

Twenty-Six Eulogies for Victims of Covid

On March 14th, 2021, Zen Mountain Monastery held a memorial service marking a year since the beginning of the shutdown, the official start of the pandemic. At that point, Covid-19 had claimed 2.6 million lives around the world. One aspect of the memorial was the reading of eulogies for 26 of the dead; people we identified through various news sources and, in some cases, word of mouth. Here, briefly, are their stories.

Liu Shouxiang died of the coronavirus on **Feb. 13, 2020** in Wuhan, at the age of 61. Mr. Liu studied and went on to teach at the Hubei Institute of Fine Arts, where he helped establish a watercolor major, and eventually, a stand-alone department dedicated to the medium. Though widely respected by colleagues, he didn't seek a reputation for his work, fearing it wasn't good enough to put on display. Regardless, the Wuhan Art Museum gave him a solo show—his first—in 2019, just months before the pandemic began. A close friend of his, Wang Chenghao, said that Liu Shouxiang's paintings "still had not met his own high requirements."

Manu Dibango was born in Cameroon but lived most of his life in France. Although Mr. Dibanjo started training in classical piano at 15, he was drawn to jazz, and began playing saxophone in his 20s. Ten years later, he was the frontman of his own band in Paris. Mr. Dibanjo's prolific musical output ranged from jazz to reggae, pop, and hip-hop. He is best known for the single "Soul Makossa," which became immensely popular at the start of the disco era. Mr. Dibanjo died of COVID-19 at the age of 86 in Paris on March 24.

Karla Lake, of Brisbane, Australia, developed her first symptoms while on the Ruby Princess cruise ship. She and her husband Graeme had already been on more than 20 cruises together, but this trip was a special one — to celebrate Mrs Lake's 75th birthday. She had Parkinson's disease and arthritis and enjoyed the relaxing nature of cruise ship holidays. "Karla was the most beautiful and easiest-going wife a man could ever have," Mr. Lake said. "I don't think we ever argued, because she wouldn't argue." Hundreds of passengers contracted COVID-19 while aboard the Ruby Princess. At one point, 10 per cent of all cases in Australia were linked to the ship which carried over 2600 passengers and crew. Karla Lake died on **March 29th, 2020**, two weeks after her first symptoms appeared.

Adela Cassinello Plaza, an architect in Madrid, passed away from Covid complications on **March 30, 2020** at the age of 62. Her sons Fernando and César posted online, “We will always remember you as the best mother a child can have: joyful, loving, intelligent, hard-working... and a fighter until the last moment. ‘Do anything to the best of your ability,’ you would tell us. We, and Dad, will do nothing but love you and remember you knowing that we were immensely privileged to have you by our side. *Hasta siempre, mamá.*”

Stuart Cohen, a Navy veteran, passed away from COVID-19 complications on **April 8th**, at Coney Island Hospital in NYC, at the age of 73. Stuart was a lifelong New Yorker and for the past 25 years worked as a cab driver. A practicing Buddhist, Stuart was an avid reader and loved to collect books that were being thrown away and redistribute them to places with empty bookshelves, like nursing homes. Stuart’s friend said he “was the best-read person I’d ever known.”

Alan Fitchett died of COVID-19 on **April 10, 2020**, in London, at the age of 65. A beloved father of five, Alan was a dedicated teacher of Electrical Engineering for 30 years. He became ill three weeks before the nationwide lockdown. One of his daughters said, “He was a very dedicated and diligent teacher, devoted to both his children and grandchildren.” He passed away just two months shy of his retirement and the birth of his fourth grandchild.

As a young adult, **Kishen Bholasing** immigrated to the Netherlands from his native Suriname but he continued to call both places home. He came from a musical family. Both his parents and an aunt had all made a name for themselves in baithak-gana, the hybrid folk music of Suriname. Kishen played the dholak, a two-headed hand drum and himself became known as one of the best interpreters of baithak-gana working today. He died at the Academic Medical Center in Amsterdam on April 12th from the effects Covid-19. Bholasing was 35 years old and left behind a wife and two children.

"An immense and unbridgeable void." Such is how a colleague described the early death of **Dr. Luciano Abruzzi**, who had been intubated for a month at the Poli-Clinic of Milan before losing his battle with Covid on **April 19, 2020**. The 58-year-old neurologist, esteemed and loved by patients and their families, was one of the leading Parkinsons specialists in the city of Cremona, Italy, and helped educate a new generation of neurologists. The president of one association to which he belonged said: "He was one of us, always available, friendly, and always ready to smile at you."

Pat McManus also died of Covid-19 on **April 19th**. An Irish nurse working in Stoke-on-Trent, England, Pat was offered a safer managerial position when the pandemic began, but insisted on being a frontline worker despite being at significantly higher risk due to multiple sclerosis. Pat was also a union leader. As the hearse carried his remains to the crematorium, the staff of Stafford Hospital stood outside to applaud. Pat is survived by three sons and five grandchildren.

