

My name is Maggie Fanning and my husband, Kirk, died from COVID. He was only 44 years old. He left behind a heartbroken wife and four sons who still needed their dad. One of my sons was attending the Naval Academy and one was in the Corps of Cadets at A&M when their dad died. They are now serving their country in the Navy and their dad would be so proud!

On a Wednesday in August of 2021, I took Kirk to the hospital because his oxygen levels had dropped. Due to the hospital's COVID restrictions, I was not allowed to go inside. I waited alone in the parking lot while he was evaluated. Four hours later, he was discharged with an oxygen tank and sent home.

Just three days later, on Saturday, his condition worsened. His oxygen levels dropped again, and I rushed him back to the hospital. I hugged him goodbye in the emergency room waiting area, believing I would see him again in a day or two.

I never saw him awake again.

He was admitted to the hospital, where he remained for the next two weeks. During that time, communication with his medical team was extremely limited. I called three or four times every day, desperate for information. Sometimes I received an update, and sometimes I didn't. I had no meaningful opportunity to participate in discussions about his care or advocate for the man I knew better than anyone else.

During his hospitalization, Kirk received Remdesivir and, as his condition deteriorated, he was placed on a ventilator.

Kirk was not just another patient. He was a husband, a father, a son, a brother, and a friend. He loved people and drew strength from being surrounded by those he loved. Being alone would have been one of his greatest fears.

Yet he spent the final two weeks of his life isolated from his family.

I repeatedly asked to see him. Each time, I was told no. Finally, on the morning of the day he died, I was allowed into his room. By then, he was in a medically induced coma and on a ventilator. He could no longer hear my questions or respond to my voice.

I sat beside him for the rest of the day. I held his hand. I prayed over him. I told him how deeply he was loved and how proud I was to be his wife.

Around midnight, he took his last breath.

Outside the hospital, our four boys and Kirk's parents waited in the parking lot, unable to be with him in his final hours. They lost the opportunity to hold his hand, tell him they loved him, or simply be present. Those are moments that can never be replaced.

COVID took my husband's life. But the isolation policies also took away our family's opportunity to walk beside him through the hardest battle of his life. They took away our chance to comfort him, to advocate for him, and to say goodbye together.

I cannot change what happened to our family. But I can tell our story.

My hope is that no family—regardless of the illness or the circumstances—will ever again be separated from a loved one during their final days without every possible effort being made to preserve compassion, communication, and the presence of family.

No one should have to die alone.

And no family should have to live with the lasting pain of knowing they were forced to say goodbye from a parking lot.