

News and views that inform, inspire, and connect the Drummond Island and De Tour Village communities and points west.

A HERO'S TRAGEDY

What Made an Island Cry

By Julie Covert

"911 – what is your emergency?"

Fire...

House fire...

Johnswood Road...

...two people trapped...

Sunday, December 9th, around 10 PM the tranquil life of our small remote island community was shattered. The week that followed was painfully mournful.

"I walked out my back door to have a smoke Monday morning," one resident said, "and the quiet that lay over the Island was like that which I had never experienced before. It was almost spiritual."

"It was about 8 a.m. I went into town on a quick errand," he continued choking back tears, "and that's when I heard the news."

Like wild fire – by word, phone, email, and Facebook – the news spread quickly: Kyle Messenger and his son Ethan died last night in a house fire.

Show me a hero and I'll write you a tragedy. - F. Scott Fitzgerald

"Go get help!" Kyle shouted to his partner Morgan Harsin, as he got her and their infant son Ashton out of the house.

When she was safely out he turned around and went back in.

Five year old Ethan was still inside, upstairs.

They never made it out.



Ethan and Kyle Messenger.
Photo courtesy of the Messenger Family

The waters surrounding Drummond Island, MI have risen in the last week from all the tears that have been shed. With a population of just over 1,000 we're a tight-knit community. Across the St Mary's River in in DeTour Village, where Drummond kids go to school, we have 800 more close friends and family.

I didn't know Kyle or Ethan. I don't know Morgan, Ashton, or Kyle's siblings Somer and Kim; my husband and I are casual friends with Kyle's mother Donna and father Kim Messenger. We had both seen Kyle in the grocery or hardware store, or waved to him on the road. Here on Drummond we give a two-finger wave to everyone, whether or not they are a close friend; it's an Island-thing. It is part

of what creates a bond amongst all of us. It's what helps hold us together in terrible times like the week of December 9th.

I will be the first to admit that I cry at the drop of hat at anything happy or sad, but the way the tears have poured and heartache has gripped me this past week has been difficult to fathom. Yes, two people are dead; two innocent people, but I didn't even "know" them, so why am I unable to stop thinking about their deaths?

Why do I cry when I see the amount of money being donated through [GoFundMe.com/MessengerFamily](https://www.gofundme.com/MessengerFamily) and at the DeTour Drummond Community Credit Union continue to leap by the thousands of dollars? Why do I cry when I read the Facebook post from the Newberry Basketball Teams that they asked their athletes and fans to take part in the fundraising for the Messengers at their next game against DeTour? Why do I tear up when Pickford Public Schools has a "hat day" for the kids where a donation is made to the Messenger Family for each child wearing a hat?

And it's not just me who has tears welling up. Everyone I encountered this past week was choking them back. Yes we're a community where everyone knows everyone's business, good or bad. We are all happy to help the family in any way that we can. Donations of food and clothing and household items are pouring in, even from strangers from downstate. But there's more that has happened than just wanting to help a family through a very tragic time.

No cause justifies the deaths of innocent people.
- Albert Camus

We've had tragedies on the Island; we're no stranger to them. When it hits, it hits close to home, extremely close to home. Houses and workshops have burnt down; there have been car, ATV, snowmobile, and hunting accidents, and friends have struggled through the cruelty of cancer and debilitating diseases. Some have recovered and others have unfortunately lost their lives. What has happened to us by Kyle's and Ethan's deaths is deeper than just the sadness of the passing of a loved one.

Kyle and Ethan were not murdered in cold blood, so there is no perpetrator to blame and take our frustrations, anger and bitterness out upon. There is no manhunt to quell our unrest by rightful action of a search.

It was not an accident where we could say "If only they had been more careful." They weren't hit by a logging truck or swerved to avoid a deer, for us to enact laws or cull the deer herd.

The house didn't explode from a propane leak for us to then say "Oh, yes, I have to make sure I have a smoke and propane detector with working batteries."

They were not lost in a blinding snow storm with hopes that they will be found.

This is not the situation of their death coming after a long illness, where there was time to say goodbye. Nor is this a case where a loved one could vow to find a cure for a dreaded disease.

There is nothing for us to do to soothe the pain of their deaths; there is no balm for the heartbreak, except love and time. Nothing to do except being willing to be a part of the community and give from our hearts, which weaves the fabric of our lives tighter together. Then in these times of tragedy, as we are doing now, we can wrap those deeply effected with that community blanket to provide heart-felt warmth and protection.

Yet this still does not explain why Kyle's and Ethan's deaths have affected us so deeply.

