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For 30 years, I smoked a pack of cigarettes every day. Then around two years ago, it really started affecting my breathing and my work, because I was taking smoke breaks all the time. I was working at Walmart at the time for nine years and I had moved up to an assistant manager position. We had a new manager at the store and we weren't getting along very well. I ended up getting terminated, and that was a huge wakeup call for me to do better and make an attitude adjustment. I knew it was time for me to quit smoking. I bought patches to help me, and within a few months I had quit.

Losing my job was upsetting at the time, but in the long run it was a blessing.

It taught me that sometimes you have to take a step back to take a step forward. I was asked to come back as an associate about a month later, and my manager and I had a much better relationship after that. I really needed that push. But once I wasn't smoking every day, I turned to food. I started eating sweets, like cookies and cakes and ice cream, and I was gaining weight. I remember going to the doctor and being told I was pre-diabetic because of all the weight I had gained. I looked in the mirror that day and just said, "I've got to do something about this."

At 58 years old, it was time to get myself together.

I started cutting out sugar and carbohydrates, and instead focusing on protein and reading the labels on foods I was eating. Within a few months, I was starting to lose weight. Then, my co-worker, Maria Howell, told me about the Thrive Challenge and how it could help me stay consistent with my weight loss. I started looking at Microsteps and picking ones that would help with my food choices, but also my focus. I wanted to start focusing on what's important.

In March, my dad's brother died, and I wasn't sure if I would go to the funeral.

My mom and dad divorced when I was four years old, and my grandparents raised me. When I moved out of the house, I stopped talking to my parents. I didn't see them or talk to them for 30 years. I was always angry at my mom for not trying to see me or my sister growing up, and I had a grudge against my dad because he was never really around.



I held that grudge for a long time. But when I heard the news about my uncle, I thought to myself, "You know what? I don't know who may be next." My parents are almost in their eighties, and I knew that it would be the right thing to go.

I showed up to the funeral, and I was welcomed with open arms.

Reconnecting with my dad after so many years was very emotional, and it was a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. Not talking to your parents for 30 years can be really heavy. Ever since the funeral, my dad and I speak on the phone about once a week, and I talk to my mom on the phone once a week, too. She had a bout with cancer about a month ago and we talked during that time. She's cancer-free now. And when I have a little more money in my pocket, I plan to travel to see my parents again up in the panhandle.

In November it will be two years since I quit smoking, and I'm finally living my life the way I want to.

I've lost the weight I needed to, and my doctor recently said to me, "I won't have to give you any medication for the pre-diabetic stuff." It made me so happy. I'm still watching what I eat, but I've learned to balance it all. My goal now is to build a bigger relationship with my parents and the rest of my family. I have cousins with kids I've never even met, and I want to reach out to them. I'm focused on my life and my relationships now, and I'm so grateful for the blessings I receive every day. I didn't even see all of the blessings I was receiving until I opened up my mind and heart.



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