In South Africa, another nurse, **Petronella Benjamin**, became the Western Cape's first health worker to succumb to COVID-19 when she passed away on **April 29th**. The next day, she'd been due to retire from the Cape Town Reproductive Clinic after a 40 year career in health care. She is survived by her husband, their three sons, a daughter, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She was 62 years old.

Hanjorg Weigel was a devoted Christian whose obligatory duty in the East German defence forces at the height of the cold war convinced him of the need to oppose militarism. In 1973, he co-founded the Königswalde Peace Seminar in the small farming village where he lived, not far from the Czech border. The participants came from all over the country: workers and university employees, artisans, nurses, even some who travelled from the West. In 1980, under suspicion from the state, Mr. Weigel was arrested by the Stasi police, interrogated for two days and given a "lenient" 18 month prison sentence. With pressure from the church, he was released after two months and returned to organizing the seminar which has continued to the present times, taking up issues of environmentalism and industrialization, among others. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, he learned that 47 Stasi informers had been assigned to him. Also many from the peace seminar itself. A prison guard and an interrogator came to apologize. A family friend said he was blackmailed. Weigel forgave them all. He died on **April 29th**, from the novel coronavirus, at the age of 77.

Yulia Yasyulevich, a devoted nurse, passed away from COVID-19 complications on **May 1st**, at the age of 54, in St. Petersburg, Russia. Yulia had a passion for helping others and before becoming a nurse was an athletics coach. When Yulia began to show symptoms, half the hospital she worked at had already been infected. After being transferred to an intensive care unit she was starting to get better, but the day after her fever broke she passed away. She is survived by her loving husband and a daughter.

Mary Jeannette Wilson died of COVID-19 on **May 25** at a hospital in Randallstown, Maryland. In 1961, Mary became the first African-American senior zookeeper at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore. From a young age she'd had a love for animals, especially primates and elephants. She pursued a career working with large animals after only attaining a high school degree. Colleagues remember her as being one of the most skilled animal handlers and trainers they'd ever seen. Mary is survived by her loving daughter and a grandson. She was 83.

Tania Dinile (Dee-knee-lei) died on July 9th after being infected with the Coronavirus. For a number of years she had been a field worker for the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation, encouraging adolescent girls to seek sexual health care at a clinic in the Gugulethu Township of Cape Town, South Africa. A colleague described her as "kind, welcoming, compassionate, humble, dedicated, and hilarious—she had a sparkly glint in her eye, a body designed to laugh, and was simply a joy to be around." At 49, she left behind her husband, two daughters and a son.

Margaret Waterchief of the Siksika/Piikni Nation died from COVID-19 complications on **July 19, 2020** in Alberta, Canada, at the age of 88. Margaret was a Blackfoot elder *and* Anglican priest. After the death of her husband in 1976 she became actively involved in the Church and was later ordained as a Deacon. Margaret was also an activist for her community and was instrumental in starting many initiatives in Siksika to help her people, such as starting the first day care center on the reservation. She is survived by her beloved 10 children and many grandchildren.

Saab Erekat died of COVID-19 in Jerusalem on **November 10**, at the age of 65. Erekat, who lived in Jericho, represented Palestinians in peace talks with Israel for several decades, playing a key role in the Oslo Accords and the Camp David summit. Erekat called for dialogue between Palestinian and Israeli academics, and stirred up controversy by inviting Israeli students to attend his lectures at al-Najah University in the West Bank. His aim was for Palestinians, he said, was to "use the civilized means of international law to achieve our goals, our independence, our freedom."

Aparna Bhattacharya, was the youngest daughter in her family and therefore, as her sister wrote in an online tribute, “she has been the most loved one amongst us all. Nonetheless, she proved to be the most mature with rational gestures and a philanthropic attitude.”

Married, and survived by a daughter of her own, Mrs. Bhattacharya was known by those close to her as a gifted singer and an outstanding cook. She loved cricket, spiritual conversations, and her friends. She passed away due to Covid on **November 15**, in New Delhi, at the age of 50, just a couple of days prior to Kali Puja. Her sister Reba added, “I feel her presence in every moment now and in all that I do. She is an extension and will forever reside within me.”

Martha Madrigal, of Mexico City, who passed away from Covid on **November 19th, 2020**, started writing short stories when she was young but that was not what gained her notoriety. Following the early death of her husband, grieving and with children to raise, she discovered haiku to be her most convenient and suitable means of expression. She went on to author 6 books including an anthology, *Conclave of Signs*, which was published earlier in the year. One publisher that worked with her said Madrigal's poetry "is the living memory of what we were, but also what we continue to be as a culture of words." One of her haiku, singled out by an international committee that certified her as a master of the form reads as follows:

Mariposas dormidas / fingen sobre la tapia, / las buganvillas.