There is the "that could have been me and my house" that many of us have had cross our minds. Sure we have a great volunteer fire department, but it takes time for the volunteers to get to the firehouse and then more time for them to get to

us. As many of us live a good distance away from the firehouse we've had to reconcile ourselves to the fact that if there is a fire, hopefully our own efforts with fire extinguishers and garden hoses with either put it out or all will be up in smoke by the time they get there.

But there's something more to this tragedy that has made its way into our souls.

A hero is a man who does what he can.
- Romain Rolland

One person said "Kyle was a good guy - always up-beat & funny. He was kind of a wild one. I never knew him to be grumpy or have a frown. He was always smiling." The pictures that loved ones have posted on Facebook show the same thing - always a huge smile.

He was also a very loving father. And for that reason he turned right around and went back into the blazing house to rescue his son.

Who knows what went through his mind that night when he realized that Ethan was in danger? None of us will ever know. He went back in with no regard for his own safety.

There was no time to press the pause button and rewind the video of the scene and consider tactics. He didn't wait for the firemen to show up in their turnout gear and air tanks. He just did it - he tried to get his son out at all costs.

What he did, running into a burning building to rescue his son, brings up a question that has needled its way into our souls - "Could I have done that? Could I have been that brave?"

A gut reaction, an instinct stronger than the cellular ties that bind a parent to a child - is that what drove Kyle to go? Probably, but we'll never exactly know.

"Would I be able to do that?" We are now asking ourselves this question in the comfort of our own homes. Curled up in the safety of the arms of our loved ones, we ponder the ramifications of an act so brash, so primal, so spontaneous that we can only answer with "I hope I could do that."

And in that moment realizing that truly we don't know what our own reaction would be in the same circumstances, part of us hurts deeply because we know the truth that either action we'd take could be tragic.

Kyle didn't stop and think about leaving a life partner and infant son behind, he just did what he had to do - rescue his son.

And that is what has made Kyle Messenger a hero, to our community and to parents all across the country.

A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is brave five minutes longer. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Donna and Kim Messenger lost a son and grandson, Somer

and Kim lost a brother and nephew, Morgan lost her beloved and her son, and Ashton lost his father and brother. Many friends and family lost two wonderful people in their lives. I wish for all of them that one day will come that their memories of Kyle and Ethan are able to be remembered without tears pouring down their faces. And my special hope for Ashton is that whomever steps into the role of father for him is able to do him the justice that he deserves.

Despite Kyle's heroic actions a tragedy occurred. The events of Sunday, December 9th have caused this already close-knit community to become even tighter, and in gaining a hero we've become stronger and better.

*Through action, a Man becomes a Hero
Through death, a Hero becomes a Legend
Through time, a Legend becomes a Myth
And by learning from the Myth, a Man takes action.*

- Author unknown

Ethan and Kyle Messenger

Kyle Ray Messenger and his young son, Ethan Ray Messenger, of Drummond Island, Michigan, died together in a fire in their home on December 9, 2018. Kyle was born May 24, 1988, in Howell, Michigan, and Ethan was born February 15, 2013, in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

Kyle's family moved to Drummond Island when he was a toddler. He attended DeTour schools where he was very outgoing and had fun with his many friends. After high school he attended NCCER (heavy equipment trade school) in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He worked for several companies installing 300' tall wind turbines. He and his girlfriend, Morgan, lived like gypsies working together in Texas, Colorado, Idaho, North Carolina, Nebraska, and Oregon, before settling on Drummond Island with their young sons. On Drummond, he has been working for Drummond Island. He was a super great Daddy.

Ethan was attending Kindergarten at Drummond Island Elementary School. He loved playing with his brother, Ashton, and was interested in American Ninja Warriors. He could swim like a fish and loved being outdoors. Lego's were a favorite inside activity and he loved going to school. Ethan had pet ducks, Lucky and Ducky, and a cat named George. He was a precious child with a kind caring heart.

Kyle and Ethan are survived by Kyle's girlfriend and Ethan's

mother, Morgan Ashley Harsin; Kyle's son and Ethan's brother, Ashton Messenger; Kyle's parents, Kim Henry Messenger and Donna Jean (Reed) Messenger, both of Drummond Island; Kyle's sister, Somer (Paul) Batman of Drummond Island; brother, Kim Henry Messenger II of Drummond Island; nephew, Rylan Batman; grandmother, Norma Whitmore of Drummond; and uncle, Darryl Reed of Decatur, Michigan. Ethan is also survived by his aunt, Megan Harsin of Seattle, Washington; and his grandfather, Russell George Harsin of Tampa, Florida.



A Memorial Service was held Friday, December 14, at R. Galer Funeral Home, Pickford, Michigan with Pastor Scott Danforth conducting the service.

Memorial contributions may be directed to the Messenger Family, 32544 S. Bobby Drive, Drummond Island, MI 49726.

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