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My mom passed away unexpectedly almost nine years ago, right before Christmas. At the time, I went into survival mode and I was completely focused on helping my sister and my father, and I started to forget about myself. It was a really hard time and for years I didn't want to leave the house. I remember my daughter asking, "Why is mommy in bed?" and she would come in and color with me. I wasn't eating right, sleeping right, or taking care of myself.

In 2019, I was on my way to work one way and got into a car accident.

It was only eight seconds of my life, but it changed everything for me. I knew that it happened because of sleep deprivation and not taking care of myself. It was my wakeup call to make a change. I remember saying to myself, "I've got to do something to help myself, and to be able to be around for my husband and watch my children grow up." It just clicked in my head.

I knew that my first step had to be quitting smoking.

My mom smoked like a fiend and I never ever did it. I started later on in life as a coping mechanism for stress. But I had gotten to a point where I couldn't walk very far without having trouble breathing. I have two daughters, Mackenzie and Jaden -- one of my own and a bonus daughter -- and it felt like I was always making them wait. I didn't want to smoke in front of them, so I would make them wait before we took a car ride, or started a movie, or we'd pause the movie for me to go outside.

The Microstep about taking time for yourself really resonated with me.

The withdrawal from quitting was horrible at the beginning, and keeping busy was key. We would do little crystal paintings and I started crocheting and painting with my daughter. I would talk to my friend Sherin about the Thrive Challenge, and she really encouraged me to take small steps to help myself. I decided to start taking a few minutes here and there to just shut the door and just breathe for a few seconds, or listen to a meditation. That became my "me time" that I needed. Now I take several of these throughout the day just to reset. That Microstep is what really helped me focus on myself.



I remember the moment I said to myself, "I'm not a smoker anymore."

At the six-month mark, it was Black Friday in 2019 and as a manager at Walmart, that was our busy day. We worked a 12-hour day, setting up the store and all working together. Usually I would sneak outside to have a cigarette, but I remember getting into my car at the end of my shift and I cried, because I didn't even think about smoking during the most stressful day of the year. It was a happy cry, because I wasn't pushing pause on our lives anymore. We were able to get back that time together as a family.

Mackenzie graduates this year, and Jaden is going to be in the tenth grade.

She has loved animals since she was little and she wants to be a veterinarian. My goal right now is putting away savings toward my daughter's college fund. I want to invest in their education. As a family, we're doing things I never thought I could have done. We're dancing, being active together -- we even went zip lining last year. We're finally just in the moment, being together.

I'm on my seventh Thrive Challenge now, and I'm just so thankful that I can move my body and choose to be in my life.

Looking back, that accident was the moment that changed everything for me. My biggest goal now is connecting and inspiring others. I want to show others that no matter where you are in life, no matter the challenges that you're facing, you can overcome it. There's someone there that can support you. I was pulled out of one of my darkest times and I had to do a lot of work myself, but today I have more energy, better health, and I'm just surrounded by happy.



THRIVE