

Ana

His death rocked her. But sometimes it was hard to see why. He was the most controlling person I'd ever met, watching her eat during every meal, then pulling the plate away if she'd had too much. She also wasn't allowed to drive their car or leave the house without his permission. The keys remained in a lockbox that only he could access. And when it came to money, in his eyes, she had none. He didn't even allow her to spend a dime on their two adult children, keeping any money they did have in a savings account under his name.

To outsiders, it was hard to believe she would want to stay. But I always assumed she had just accepted it. When you're with someone for that long, the numbness just takes over. And you begin to think that the absence of any feeling is actually just love.

But a few months after burying him, she started to change and grew a beautiful set of wings. She became a new person, experiencing freedom for the first time in over 60 years. She could now indulge in cakes and other sweets whenever she wanted, go to places she had never been allowed to before, and even give her two daughters any amount of money she desired.

And her life was pretty good after that, and we were all happy for her. Until last April, when everything changed.

I remember my mother-in-law calling my husband, telling him his grandmother had the virus. I could almost hear the tears falling down her face from the other end of the call. This was it. The unthinkable was now our reality. She was 93, and as far as we were concerned, this was a death

sentence. And it was on a whole new level of sadness. One nobody had ever experienced before. She would now breathe her last breath alone with complete strangers, never having the comfort of her family's hands to hold. Her fate was now sealed. She would die in a cold nursing home without the people she loved most, and it was gut-wrenching.

We called her a few days later, her voice now almost unrecognizable as she spoke back complete gibberish. The virus was messing with her brain, taking complete control of her. A control she knew all too well. It was stealing every bit of freedom she had gained. Forcing her to take her food through a tube, wiping out her bank account because of all the medication she needed, and worst of all, preventing her from seeing her two beloved daughters.

But with freedom comes strength, and since her husband's death, that strength had grown and grown into an impenetrable type of courage. One that would no longer allow anything to stop her from being happy. And as one day led to another, each of us bracing for that inevitable phone call, weirdly, it never came. Because on day 14, when we surely should have been making funeral arrangements, we got the news that she was out of the woods. She had beaten it, not allowing a virus that had killed thousands of people to control her life anymore.

The other day we were able to video chat with her, a big smile lighting up her face as she peered at all her loved ones through the screen. And she had a lot to say, talking about how the entire staff had made her a double chocolate sheet cake and how she'd won twenty bucks at bingo the night before. The whole ordeal seemed like nothing to her. But to me, it was life changing. It

showed me that no matter how old you are, it's never too late to find your true strength and break free. A lesson that I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.