wonderful man. I have fond memories of him as I picture him in the kitchen with his apron on preparing cioppino; or hanging out the sheets on my clotheslines. What a treasure; I can only smile as that is how I will always remember him. God bless you all and may he wrap his loving arms around you; love, Ann Marie

Ann Marie Champion - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

NK

“ Dear Laura, David, BobbyJane and family of AJ:

I am so sorry for your loss and the pain you are going through at this time. I know that your fond memories of AJ will help you through this. My thoughts and prayers are with you all. Love, Nancy

Nancy Klingbeil - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

BN

“ *Mary Ellen and Family...May the memories that you have kept in your heart wrap you in comfort and bring you to a special peace. Remember that God opens His heart and opens His arms. You are not alone...He is with you and so are we. ROMANS 8:28 May God Bless You and Keep You.*

Butch Neuens - February 14, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JW

“ *Dear Mary Ellen, Laura and Adam:*

We were truly saddened to hear of your loss. We were blessed to get to know A.J., your loving husband and father while our son, Sam was a student a DACS. You are in our thoughts and prayers and A.J., will always live on with fond memories in our hearts. John, Janette and Sam Ward

Janette P. Ward - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

CH

“ On behalf of all of his friends at up-football.com our condolences go out to his family and friends. He will certainly be missed, but never forgotten.

Football is not a contact sport, it is a collision sport!
Peace, AJ Kent

Chris - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JF

“ *Mary Ellen, Adam and Laura,*
My deepest sympathy to you. Sure am sorry for your loss.
Sincerely,
Jim Fornetti

Jim Fornetti - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

CR

“ *Mary Ellen, Adam, Laura: We cannot send enough sympathy to you and your entire family. Jim and I were admirers of AJ and will always feel blessed to have the privilege of knowing him. We love you and wish we could be there for you, however, we definitely WILL be there in spirit. We will make it a point to come see you this summer! Love you.....*

Cheryl & Jim Richard - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

DS

“ *Mary Ellen....I am so sorry for the tremendous grief that you and the kids are experiencing. I always admired the genuine, unconditional love that you and AJ shared, and I hope you are comforted by memories of the many wonderful years you had together. My prayers are with you and your family.*

Dana Stearns - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

PA

“*Mary Ellen, Adam and Laura, A.J. is finally at peace. Although it is touch for us left behind, he is no longer in pain and is free. A.J. was a great person and always made me feel welcome whenever I saw him. His memories will live in our hearts forever. You have my deepest sympathy.*

Patty

Patty Asselin - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JD

“*Mary Ellen, Adam and Laura,*
I am so sorry for your tremendous loss. A.J. was a great man and will truly be missed. I am very fortunate to have known him and been there on the ski slopes with the both of you in the late 80's and at your wedding at Pine Mountain. I remember the ski trips we had and the video's he would shoot skiing backwards down the hills. In particular, the video he took and set to the music of "I've had the time of my life" will always stay with me and is a fitting theme for him. Mary Ellen, I know how much AJ loved you and how much your love meant to him. Even though he had many difficult periods in his life, I know that with you and the kids in his life, he was a happy and blessed man.

You are all in my thoughts and prayers, God Bless.

John Driscoll - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

MP

“*Mary Ellen, Adam & Laura - Always remember the good times, nobody can take them away from you! A.J. has touched lives in more ways than words can express. We are all better off for his life and friendship. Thanks for sharing him with us!*

Mark & Peggy Pontti - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

LL

“ Dear Laura, Mary Ellen and family, I was so impressed by AJ's strength and courage during this battle. I've been a nurse for 35 years, and I have never seen such bravery and determination in the battle of cancer. I do know it was because of the love he had for his family. He is now at peace with Bob in a better place. I know my mom and dad would want to be there, but their health will not allow it right now. Our Love to everyone. Linda

Linda Letto - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

CG

“ Dear Mary Ellen and Family, I was so sorry to hear about AJ. We are in Arizona and unable to attend the funeral. We were privileged to know AJ and will be eternally grateful to this wonderful man and care provider. My deepest and most sincere condolences to all of you.

Cynthia Gordon - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

JG

“ Mary Ellen, Adam & Laura - You are all in our thoughts and prayers. A.J. will be missed very much. He was such an influence to the boys on the football team and I know they will miss him. May God give you peace and strength. All our love - Jenni Giguere, Gibbs, Jessica Fohn

Jenni Giguere - February 13, 2008 at 12:00 AM

CW

“ *My sincerest sympathy to your family. I know that words are quite inadequate at a time of loss like this, but my prayers are with you. A.J. will always live on through you. You will always feel his presence and love.
I am here for you at any time.
Love to you all.
Cheryl*

Cheryl Wender - February 12, 2008 at 12:00 AM

CB

“ *Mary Ellen and sons:
My heart cries for you. A.J. is in a better place and he is with joy and peace.
My prayer for you is for peace and comfort to your hearts. Give yourselves to God and He will give you the strength and courage that you need.
God bless and keep you.*

Christine Burns - February 12, 2008 at 12:00 AM