**Covid 19 loss support for family and friends**

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On April 14 th , Pakistani-American Sabila Khan lost her father to Covid-19. In trying to cope with such traumatic events and affected by grief, by April 17 th , she started a Facebook group called Covid-19 Loss Support for Family and Friends. A tribute to the lives lost to this virus as well as a wonderful support space for those left behind and struggling to cope with Covid loss.

Mr. Shafqat Khan, her father, was a community activist, philanthropist, and social entrepreneur in Jersey City, NJ where they lived. He was a very well-known figure in the Pakistani American community in New Jersey. He contracted Covid-19 while receiving physical therapy in a rehab facility there and died a week later. Although Mr. Khan spent the final week of his life in a hospital only three blocks away from his wife, daughter, and her family, they were unable to be with him due to the lockdown in New Jersey at the time. His burial, which took place the next day, was livestreamed for the family. Due to the pandemic, the Khan family was unable to honor their father in the customary ways—they couldn’t be with each other, let alone their extended family and friends. Needless to say, this experience was a deeply traumatizing one for Sabila. Desperate to talk to others who were going through the unique challenges of Covid loss, Sabila searched for a Covid loss support group on Facebook and was unable to find one. Two hours later, she came across a woman named Angelina Proia on a Covid resource page on Facebook. Having lost her father the previous day, Angelina was also looking for a support group for Covid families. Sabila informed Angelina that such a group did not exist and asked her if she wanted to create this space together. Within hours, Covid-19 Loss Support for Family and Friends was born.

Today, the group has grown in thousands. Sabila and Angelina are joined by a third admin—Brian Walter, who also lost his father to the virus. It has become a beautiful space for members to support each other as they themselves face the prolonged and complicated grief that comes from losing a loved one to Covid. Like Sabila, many members of this community were unable to be with their loved ones in the hospital. Funerals were postponed indefinitely. In one instance, loved ones had to watch the burial of their family matriarch from the other side of the cemetery gates. As some people in the group put it, this is the community that nobody voluntarily wanted to be part of, but it is so needed. The group has become an incredibly tightly- knit community, finding strength in supporting one another. The rules of the group are simple- no politics or minimizing the grief of others. One can vent their emotions as there are different stages of grief and each one can understand the pain of the other. They are all in the same situation having lost loved ones going through the motions of loss and pain and the agony of not having to be able to do anything about it. The whole purpose of the group is to join together in support.

Additionally, admins share with the group a carefully curated list of mental health resources, media, and memorial opportunities—all tools that will, hopefully, provide healing through this grief.

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They have cried together, spoken out, raged, ranted, comforted each other, networked, and shared how they feel, bringing them closer as a community each day. Sabila’s father was a well-admired gentleman.

I was very blessed to have not only met him but spent some time with his family several years ago whilst working in New York. He would connect with people easily, often offering words of advice, help and even physical assistance. From business, to real estate or even small day to day issues, he was always ready to share his knowledge and resources for the benefit of others. He was a central figure the community could reach out to at any point. This is one thing that many will remember him for. Over the decades he built up his community of people and was the founder of Pakistanis for America (PFA), a non-profit organization that focused on increasing Pakistani participation in local and national elections in the US. PFA created a link from the Pakistani immigrant community, as a means of assistance, by connecting them to the greater community of Americans, bringing two worlds together in a very unique manner.

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COVID-19 is not going away anytime soon. People have started to get confident and many have stopped taking the precautions that have been recommended. This has turned out to be a vicious circle for those who are wanting to stay safe and protect not only themselves but also their loved ones. The divide in thought processes has divided the world in the way of thinking and possibly for decades to come. Only people who have either survived through Covid-19 or have lost loved ones can truly understand the anguish of the situation.

The vaccines which are now being administered as we speak, bring us hope and good news all around. There are many across the world praying that each of us gets this available to us as we have families that we want safe. In Pakistan, they will not be available for at least the first quarter of the year till after March 2021- or even later. There are millions of people who are not privileged enough to stay inside or work from home, especially in developing countries such as ours. However, we must be in the same line of thinking that when we take precautions, we are doing this not only for ourselves but for the safety of others as well. It is plainly human connectivity and growth as a community which will bring us together in collective thinking. May we become more empathetic and considerate of the worlds situation and for others to live in.

*The writer is known for her articles on cultural impact.*