The Washington Post
November 25, 2018

We will keep our father’s light alive

by Noha Khashoggi and Razan Jamal Khashoggi

Illustration by Razan Jamal Khashoggi

Jamal Khashoggi was a complex man, but to us, his daughters, he was simply "Dad." Our family has always been proud of his work, and we understood the awe and grandeur with which some people viewed him. But in our lives, he was "Baba" — a loving man with a big heart. We loved it when he took us every weekend to the bookstore. We loved looking through his passport, deciphering new locations from pages covered with exit and entry stamps. And we loved digging through the years of musty magazines and newspaper clippings that surrounded his desk.

As children, we also knew our father as a traveler. His work took him everywhere, but he always returned to us with gifts and fascinating stories. We would stay up nights wondering where he was and what he was doing, trusting that no matter how long he was gone, we would see him again, wide-armed, waiting for a hug. As bittersweet as it was, we knew from a young age that Dad's work meant that his reach extended far beyond our family, that he was an important man whose words had an effect on people over a great distance.

Throughout our lives, it was common for people to stop us on the street to shake hands with Dad, telling him how much they valued and appreciated him. To many, our father was more than just a public figure — his work touched their lives powerfully and resonated with them personally. And it still does.

We grew up with our parents' love of knowledge. They took us to countless museums and historical sites. While driving from Jiddah to Medina, Dad would point out different areas and tell us their historical significance. He surrounded himself with books and always dreamed of having more. And in all he read, he never discriminated, fully absorbing every opinion. His love of books taught him to form his own thoughts. He taught us to do the same.

His life was a series of unexpected twists and turns, and we were all on the same ride. Not many people can say they got fired from the same job twice a few years apart, as Dad was as the editor in chief of the Al-Watan newspaper. But no matter what happened, he was an optimist, seeing every challenge as a new opportunity.

Dad certainly had a pragmatic side, but in his dreams and ambitions, he was always striving for a utopian version of reality. This, we suppose, is what inspired his critical nature. It was vitally important to him to speak up, to share his opinions, to have candid discussions. And writing was not just a job; it was a compulsion. It was ingrained into the core of his identity, and it truly kept him alive. Now, his words keep his spirit with us, and we are grateful for that. They say, "Here was a man who truly lived life to the fullest."

When we were in Virginia during Ramadan, Dad showed us the world he had built for himself over the past year. He introduced us to friends who welcomed him and showed us the places he frequented. Yet as comfortable as he had made his surroundings, he still spoke about how he longed to see his home, his family and his loved ones.

He also told us about the day he left Saudi Arabia, standing outside his doorstep, wondering if he would ever return. For while Dad had created a new life for himself in the United States, he grieved for the home he had left. Throughout all his trials and travels, he never abandoned hope

for his country. Because, in truth, Dad was no dissident. If being a writer was ingrained in his identity, being a Saudi was part of that same grain.

After the events of Oct. 2, our family visited Dad's home in Virginia. The hardest part was seeing his empty chair. His absence was deafening. We could see him sitting there, glasses on his forehead, reading or typing away. As we looked at his belongings, we knew he had chosen to write so tirelessly in the hopes that when he did return to the kingdom, it might be a better place for him and all Saudis.

This is no eulogy, for that would confer a state of closure. Rather, this is a promise that his light will never fade, that his legacy will be preserved within us. Baba said it best: "Some depart to remain," which rings true today. We feel blessed to have been raised with his moral compass, his respect for knowledge and truth, and his love.

Until we meet again in the next life.

*The writers are the daughters of Jamal Khashoggi***.**

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