Sleeping butterflies / pretending over the wall / the bougainvillas. She was 91.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, on December 6, 2017, **Honestie Hodges**, then eleven years old was handcuffed at gunpoint by the police while they were searching for a murder suspect. The body cam footage of her arrest gained nationwide coverage and led to the Grand Rapids Police Department enacting a new protocol, nicknamed the “Honestie Policy,” for interacting with minors. As an activist, she continued to advocate for police reforms across the country through last summer. Honestie Hodges died of [COVID-19](#) on **November 22, 2020** at the age of 14.

Bassam Saba died of COVID-19 on **Dec. 4, 2020** in Beirut, Lebanon, at the age of 62. Bassam, the director of the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music, trained in both Western and Arabic music, and played the violin, various flutes, and the oud. To share his love of Arabic music, Bassam helped start the New York Arabic Orchestra and performed with Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. Bassam's final performance on October 17th helped raise money to restore the conservatory, which was damaged by an explosion in August.

Lidia Menapace died of COVID-19 on **December 7** in Bolzano, Italy, at the age of 96. Lidia, who grew up under Mussolini's regime, joined the anti-fascist resistance at age 19, helping Jewish refugees flee to Switzerland, passing secret messages to political prisoners, and even storing bombs in her family's basement. She refused to let women's contributions to the Resistance be overlooked, and went on to fight for the legalization of abortion and divorce in Italy as a member of the Italian senate. Lidia, a staunch feminist in all aspects of her life, refused to cook for her husband, Nene, unless he did the grocery shopping.

Jose Garcia died of coronavirus-related complications on **Dec. 15th** in New Mexico, at the age of 68. His daughter, a nurse, was the only family member who was able to visit him during the six weeks he was hospitalized. Jose worked at Cervantes Enterprises, a chile processing plant, for more than 50 years, carefully saving up to buy an acre of land and build a house large enough for his wife and nine children. Jose is survived by 28 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Patty Sakal died of coronavirus-related complications on **January 15, 2021**, in Alvarado Medical Center in San Diego. Patty, a child of two deaf parents, worked as a sign-language interpreter whose knowledge of Hawaiian as well as American sign language made her an invaluable asset to the deaf community in her native Hawaii. She repeatedly risked exposure to COVID-19 in order to translate pandemic-related news briefings for the deaf community. Patty was an artist as well as an interpreter: she wrote poetry, painted, sang, and taught herself to play the guitar and drums.

Shuei Mochizuki passed away from COVID on **January 18th**, at the age of 66. Shuei was a Shingon Buddhist priest who was known for practicing takuhatsu on regular alms rounds in Tokyo's busy, upscale Ginza district. He was known to many for his chanting of the heart sutra and his willingness to listen to the troubles of others. Becoming a monk was a midlife change for Shuei-san. He previously lived in New York City for 20 years and had a background in environmental studies. A makeshift memorial was created at the site where he was found often chanting and speaking with strangers.

Dr. Adriana Morais Carvalho died **January 27th** at São Vicente Hospital, in Guarapuava, where she had been admitted to the Covid Intensive Care Unit a few days prior. Born in a small, historic village several hours north of Sao Paulo, Dr. Carvalho went on to get a medical degree and pharmacy degree before joining the staff at Santa Casa de Irati Hospital as well as the Department of Health for the city of Rebouças. Her hospital's administration issued a note of regret for the death of its doctor. "Once again Covid-19 wins and makes our team sad... Through her work we know the meaning of true dedication and friendship, which she offered to our institution and to the community... May Dr. Adriana be welcomed with much peace in her new home," says the note. "After all, death is not the end, but the beginning of a new life, lighter and closer to our Father." She would have turned 37 years old on February 21 of this year.

Franklin Miller, my uncle Frank, passed away from Covid-19 complications on January 15, 2021 in Phillipsburg, NJ. I remember him from the many family picnics we held. He was always available for a great story. His favorite hobby was working on cars. He loved his family, grandkids, and great grandchildren. To my aunt Jane, and cousins Janine and Tink (Who is in the hospital now battling Covid) my heartfelt condolences. (Read by Pam Jinshin Dragotta)

Luis Fernando Arias died of a coronavirus-related heart attack on **February 13th** in Barranquilla, Columbia, at the age of 41. A member of the Kankuamo people, Luis studied law and became an activist on behalf of Indigenous rights, but was forced to end his studies when paramilitary violence forced him to flee. Luis became senior advisor to the National Indigenous Organization of Columbia, where he spoke on behalf of Indigenous communities at congressional hearings, peace negotiations, and protests. A co-founder of the N.I.O., says Luis left behind "memories of strength and bravery."

They called him "the ferryman of memory." **Lucien Gourang** was a writer, singer, and storyteller, an update on the French medieval *jongleur*, carrying oral history on his wide shoulders. He spent more than 40 years travelling across France and the Francophone world, performing stories and songs. He even founded a storytelling festival. His passions included Breton culture as well as Asian stories and songs documented by sailors in the 19th century. On the 15th of February 2021, Lucien Gourang died of COVID-19, during the pandemic in France, at the age of 77.