

Marc Lewitinn, Covid Patient, Dies at 76 After 850 Days on a Ventilator

[nytimes.com/2022/09/09/health/marc-lewitinn-dead.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/09/health/marc-lewitinn-dead.html)

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As the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the country in March 2020, the family of Marc Lewitinn, their 74-year-old patriarch, urged him to stay indoors. He had survived lung cancer and a stroke that left him unable to speak, and doctors were already warning that older people with his sort of medical history were especially vulnerable to the virus.

He complied, more or less. But he soon felt cooped up, and one day he ventured into a crowded Starbucks near his home in Cliffside Park, N.J. By March 25, he was feeling lethargic. A pulse oximeter showed his blood oxygen level at just 85 percent.

His son Albert, a TV producer, took him to the emergency room at Weill Cornell Medicine in Manhattan. The hospital was inundated with patients and doctors in hazmat suits, and it took hours for someone to see him. He tested positive for Covid that night. Six days later, with his oxygen level falling further, doctors decided to intubate him — in which a breathing tube is inserted through the mouth or nose down into the trachea, or windpipe — and induce a coma.

They told the Lewitinn family that Marc, a retired Manhattan shopkeeper, would likely die within a few days. In the early months of the pandemic especially, the survival rate for intubated Covid patients was about 50 percent, and that included people who were younger

and healthier than Mr. Lewitinn.

“They stepped outside with the iPad to ask us if we wanted to just give him morphine and let him pass away naturally,” Albert Lewitinn said in an email. “On a group FaceTime, we urged my father to fight. We didn’t say goodbye. We said, ‘Keep fighting, Dad, you’re going to be fine.’”

Mr. Lewitinn stabilized and recovered from Covid, but he remained too weakened to come off the ventilator. After six months he was brought out of his coma and eventually moved to another hospital, closer to his New Jersey home.

After 850 days on the ventilator, Mr. Lewitinn died of a heart attack on July 23 at Palisades Medical Center in North Bergen, N.J. He was 76. His son Albert confirmed the death.

While there are no comprehensive statistics for how long Covid patients have survived on ventilation, medical experts say Mr. Lewitinn may hold the record. The literature around the pandemic notes a few patients who have lasted more than three months; [a patient in Alabama](#) made headlines in 2021 when he came off a respirator after 187 days.

None of those come close to Mr. Lewitinn’s streak, a combination, doctors say, of his physical and mental strength and the swiftness with which the medical establishment developed protocols for long-term Covid care.

“He had a long and difficult course,” Dr. Abraham Sanders, one of his physicians at Weill Cornell, wrote in an email. “He was a strong man and was the beneficiary of sophisticated medical care.”

Murad Albert Lewitinn was born on March 12, 1946, to a Jewish family in Cairo. (He Anglicized his first name to Marco as a child and later dropped the O.) His father, Albert Lewitinn, was a medical engineer, and his mother, Sarah (Amiga) Lewitinn, was a homemaker. He grew up speaking Arabic and later learned English, French and Spanish.

Egypt had a thriving Jewish community of 75,000 people, but they faced worsening conditions after the Arab nationalist revolution in 1952 and the Suez Crisis in 1956, which pitted the country against Israel, France and Britain. The government took over the elder Mr. Lewitinn’s business and, after being briefly detained, he and his family were expelled in 1958.

They settled in Baltimore, where Albert Lewitinn was hired by Johns Hopkins University to work on organ transplant technology.

As a young man Marc lived in New York City and Los Angeles, where he briefly attended college, then Paris, where he met Ondine Green, the sister of a childhood friend from Cairo. They married in 1968.

The Lewitinn family settled in the New York City area, first in Brooklyn and later in Tenafly, N.J. He opened a business on the Upper West Side that operated as a sort of everything store for the neighborhood: pawn shop, film processing, electronics repair, jeweler. It became a local fixture; John Lennon, who lived nearby, came in occasionally, and Mr. Lewitinn hung a picture of himself with Lennon on a wall at the store.

He sold the business in 1981, after which he bought and sold real estate and later traded in art online.

Mr. Lewitinn was an ardent supporter of Israel and Jewish causes. He raised money for Ethiopian Jews fleeing their country as refugees, and won praise from the Nazi hunters Simon Wiesenthal and Charles Kremer for helping to persuade the U.S. government to deport Archbishop Valerian Trifa, a Romanian cleric and fascist collaborator who had moved to the United States after World War II.

In 1995, Mr. Lewitinn sued the Egyptian government to win the release of several Torah scrolls, prayer books and other religious items seized from the country's Jewish community in the late 1950s. He later dropped the case.

Along with his son Albert, he is survived by his wife; another son, Lawrence, a financial journalist; his daughter, Sarah, a record producer and D.J. who performs under the name Ultragrnr!; his sisters Fortunee Yeh and Rachel Algazi; his brothers Solomon, Michael and Nessim; and two grandchildren.