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I was living paycheck to paycheck and struggled with my finances. I'd think: Can I put gas in the car? Can I take my kids out for lunch? I'm divorced with teenage boys: Sean's 16 and Matthew's 13. If they wanted an article of clothing or headphones, I'd have to wait until I had extra cash, and I always hated saying, "Let's put it on hold for a little bit." My kids are not materialistic but I felt inadequate because even though I work hard, I felt I wasn't living up to their expectations.

My car was about to get repossessed because I couldn't make my payments.

My mom and dad stepped in and actually bought me a new car, but I felt dreadful. I'm 56, and here I am, not living up to my full potential. I knew I needed to refocus my negative energy into a more positive way of living.

I started by taking up meditation and feel a heck of a lot more calm about everything.

I use the app, Insight Timer, and listen to short, guided meditations, and I do breathing exercises. It helps me get rid of the outside noise and negative thoughts.

I listen to classical music as I'm getting ready for work and eating breakfast.

I like Beethoven and Tchaikovsky but Mozart is my guy. The music fills the room, fills my mind and puts me in a super good mood to start my day. And I love jazz and blues. I grew up in a household where music was important; my dad played us his old jazz records — the greats. I count Louis Armstrong among them, as well as B.B. King and Ray Charles.

Following a vegan diet means I stay healthy and save money.

I eat beans, rice, grains, and veggies. I make a killer chili with kidney beans, veggie "beef" crumbles, peppers, and onions. When I go to see the kids, instead of taking them out for dinner, I'll sometimes buy vegan pizza and make a salad, we'll eat at home and actually they love it. I'm doing my best to save and managing to put away 40 or 50 dollars a month. And I have my 401(k) that I don't touch.



When I'm with the kids, we just hang out.

And they're perfectly fine with that. One Sunday, I helped Matthew paint his room; he decided to go with blue. It was a great way to spend the whole day. I do treat them: we go to see every Marvel movie! But the boys are learning about saving when they get money from chores or for birthdays. My ex has opened up bank accounts for them. I'll say to Sean, who'll be going to college in a couple of years: "Dude, you've really got to start squirreling some money away now."

For myself, I've signed up for an online course to get my wellness certification.

Well-being is my passion and I want to help people eat more of a plant-based diet. Maybe I'll be able to make more money doing what I love — there's a big focus now on well-being at work. I'm always talking to people at every opportunity about what my lifestyle has done for me — how I have more energy and don't have a weight problem.

I'm focusing on gratitude. I'm grateful for my kids and my job.

I'm extraordinarily thankful to my parents who go above and beyond to help me out. They live in California and when I've saved enough, I'd love to take the kids to see them. I'd also love to take the kids to Pittsburgh to see where I grew up. And a big dream is to buy a house. Right now, I'm doing much better in every way. The struggles are still there, but I'm not letting them take over my life. I feel awesome.



THRIVE