

LaTonya Williams

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\$5,000 WINNER
Distribution Center #2076
Laurens, SC

I'm a single mom with two kids, 13-year-old Alycia and five-year-old Jayceon, and life has been a struggle. Alycia was born premature, she weighed one pound, seven ounces and had to stay in hospital for five months, and it was the same with Jayceon. So I'm very protective of them. My mom helps a lot, but it's hard. I'm 38, I was tired all the time, and I wasn't giving the kids the family time they deserve. I just wanted to lay around and watch T.V. And I was eating a lot of junk food. My son wanted to play outside, but I'd say "It's too hot," or "It's too cold." I was just making excuses.

One day I felt really sick. I had bad chest pains and went to the emergency room.

The doctors did all kinds of tests and told me I'd had a heart attack, which was a big shock. I knew it was time to change my lifestyle.

I cut out sugary food and candy.

I went through the cabinets and got rid of all the unhealthy snacks. It's hard for Jayceon, but if we're in the store and he asks for candy I'll say, "Let's get a water gun or a PAW Patrol toy instead." And he'll say, "OK Mommy." I'm making great dinners like baked chicken with steamed broccoli and zucchini, seasoned with garlic. I joined a gym and go three times a week when I get off work. I use the stationary bike and the treadmill.

My son and I race each other at the park.

I always lose, which he loves, he says, "Mama, I beat you!" He's a big fan of four-wheelers and dirt bikes, so we'll ride the trails and get a little dirty.

My daughter is trying out for a cheerleading team and I'm giving her some pointers.

I was a cheerleader myself, so I can help her; you have to be very sharp with your movements. When she used to ask me to help, I'd say, "Not now, just look on YouTube." We googled cheerleading videos to do together and we're much closer. She loves TikTok and she's teaching me lots of dances. She'll put on Lizzo and Willow Smith and we dance and laugh. She loves to sneak up and record me when I mess up — it's become a competition. She'll say, "Mama, I dance better than you now."



I'm cutting the grass and putting mulch down in my yard.

I'm enjoying being outside. I bought my house two years ago and now I have more energy for DIY projects. I wanted a colorful front door and I'm painting it yellow.

My girlfriends came over for a seafood boil.

It had been a long time since we'd got together. I'd been canceling all our plans because I didn't feel good. It was a lot of fun. We cooked crab legs, shrimp, corn, and potatoes. And we just sat outside catching up, having girl talk — I think I laughed all day.

I'm grateful for my mom: I don't know what I would do without her.

When I get a few extra dollars, I do something nice for her like filling up her gas tank. I just took my mom and the kids away for a one-night vacation. I said, "Pack a bag Mom, we're going to the beach." She sat at the bar and had a margarita and I was like, "You deserve it!" I took the kids out to the ocean and we played in the sand. They wanted to bury my legs! And they swam in the hotel pool.

I've lost 12 pounds and my doctor is very pleased.

He says I should keep doing what I've been doing. The heart attack made me realize I could've been gone, leaving my babies behind, but God spared me and now I want to be here for them. I want to explore and do things we've never done before, like going to the zoo. I want to take them on a Nickelodeon cruise. I'm excited about the future.



THRIVE