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When I was 18, I lost my mom to cancer. It was the most traumatic event in my life and had a big impact on me. I stopped doing things I'd loved, like wrestling and Mexican folk dancing. I'm 28 now, and it has still been difficult for me. I didn't feel good and I worked too much. I always put my job in front of my family. My fiancé, Jennifer, is a teacher, and we have a nine-year-old son, Aven. He's autistic and means the world to me, but I wasn't spending a lot of time with him.

A year ago, I fell into a deep depression.

I was eating fast food every single day, and I weighed over 200 pounds. I lost my confidence in myself, and I felt like I'd failed everyone. I decided to change my life around. I stepped down from my role as assistant manager so I could spend more time with the family, and I downloaded the Thrive app.

My first step was walking to the park with my son on my days off.

It was so important to me to make that commitment because I never had a close bond with my own father. We go when Aven finishes school and he gets excited. It's hard for him to talk — he has a limited vocabulary — but spending that time together is making a big difference. We have a deeper connection. As we walk along, we sing a song he loves called "I Am a Pizza."

Aven loves playing tag with me.

He'll say, "Tag, you're it!" We run around and play on the jungle gym and I act like a little kid.

We go to Barnes & Noble and read together — he'll pick a book and memorize it.

We've just been reading *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson. And he's into dinosaurs. Books are Aven's favorite things in the world — they're like his Disneyland.

I really like the Thrive Microsteps — making small changes.

Energy drinks used to be my best friend, so I gradually cut down and now I don't drink them at all. I just have water. I've also stopped smoking.

I was a terrible cook, but I've been learning!

I looked up recipes on TikTok and I got excited. This week I made teriyaki chicken with broccoli and carrots. I also made high protein pasta seasoned with oregano and garlic. I'm not going to lie, I outdid myself — Jennifer was shocked at how good it was. I'm leading my son by example. He's eating more vegetables, and he loves apples and strawberries.



I started walking and now I'm jogging.

I do 30 minutes on the treadmill at the gym and then I hit the weights. I've lost 30 pounds and I'm feeling much more confident. I'd never been to church much before. Now, at 6:30 every Sunday morning, I volunteer setting up and later in the morning I'm an usher. I go to a men's Bible study group every Tuesday. God is guiding me on my journey.

After church, I go to the cemetery where my mom's buried.

I tell her how I'm doing and I tell her about Aven. That's my quality time with my mom where I let everything out, and I feel peaceful.

Then on Sunday afternoon, Jennifer and Aven and I go to the park.

We'll have a cheat day and eat out. And we take turns choosing whether it's Mexican food, pizza, or barbeque.

Once a week, Jennifer and I have a date night.

We both love movies and we try to be movie critics. We'll rate them and discuss what they could've done better. We felt proud watching *Black Panther 2* with Mexican actor, Tenoch Huerta (as Namor), because you rarely get to see a Mexican star in a movie. And we really loved *The Whale*.

Jennifer says I'm more handsome.

She bought me new clothes, and one nice thing happened when we spent the day with my fiancé's family. I walked in, and my mother-in-law, Concepcion, looked at me and said she could see a huge difference. Honestly I blushed. I'm not gonna lie, I enjoyed the compliment.

Life is good.

I'm happy because I'm doing a better job as a parent. I love my job and my family, and words can't really explain how I feel. I just love waking up every day.



THRIVE