

Kristina Meskan

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\$5,000 WINNER

Supercenter #4256

Ames, IA

I'd been feeling emotionally overwhelmed during the pandemic. There's been a number of changes at work, and as essential workers, we've carried a lot of responsibility on our shoulders. I'm 46, a single parent, and an army veteran — I served in Iraq — I've experienced a lot of loss and heartbreak. And I wasn't taking care of myself. I weighed 258 pounds and I was pre-diabetic. I'd eat fast food from McDonald's and drink a lot of soda, like Mountain Dew. The turning point came when my son Cayden's best friend, Henry, who was 17, took his own life. His suicide affected our small community deeply and Henry's mom, Susan, challenged us all to make ourselves a priority, so I downloaded the app.

I began reading to children at a bookstore owned by Henry's mom, The Pumpkin Patch.

Henry always had the biggest smile, and now I can give back and honor him. I used to work as an education assistant and I love promoting literacy — it's rejuvenating. My son and I also volunteer for the foundation Susan started to help prevent teen suicide.

To take care of myself, my first step was to switch from drinking soda to water.

I've been experimenting with low-sodium recipes. I'm eating salads topped with nuts and cooking with grains like couscous and farro. I make stir-fries with fresh vegetables. And instead of regular pasta, I cook tasty spiralized zucchini "noodles" with lean turkey and tomatoes. I'm also growing my own herbs: cilantro, basil, and parsley. To help with portion control, I measure out my food and put the right amount in a tupperware so I don't eat too much.



I found a Challenge buddy, my co-worker, Michelle, and we're walking three miles a day.

Having a buddy is great for accountability. Michelle's motivated me to start going out more, too; we have fun dinner dates together. And I've started a group called Warrior Ladies, focused on growing old gracefully. I've challenged people to start walking with me and Michelle whenever they can.

Every night I write down three things I'm grateful for in a pretty, flowery journal.

I'll write about my gratitude for my family, friends, and my higher power — God. I also write thank you notes to co-workers. Gratitude helps me find inner peace.

I'm getting eight hours of sleep by having a regular bedtime at 9 o'clock.

I typically get up early, so to wind down at night, I bought a "Sound Spa," which is very calming. The sound of rain and thunder stops my brain going a mile a minute and helps me fall asleep.

I've lost 32 pounds, dropped three sizes and I'm no longer pre-diabetic

My Better Choices have become habits — I have energy and I've learned how to relax. My son is enjoying having a mother who is nice to be around and not cranky! Our relationship is 10 times better. The Challenge has given me a second chance on life.

