

Crystal Leonard

.....
\$5,000 WINNER
Walmart Supercenter #0494
Newnan, GA

I lost my husband, Jamal, on February the 12th this year. He was 44 and had end-stage renal failure. I was his caregiver for four years. I'd cook for him, bathe him and get him to his dialysis appointments. I'd try to ease his pain by massaging his legs. He became wheelchair-bound and couldn't work so I had to work extra hours. Coping with everything was very stressful and I wasn't taking care of myself. Sometimes I wouldn't eat at all and other days I'd indulge in fast foods, soda and chips. When he passed away, I felt like a part of me died. I felt empty and alone.

I found out that my blood pressure was high.
My doctor said I was pre-diabetic. At that point I said, "I must live. Jamal would want me to keep going," and I downloaded the Thrive app.

The very first step I took was joining the YMCA and I haven't looked back.
I do cardio and lift weights three to four times a week. My joints feel better and I don't feel bloated anymore. At work, I do Thrive Microsteps like standing up and stretching instead of sitting down all day.

I went on YouTube and watched videos about meal prepping.
I started to eat lean meat, fish, and veggies. Now, I cook chicken in the airfryer with broccoli and green beans. For a treat I'll have popcorn. It's just me at home — I have a stepdaughter, Enchanted, who's at college. But I sit down at the table to eat, which helps with portion control. I find if I eat in front of the TV, I'm more likely to overeat. I'm no longer pre-diabetic and I have more energy.

Doing yard work keeps me moving — I trim the bushes and mow the grass.
I'm growing plants like peace lilies. I don't have a green thumb, but I'm learning. Gardening is therapeutic and healing, I love watching something that's alive and growing. I relate the stages of growth to myself, and how I'm growing.

Someone gave me a grieving journal and writing in it helps me heal.
You answer questions about your thoughts and feelings and your memories. I write about things I miss that we'd do together. For instance, football season has just started.



Jamal and I both loved football and we were big Georgia Bulldogs fans — we'd watch all their games together. I'm also reading aloud motivational quotes that help to keep me going, like this one from Arthur Ashe: "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

One of my sister's friends is a counselor, and she reached out to me.
I've had some sessions with her which have really been supportive. She lost her husband as well, so she can relate. You know how people say, "Eventually you'll get over it." I realized that you may not ever get over it. It's more about how you cope with the grief.

My mom is my everything — she's always there for me.
We go to church together and have dinner once a month. I have two sisters and a brother and they're all supportive. We just got back from a family vacation in Panama City, Florida. It was amazing, sitting on the beach, relaxing, listening to the ocean, and looking at the sunset every evening. I felt calm and peaceful.

I am more optimistic.
Jamal passed away just before my 40th birthday. It was supposed to be a big birthday, but I didn't feel like celebrating. So I'm planning a big celebration for my 41st birthday next March. I'm planning to go to Hawaii. When I think of Hawaii, I think of paradise. I can see myself at a luau with my grass skirt, laughing and being happy again.

I have faith — I believe that God is helping me get through the tough times.
Maybe I'll meet someone else, remarry, and have a family. I'm just getting my inner and outer self together and I know my life will change for the better.



THRIVE