

## South Jersey families lost their share of loved ones to COVID-19

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[Link to story on \*The Press\* website](#)

Robert “Swami” Browne called his sister from the hospital, saying he had a bad cold, although the doctors said it was something called “the COVID.”

“I’ll be home soon,” he said.

The siblings never talked again — not really. Yes, Burton would have the chance to say, “I love you,” to Browne, but she would say it during a videoconference. And by that time, her brother was not very responsive.

“I had never seen anyone on a ventilator,” Burton recalled. “And all the nurses and doctors had suits on as if they were in space. I had never seen anything like that.”

Browne died May 2, at 76. His story flows in a river of told and untold tales whose source is a worldwide pandemic. A few can be glimpsed on the website *Loved and Lost*, “a statewide media collaboration with a goal of naming and celebrating the life of every New Jersey resident lost to COVID.” The project is led by [NewJersey.com](#) and the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University.

As of Christmas Day, the website had 883 names, including 28 from Atlantic, 13 from Cape May, four from Cumberland and 49 from Ocean counties. Statewide, as of Friday, there had been 16,650 confirmed COVID deaths, with another 1,945 considered probable COVID deaths, according to New Jersey Department of Health’s COVID-19 data dashboard.

Of those local residents listed on *Loved and Lost*, the oldest was June Rosenthal, at 101.

The Linwood resident died March 23 at Shore Medical Center in Somers Point, where she had been admitted due to deteriorating health. Her advanced age made her vulnerable to the viruses often contracted in institutional settings, said daughter Carol Rowe, of Marmora.

“Nobody had ever tested her for COVID,” said Rowe. “But she was 101. She could not have handled anything.”

Rosenthal’s life began in 1918, the year of the Spanish flu epidemic. A former labor and delivery nurse, she outlived her parents, her husband, her siblings and two of her children.

Among the youngest local victims, as identified by *Loved and Lost*, was 48-year old Erick Whitaker, of Bridgeton, who died Dec. 4. He had

been employed at the South Woods State Prison as a senior correctional officer. He might well have been among the countless who've contracted COVID-19 in institutional settings.

The youngest identified by Loved and Lost was James Joshua Dwyer, 47. He died after years of physical challenges stemming from a brain tumor in his late teens. His next-of-kin was the real estate developer James Dwyer, who by his own estimate once owned "half of Ocean City."

During two summers in the 1990s, Josh Dwyer was a lifeguard for the Wildwood Beach Patrol. After the tumor, he stayed with the WPB for four seasons, working as an administrative assistant, said retired lifeguard captain John McCann, of Ocean City.

Dwyer went to work for his father, James Dwyer, who one day would be Josh's full-time caregiver and roommate. But long before the two men came to live together, the Dwyer real estate business met a dark end. In 2003, the elder Dwyer was charged with bank fraud. Rejecting a plea deal — to his regret, he said recently — he was convicted and served seven years in federal prison.

"As soon as I got out, I decided Josh would be on my right hip," said Dwyer. "And he was." He devoted himself to his son's care.

Eventually, father and son entered the era of COVID. Earlier this year — "the worst year of my life," James Dwyer said — the father broke his ankle. It happened when Josh Dwyer's wheelchair caught onto the doorway of an elevator. Josh and the wheelchair toppled onto the father's ankle. During James Dwyer's recovery, his son, unable to care for himself, lived at the Linwood Care Center. He caught the virus there, James Dwyer said.

"If I hadn't broken my ankle, Josh would be alive today," Dwyer said.

Other survivors related their own tales of caring, hardship, and love:

Ronald Frech Jr., of Villas, recalled how his father woke up in the middle of the night and mistook their kitchen for the bathroom — the virus had made him delusional. Ronald Frech Sr. died April 20, at age 83.

Patrick Galloway noted the wear-and-tear on three separate vehicles, not to mention gas money, from driving back and forth between his Upper Township home to his mother's in Cape May City, over the course of seven years, to care for the aged parent.

He eventually had to place her in a facility, for what would be a 43-day visit. Dolores Galloway died from COVID-19 on April 20, at age 89. A former novitiate and a retired longtime teacher in parochial and public schools, she "went out on a train of prayers," courtesy of her Catholic nun friends, Galloway said.

John N. D'Angelo remembered himself as a small boy, sitting atop his dad's piano at the 500 Club, watching Frank Sinatra rehearse. The father was renowned nightclub pianist and composer John R. D'Angelo, who died Dec. 7, age 83.

Ronald Frech Jr. remembered haunting local diners with his father. "We ate out every night," he said. "We really went through it (money)."

Separated in age only by 17 years, the two men were "more like brothers than father and son," Frech said.

Al Jeremiah posted videos and pictures on his Facebook page in tribute to his brother, rhythm and blues recording artist Kenny Jeremiah. As the Jeremiah Brothers, they would perform locally.

Kenny, a resident of Northfield in later years, was a founding member of the Philadelphia-based Soul Survivors. The group recorded "Expressway to Your Heart," which hit No. 4 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in 1967.

Kenny Jeremiah's own Facebook page contains a posting from Nov. 7, in which he announced being "Honored & Humbled" to receive an award from RowHome, a Philadelphia lifestyle magazine. On Dec. 3, at the age of 77, he died from COVID-19 complications.