

Chad DeMatteo

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\$5,000 WINNER
Supercenter #5414
Lanoka Harbor, NJ

My wife, Jessica, was diagnosed with kidney disease when she was pregnant with our son Damien. It was terrible. Seemingly overnight, we found out she had end-stage renal failure. Her condition stabilized, and Damien's now five years old and we have a 13-year-old son, Daniel, from Jessica's previous relationship. But she's waiting for a kidney transplant and is on dialysis. We're doing our best to be strong, but Jessica's illness has been an ever-present, dark cloud hanging over our lives.

I'm 37 and I've been overweight as far back as I can remember.

I've always eaten junk food and now I have knee and hip problems. I was too tired to run around with Damien and play catch with him. It felt horrible, like I was a side character in my child's life. I said: "You know what? No more diets that don't work. I'm going to change my entire lifestyle." I wanted to motivate Jessica because the doctor told her she should lose weight to make the transplant easier. And I want to live a long and healthy life for our boys.

I dropped fast food from my diet.

I started cooking and we're eating more greens. I have two boiled eggs for breakfast and a typical dinner is shrimp with steamed broccoli. At work, I challenge myself to take more steps than I did the previous day. And on my days off, I work out with weights to build core strength.

Determination is the key — passing up that bag of chips.

There've been many times where I've lied to myself about what I was eating. And I finally figured out that, to succeed, I had to be fully honest with myself. I've lost exactly 54.8 pounds so far and feel much more confident. My shirts hang off me now and it feels good to have room to breathe, both metaphorically and physically. And in just a few months, there's been a vast improvement in how my knees and hips feel.

I'm always outside in the yard running around with Damien like a little fool.

Oh my goodness, it's phenomenal. I get to participate in Damien's life, taking him to local parks and playing with him. He's mildly autistic and I have the energy to help him — we're working on developing his speech.



Finances have been an issue because of expenses related to Jessica's illness.

It costs a lot getting her to doctors' appointments. Also, my father left me with debts when he died, but I'm rebuilding my credit and managing to save \$50 from each paycheck. We're renting space in my brother-in-law's house and I am wholeheartedly grateful for his family's kindness, but it's difficult because there are eight of us and it's no picnic. I'm saving to get an apartment so my kids can have their own space.

Even though my wife and I are facing difficulties, our bond is deepening.

I hate to call it a fairy tale relationship because that's clichéd, but it's true. All my life I'd wanted a family, then Jessica and her little boy came into my life and became my family. We are on this journey together, supporting each other. We're lifelines for each other and know we can take on anything that's thrown at us,

To relax, I work on creative projects — I'm making Harry Potter-inspired magic wands.

We're all big fans of the books and I make the wands out of exotic woods. I've made one for Daniel, and now, for Mother's Day I'm making one for my wife out of beautiful Indian rosewood. Daniel's helping me. It's a wonderfully creative act and there's tons of magic in each wand. Each one has a positive effect on me and the person that I hand it to. I'm also reading Harry Potter aloud to my wife; it's one of our favorite activities.

We had an amazing day recently and we're hopeful that there's a bright future ahead.

We were just walking down the street to the convenience store after putting our kid on the bus to school. I wasn't struggling or limping, I was just with my wife and holding her hand. That was a watershed moment. We're confident that these clouds will pass, that Jessica will find an organ donor and recover from the operation, and that we'll grow old together.



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