

Pahoua Xiong

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\$5,000 WINNER
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As the oldest of 11 children, I've always had a lot of responsibility. We were refugees from Laos, and growing up, I was expected to help take care of the other kids. We were poor, which meant we couldn't have fun with kids at school, going roller skating, or to the movies. All our money went on basic necessities. My parents stressed the importance of making something of yourself, and I've always pushed myself in my career, but I never made time for myself. Because I was focusing on moving up in the company, we relocated many times which was hard for my family. I've worked in 21 Walmart stores. My husband, Tousu works for Walmart too — we have nine children and four grandchildren.

Last year I was feeling exhausted and stressed.

I was always on the go. When I got home from work, it was a rush to make dinner and make sure the kids got their homework done. I'd keep my rice pot full, but dinner would be something quick like pizza pockets heated up in the microwave. I was only sleeping three or four hours a night and I started getting chest pains. Every inch of my body hurt and, at one point, I thought I was dying. The doctor couldn't find anything wrong physically, but said I was suffering from anxiety. So I decided it was time to do something different.

I started going to group counseling.

I'm a shy person, I keep everything inside, and therapy helps me to express what I'm feeling without any fear. Early in the morning, before anyone else is up, I meditate, do breathing exercises and listen to motivational speakers. I can feel the stress and pressure lifting and I feel calm as I make breakfast and get the kids ready for school.

At work I make time to step outside for a few minutes in nature.

I look at the trees, stretch and refocus. In my daily huddles with my team I do my best to support everyone and offer suggestions. I share how I've suffered from mental health issues like anxiety, and explain how I'm taking time to breathe and relax.

I'm cooking for the family and we're eating more veggies.

The kids love chicken wings so I'll bake them instead of frying them and add broccoli and green beans as well as rice.



We put our phones and tablets away and sit around the table together. Everyone gets a chance to talk about how they're doing. My eight-year-old son, Johnny, is very shy but now he's talking and I've learned so much about him that I didn't know before. I've found out that he likes his teacher and is excelling at school. He'll say, "Hey Mommy, I got an 'A' in math and I'm really proud."

As a family, we go bike riding and play soccer or baseball.

When my grandchildren visit us, we play with toys and I'll read to them. One of my favorite activities: going to watch musicals with my 17-year-old daughter, Esther. We both love musical theater and her high school has great productions. Recently, we've seen Cinderella and The Sound of Music. It's a wonderful way to unwind and spend time together. And to relax on my own, I'll go for a drive, enjoy the scenery, and listen to Christian music.

My husband and I go on date nights every week.

Before we go, we take turns reading poems to each other. My favorites include Emily Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" and "Alone" by Edgar Allan Poe. Then we'll go out to eat or go to a movie. We don't talk about the kids and just check in on how we're doing and how we're feeling.

I'm sleeping six or seven hours a night, which is amazing.

I feel great emotionally and physically. I've come out of my shell and turned my life around. I'm closer to my kids and to my husband and I've learned to balance my home life and work. By allowing time for myself, I have more energy for everyone else.

I'm instilling in my kids that it's important to do things they love.

Life isn't only about work and a paycheck. I've learned to enjoy every day and I want them to do the same.



THRIVE