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During the pandemic, I was feeling scared and anxious. A lot of friends contracted COVID. A co-worker died and my brother-in-law and a cousin were on the brink of death — they recovered, but it was scary. I'm 57 and thought, "Am I going to be next?" My husband, Philip, and I don't have children and I wondered who would take care of us if we got sick. And I was worried about my family back in the Philippines, wondering whether I'd see them again. Then our little dog, Max Pedro, passed away. Even now, I'm teary eyed thinking about him, because he was like our baby. To top it all off, I was very stressed at work.

Food was my comfort.

We were eating a lot of rice and chocolate chip cookies. I'm not getting any younger and I was gaining weight. Finally, I decided to make some changes.

We adopted two dogs, Lola and Pepe, and right away, I felt less anxious.

They like to snuggle and give me kisses and when I get home from work they're sitting by the gate waiting for me. Rain, shine, or snow, we take them for walks to the university track, a mile away from our place — and it's bonding time for me and Phil. Lola and Pepe are my little motivators; they nudge me with their wet noses when it's time to go outside.

I'm food prepping and taking fresh mango or pineapple and nuts into work for snacks.

We've cut down on rice; instead, I'm cooking riced cauliflower with seasoning and we're eating lots of veggies. My favorite recipe is shrimp and veggie stir fry with eggplant and squash. I love to bake and I've been making delicious muffins with Granny Smith apples and walnuts. Phil and I are working out together at the gym; I've lost 10 pounds and feel lighter and stronger.

At work I have more energy.

I was putting bicycles on bike racks the other day when a co-worker said: "Hey, I can help you, that's a really heavy job." And I said, "I can do it." I'm so happy I can lift something heavy now without any aches and pains. I also feel appreciated. One day, I was putting outdoor garden lights up on a high shelf. A customer noticed and said: "I'm grateful for the work you do every day because I couldn't do it."



I joked, "Thank you, well somebody needs to do it!" But that comment brightened my day.

Instead of checking Facebook or looking at the news during my lunch hour, I'm relaxing.

I love listening to Meditative Stories on the Thrive app. I've listened to 66 — they're inspiring and rejuvenating.

By looking out for markdowns and taking my lunch into work, I'm saving money.

I'm putting away \$100 out of every paycheck and planning to visit my family in the Philippines. We keep in touch with video chats, but it's not the same as hugging. It'll be wonderful to be with everyone in person, talking and eating together, and I'd like to visit my parents' graves.

Writing in my journal every night helps me stay grateful.

I write about what happened during the day, like anything funny. Recently we celebrated Lola's birthday and I bought her a big cookie. Phil said Lola should share the cookie with Pepe and I was about to grab it and break it in half, but Lola snatched it from me. She decided she didn't want to share it! We both laughed out loud. Writing about those moments warms my heart.

I've regained my enthusiasm for life.

My husband and I are spending more time together, like running errands. In the evening, we'll watch comedies on T.V. We love Space Force with Steve Carell. One Saturday, Phil and I went to the gym, and then we went to a local art show and took the dogs. The gallery director let us bring the dogs inside. We enjoyed looking at the paintings and Lola and Pepe enjoyed being petted by everyone. We went home and I made fiesta chicken wraps for dinner with shiitake mushrooms, carrots, and water chestnuts. Then we took Lola and Pepe for their last walk of the day. Nothing much happened, but it was a perfect day. I realized how lucky I am to be able to do ordinary things with my husband and my dogs, and that life is good.



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