

Lazondria Shanks

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\$5,000 WINNER
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Lithia Springs, GA

I had my three kids when I was very young. I was 16 when my son, Christopher, was born, and then I had two daughters — Adrianna and Shantia. As a single mom, I always thought that I wouldn't succeed in life. I had a mentor and friend, Patricia, who encouraged and told me I was a great parent, but it was hard.

I was depressed. I'd just take care of the kids and go to my room.

I didn't have the motivation to take care of myself. My kids are grown now — I'm 50 and I have three grandchildren — but I was an emotional eater and weighed almost 300 pounds. I would literally eat a gallon of butter pecan ice cream. My legs and back were hurting, I didn't have a social life, and I didn't know where to turn.

Five years ago a light went on and I decided to change.

I started the Thrive Challenge, which was like a breath of fresh air. I began by taking 10 minutes at the start of every morning to think in silence. I used to grab my phone, even making a call before getting out of bed, which was a rocky way to start the day.

Now I do Microsteps like taking a breathing break when I'm stressed or overwhelmed.

I just breathe in and out. My daughter bought me a meditation bowl that makes calming vibrations, and I love Deepak Chopra and Oprah meditations which help me stay positive. I know my mind has to be healthy just like my body.

I became a pescatarian, eating some fish and lots of veggies.

I like my food to be colorful; it makes me happy. I make great kale salads with tomatoes, red and yellow peppers, and olives. At work, everyone says, "You're eating like a rabbit." But then they say, "Let me taste that," and they like it! For dinner I might make cod or chickpea fritters by mashing chickpeas with peppers and onions and frying them in oil.

I'm working out with my daughter, Adrianna.

And I take an "aqua fit" water aerobics class. It's awesome and works every muscle in your body. I also walk the trails near our house. I've lost 125 pounds, but it's about much, much more than the weight. I don't have any pain anymore, my life has changed, and I'm striving to become a better person.



People flock to me at work and I love it; I can give more to them now.

I'll ask them about their kids. I'll say, "How was the barbecue this weekend?" or, "How was your mom's surgery?" It's about caring and making sure your team members are happy, because if people are happy they're going to do a great job and go above and beyond.

You're going to love this: I enjoy making healthy desserts, so I opened a vegan bakery.

It's a family business called The Vegan Sweetie. We make cookies, cakes, and ice cream. My daughter encouraged me to start because I used to work in the bakery at Walmart and picked up a lot. My son's a pastry chef so he helps with the baking. I make delicious desserts like sugar-free, gluten-free sweet potato pie that everyone loves.

Nature makes me feel good.

I'm doing lots of yard work. My daughters live with me and we've planted roses and an apple tree. I'll sit on my patio looking around me at the flowers and trees and I feel free.

I've always wanted to write a book and I'm finally doing it.

It's titled Who Am I? It's about my life, and how I survived, strived, and overcame. It makes me cry thinking about how much I've overcome. I often look back at how hard my life was and I feel happy and grateful. All my difficulties have been put to rest. I look up to the sky and say, "Thank you!"



THRIVE