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As a kid, I felt worthless a lot of the time. My mom was loving, but my stepdad was hard on me. If I told him I'd been bullied, he would ridicule and mock me. That's stayed with me and I've felt a lot of anxiety. I'm 42 and divorced with two sons. Aaron, who's 26, and 17-year-old Tristan. I was feeling grumpy and short-tempered. I work night shifts and basically I'd go to work, get home, have a 12-pack and throw Hot Pockets in the microwave. Then I'd sit around playing video games. I weighed 335 pounds and didn't feel good.

I wanted to set a good example to my sons and started the Thrive Challenge.

I'm an all-or-nothing kind of person and I stopped drinking beer on day one. Once in a while I'd be like, "Oh man, I could use a beer," but I didn't want to backslide so I didn't do it.

I stopped eating processed foods.

I've always loved vegetables, I just got lazy living on my own. Now I'll buy bagged salads and throw a couple chicken breasts on top of my greens. For dessert, I'll have frozen fruit. Since I've been eating better, I've noticed I'm more mentally attentive. I'll have an occasional "cheat" meal, a burger with fries — I think it's okay to ease up sometimes.

I fell in love with working out.

The moment I stepped back in the gym, it was scary, because heavy people like me feel like all the healthy-looking people are thinking, "They're going to quit in a week." But I powered through and now I never think, "Oh, I have to go to the gym." It's more like, "Great, I get to go to the gym." It's awesome. My muscles are gaining definition and I've lost 75 pounds in the past year.

Tristan and I are working out together.

He got into the power lifting team at school and encouraged me to go to the gym with him. We chit-chat in between sets and then go back to our respective exercises. It's like it was when he was little, he's my best friend again. We share a wide range of interests. As funny as this sounds for a guy who works at Walmart, I love discussing astrophysics with him.



I'm reading again. I always enjoyed reading but I'd stopped for a long time.

Right now, I'm loving *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius (the philosopher and Roman Emperor). It's amazing because, even though it was written so long ago, it's still relevant. Some of his quotes like this one make me break down in tears: "Hasten, then, towards your goal, and dismissing idle hopes, come to your own rescue, if you have any care for yourself, while it is still possible." I think he's really saying: You've only got a short time here, so you might as well do something good with your life while you can.

I do meditative breathing whenever I feel anxious.

And before I go to sleep, in my mind, I go back to my grandfather's house in Northern California where I always felt happy as a kid. I can picture things really well so I visualize myself out there on his property, by the lake with my dad, who passed away in 2006. We sit together on the tree stump and hang out. It's just comfortable and peaceful.

I say to myself, "Dude, you have the drive and determination to succeed."

I used to think, "Ugh you're a loser." It was a knee-jerk reaction. Now, I'm easier on myself and I say, "Back up a minute and step outside yourself." I have a funny feeling improving my self-esteem is going to be a lifetime's work. But I tell myself what I'd tell any friend: "You're a valuable person and you've got this covered."

My dream is to become a personal trainer.

I'd like to get my NASM (National Academy of Sports Medicine) certification and do their nutrition program. If I could support people in making even one little change to feel better about themselves the way I feel better about myself, that would be amazing.



THRIVE